Reassessing Gombrich's THEORY OF ILLUSION for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

E RNST GOMBRICH produced a well-known classic of the so-called "theory of illusion" (Ziska, 2018, p.2), aiming to tell "the story of art" through its relation with illusion and visual "schemata." His famous work, *Art and Illusion* (1960/2014) gained wide popularity, first appearing in 1960 and continuing to be republished until today. This has created a paradox: on the one hand, readers and modern thinkers are interested in Gombrich's writings (Hopkins, 2003; Lopes, 2005; Veldeman, 2008; Tullmann, 2016), but on the other, they do not use his concepts to evaluate the processes occurring in today's social, ontological, and artistic domains. Indeed, the question of artistic skill has been significantly relegated to a secondary position in the modern debate, while the notions of ideas, manifests, and concepts have come to the fore (Haftmann et al., 1965, p.203). Moreover, we have witnessed a transformation from "the human of skill" and limited capabilities into "the human of concepts" and expansion, where self-acting technologies work for our good (or bad). Take, for example, deepfakes, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML),

and Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN). For good reason, the contemporary philosopher Chiara Bottici (2019) warns us that there is a significant reliance on perception and image-type representations by public society, so much so that losing grasp of real things is a potential danger. In this regard, is it wise to set aside Gombrich's ideas and perceive them exclusively as a relic of their time, or have we just not yet found the right place for them in the current debates? Did Gombrich detect some deeper meanings than just the reinterpretation of art history through the lens of the illusional and solving the "riddle of style"? In order to answer these questions, this research reassesses Gombrich's Theory of Illusion with regard to the techno-social and political environment of today's image-making. By detecting and building connections between the ideas of Gombrich and contemporary philosophers of mind, it is hoped that we will be better equipped to attend to the novel features of the art world and its practices which have emerged in a post-computational society. It appears that we may have already reached a world in which the gap between image and nature is collapsing, leaving us hanging in uncertainty. This is a world in which the differences between the imaginable, illusional, abstract, and real are significantly more complex and blurred. That is why it is essential and crucial to address this very question now, especially when any idea is dependent on representation and at the same time is complicated by imaginal spaces, imaginal objects, and imaginal politics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 2

Bottici's Critical Theory of Images, Imagination, and the Imaginary with Regard to Notions of Gombrich's Theory of Illusion

CHAPTER 3

Deepfakes

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

W E OFTEN HEAR THAT we live in a highly virtualized world. Indeed, one cannot always separate fact from fiction. Some theorists even predict, in relation to a new phenomenon of visual illusion known as deepfakes, that "the majority of individuals in developed economies will consume more false than true information by 2022." (Fraga-Lamas & Fernandez-Carames, 2020). It may seem that in such a world there is no solid foundation on which to rely. On the other hand, there are many areas of human activity that function within the framework of illusory models as a productive form of knowledge. Above all, it is, of course, art.

The idea that art and its methods of creating images are inextricably linked to the creation of illusions, take, for example, Greek *mimesis* or Op art (optical art) of the 20th century, has always been a cornerstone of our relationship to the visual, despite many trends of abstractions that developed during the period of modernism and are still alive today. But how can we reckon with this legacy of art history in today's high-tech world, especially when the boundaries between

simulation and reality blur over time and speculative models become the basis of reality, where seemingly real human faces in the form of deepfakes can be generated through Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) that scan global data? How can we relate to the very concept of illusion, which has been so embedded in the craft and competence of art right up to the latest chapters in the history of art? Thus, broader questions arise: can illusionism be re-evaluated in the course of the current alterations and shifts in the evolution of art? Should we just rest aside the idea of illusion in art forever and close its chapter, or should we attempt to rethink it and continue to find a place for it in our aesthetic vocabulary?

In debates about illusionism in art, one often finds associations with the *Baroque*, *Rococo*, or the Dutch Golden Age, particularly due to the popularity of deceptive methods in the art of that period, but it is rare to find references to illusionism in a broader context where the techniques of illusion go into the depth of art history or, in contrast, are widely used in contemporary art. In addition, illusionism in art is usually limited to certain genres or artistic typologies. For example, the literature rarely makes lines of connection between different art forms, which in practice often use the same illusionistic techniques. If we turn to the philosophical or psychological literature, we find even more confusion than in the field of art history. It is clear that hints of answers to numerous questions caused by the theme are scattered throughout a wide array of literature, regardless of the discipline and different fields of knowledge. Generally speaking, with regard to the main theorists of the question of the relationship between illusion and art, several names can be mentioned. And despite the fact that the authors still touch on this vast topic, nevertheless, one can hardly find a more serious author who has devoted much of his work to this particular topic. This is, of course, about the famous book *Art and Illusion* (1960/2014) written by art historian Ernst Gombrich in the early 1960s.

Although perhaps the most modern account of work related to the subject of illusion belongs to the representative of Perception Philosophy, Alva Noë, with his work "Is the visual world a grand illusion?" (2002), still one can hardly find a more fundamental and engaging study than that of Gombrich. If Noë just references a traditional skepticism about whether the world "out there" really is as we perceive it, Gombrich seems to be perhaps the only author suggesting viewing illusions as a complex interrelated structure. Moreover, though Gombrich did not specifically seek to construct a theory of illusion or perception as such, he is widely credited among contemporary authors and is perceived as a founder of this theory. Intentionally or not, he offered a systematic approach to the analysis

of art through the idea of illusion. This fact makes Gombrich a key element of the current study, since, apart from him, almost no one has tried to build a coherent system of the relation of illusion to art.

It should also be noted that the topic of illusionism in the visual arts was widely discussed in academic circles in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; however, in recent decades it has become less relevant and the topic has dropped out of the central discussions. Several attempts have been made to update Gombrich's ideas [Hopkins, 2003; Lopes, 2005; Veldeman, 2008; Tullmann, 2016], but so far little has been written about the theory of illusion as applied to modern thinking. On the whole, researchers devote their work to criticizing Gombrich's approach rather than revising or interpreting it. Hence, the purpose of this study is to update, reassess and reveal the theory of illusion (illusionism) originally developed by Gombrich in today's debate, discovering areas in which the ideas of illusionism cross interdisciplinary boundaries.

I believe that the reason for the need to study this topic in the context of modern discussions is conceptually based on the argument that we now have to deal with the issues of images, imagination, and the imaginary currently existing in the world of the hyper and virtual realities, with adjustment and manipulation, where untruths and deepfakes are common terms. This raises questions about our place in the environment as an individual, a member of communities, and part of a larger picture that encompasses the social, political, ethical, aesthetic, and many other areas of our existence. For good reason, Noë [2002] states that "skepticism about perceptual experience that takes its start from recent work in psychology and philosophy of mind" has to be overcome [p.5]. It feels that these new realms make us unproductive when there is a huge gap in the conceptual understanding of illusion, especially when today's representation makes things very real, and this concerns not only art but even our ordinary everyday life.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS, REFERENCES AND SOURCES

The objectives of the current research will be implemented by attentive analysis of the literature, and the writings of theorists and practitioners of the art, where the multifaceted view will allow finding links in ideas and theories. As a result, such an analytical approach will create a sustainable platform for the updating and comprehension of illusionistic theory and the place of the phenomena of illusion in contemporary debate. In this way, my analysis involves features of qualitative research relying on data obtained from first-hand observation, analytical articles, documents, and artistic artifacts. The starting point of the study focuses on the detailed analysis of Gombrich's work *Art and Illusion* [1960/2014]. Further, it addresses a

representative of new directions in critical theory, Chiara Bottici [2019] and her theoretical work, *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*, to find links with illusionistic theory in contemporary debate. It also includes critics and supporters of Gombrich's illusion theory such as Ziska [2018], Hopkins [2003], Lopes [2005], Veldeman [2008], and Tullmann [2016]. Moreover, I pay special attention to the writings of practicing artists shedding light on the subject of illusion through artistic activities and its theories, in this regard addressing Paul Klee [1925/1968], Wassily Kandinsky [Turchin & Kandinsky, 2008], and Kazimir Malevich [Malevich, 1915/2012; Malevich & Andersen, 1978]. Besides, I observe art history sources, providing my research with factual material on artifacts and artworks of past and modern times. Among many authors, it is worth mentioning Brusati [1990–91; 1997], Brusati and Hoogstraten [1995], Koester [1999], Battersby [1974], Warwick [2016], Bermingham [2016], and Bell [1993]. And finally, in order to complete the literature analysis with regard to contemporary manifestations of the illusionary in the arts and media, it is worth mentioning Harries [1974], Kingma and Welling [2013], Goodfellow et al. [2014], Wagner and Blewer [2019], Fallis [2020], Fraga-Lamas and Fernandez-Carames [2020], de Vries [2020], and others. This wide approach to the literary sources and connection of various disciplines and their thinkers as a network or ecosystem of research will reveal parallels of the ideas of illusion in art from different viewpoints. Accordingly, creating a cumulative vision of the problem and solving it by providing classical and modern examples of works of art, and various artistic theories regarding illusion will help to establish a better position for understanding the phenomenon under study in a modern context.

CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS

From a structural point of view, various angles to the problem are acknowledged in the current research. As the main method, a comparative analysis takes a significant role in bringing different facts, theories, and artistic writing to a common ground and singular vision of the problem, probably not suggesting a solution, but offering a perspective for understanding and future research in this field. For argumentation, I utilize artistic, philosophical, and psycho-sociological discourse to test and verify the main thesis. In addition, since little has been written on the subject of illusionistic depiction in the visual arts, some arguments have been taken from factual material, artifacts, and theories concerning the question of perception, knowledge-building, and the theory and history of art. Thus, the use of the multi-angled approach has formed the structure of my thesis and defined the narrative line of the work. Therefore, architecturally, my writing consists of three thematic essay-type chapters, each of which is devoted to different aspects of the illusion as a concept. In terms

of methodology and narration, I utilize a close reading of Gombrich's work *Art and Illusion* [1960/2014] as a starting point and framework for unfolding further discussion and bringing it to conceptual merit, which potentially may allow aligning it with more modern accounts on the concerns of illusion, imagination, and their counterparts. While each extended essay or chapter can be seen as relatively separate from the others, nonetheless, all three entries are still linked by the idea of drawing a line between how Gombrich's original conceptualization of the problem of illusionism can be re-evaluated or interpreted in more contemporary debates and settings.

In pursuing this goal, the first chapter fully addresses Gombrich's work *Art and Illusion* and its analysis. By a detailed reading of this "study in the psychology of pictorial representation," I try to display the core elements of the author's thesis, which is widely comprehended in writings as a theory of illusion. Therefore, through a consistent review of Gombrich's work, I seek to determine the constituent parts of the theory and its functionality. In this regard, special attention is paid to the concepts of artistic schemata, which are the faculty of the artist and the beholder to use a common language to encode and decode visual material. A discussion is also presented of the ways in which this complex interrelation between visual perception and artistic interpretation was formed, starting, as Gombrich [1984] calls it, with the "Greek Revolution" and progressing until the turn of the 20th century. In this way, I examine how the illusion was used as one of the effective tools and methods to connect the artist with the object of their depiction as much as the beholder with the work of art. So, interpreting the permanent artistic process as a path of constant trial and error, which can be expressed by the Gombrich formula "making before matching" [p.93], I arrive at the point where a deep analysis of "The Story of Art" reveals the concept of the artistic schemata as a complex functional unity, acting both as a stimulator of artistic creativity and at the same time an imposer of certain boundaries, where exactly this contradiction in progress and limitations of the artistic tradition in relation to the illusory, as the merit of the credibility of the portrayal, formed a broad movement of art evolution, at least in its European formation.

The second chapter addresses the research conducted by modern thinker and representative of new directions in critical theory Chiara Bottici [2019] in her book *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* in order to read Gombrich's ideas through an ontological prism. Taking into account the parts of writings particularly dedicated to the questions of image, imagination, the imaginal, the imaginary and the ways in which these terms have altered through the course of philosophical progression, I introduce

an ontological framework that allows being better equipped for analysis of Gombrich's notions with regard to illusion and the objectivity–subjectivity debate. Thus, comprehension of illusion in art starts to be seen not only from the positions of artistic practices, the faculties of a beholder, or the area of perception theories, but also as a structural element of a wider domain, where the position of illusion theory is questionable in its philosophical perspective. So, the reading of Bottici's analysis helps in better understanding the critical sites of comprehension of such ontological oppositions as imagination and reality, illusion and truth, and reasons for the shifts in terminology through the course of history, in which, according to the author, lies a sign of "a deeper philosophical rupture" (Bottici, 2019, p.14). In terms of the concepts of various thinkers, analysis touches upon ideas of such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, representatives of the Enlightenment, classics of psychoanalysis such as Freud, Jung, and Lacan, as well as more contemporary theorists such as Taylor, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Castoriadis, and some others.

      The last, third, chapter is designed to be a cumulative essay uniting all the arguments discussed in the preceding chapters through the subject of deepfakes, known for their controversy in various contexts. By providing the overall explanation and functionality of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), I describe the potential possibilities and impact of such illusionistic technology. Illustrating the positive and negative sides of the phenomenon of deepfakes, I broaden the debate and strive to look at them as a marker of deeper processes occurring in the artistic, social, political, and ontological spheres. Thus, by addressing the theoretical findings presented in this work, I investigate the question of why this technology, intended principally for easing editorial work, caused such a stir and heated discussions, ranging from potential threats to users of computer technologies to the global "infopocalypse" (Rothman, 2018; Schwartz, 2018; Warzel, 2018; Toews, 2020). So, I regard the deepfake from the position of Gombrich's insights and strive to position it in relation to the anthology of art. In the same manner, I utilize the findings of Bottici in order to unfold the ontological component of the topic under study. Finally, by addressing the entries established by modern thinkers such as Hopkins, Lopes, Veldeman, Tullmann, Ziska, and some others with regard to the theory of illusion and perception, I scrutinize the question of reality and illusion, where the notion of distinguishability comes to the fore. By the end of the chapter, I arrive at the point whereby through the example of deepfakes one may assert the complexity of knowledge-building and difficulty in perceiving objective reality, complicated by contemporary technologies and their abilities to generate illusions indistinguishable from reality,

affecting our political, social, and artistic realms. In such a way, I link the current debate with Gombrich's ideas of visual language elaborated historically through the relations of art to illusion and pose the question of whether we can still continue the "real discovery of appearances" as Gombrich suggested.

CHAPTER 1

Why Gombrich?

I N THIS INITIAL CHAPTER, our most appropriate starting point is to address the subject as expressed by Ernst Gombrich in his work ***Art and Illusion*** (1960/2014). As a means of grounding, this work equips us with a contextual meaning that can benefit a basic conceptual comprehension of the subject of illusionism in art. To this end, I propose to unfold the discussion of these principles from the basis on which Gombrich builds and articulates his hypothesis concerning art and illusion. This discussion could provide a potentially stronger position for conceptualizing illusionism in art. In other words, the purpose of an analysis of Gombrich is to answer the question of what can be learned about illusion in art and illusionism on the level of a possible "illusion theory."

It is worth mentioning that alongside the aforementioned work, Gombrich has published many others dedicated to related subjects, including visual communication, pictorial representation, art history, cultural traditions, and others. Among these it is worth mentioning ***The Sense of Order: a Study in the Psychology of Decorative***

Art [(1979/2002)], ***The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*** [(1982)], ***Tributes. Interpreters of our Cultural Tradition*** [(1986)], ***Reflections on the History of Art: Views and Reviews*** [(1987)], and ***The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication*** [(1999)]. Much analytical work on the views of Ernst Gombrich has also been conducted by Richard Woodfield in his work ***Gombrich on Art and Psychology*** [(1996)]. Whether it is Gombrich's writings themselves or analytical studies of his theorizing, both types of work have gained wide popularity. In particular, Gombrich's book ***Art and Illusion*** after its first appearance in 1960 went through several editions and continues to be republished. In order to point out why this book is so special, let me here reference the words of Dam Ziska [(2018)], who in his critical article "Art as Alchemy: The Bildobjekt Interpretation of Pictorial Illusion" addresses this exact book. He names Gombrich's book ***Art and Illusion*** as "a research program in its own right" [(p.225)]. And despite the fact that more than a decade after its publication Gombrich [(1973)] himself questioned the correctness of the way readers perceived the message of his book, stating that:

> **I should perhaps confess that I feel both gratified and puzzled by the attention which my discussion of illusion has been accorded, for it has never been the central issue of *Art and Illusion*. The title of the lectures on which that book is based was 'The Visible World and the Language of Art' which approximates more nearly to a description of its topic. It so happens, however, that my publishers found this rather a mouthful, and since they also wanted to retain the word Art in the title I drew up a lengthy list of simple alternatives from which the final title was picked by a friend. We never dreamed that that title would convey to some that I considered illusion or even deception, the main aim of art.** [(p.195)]

still, notwithstanding certain criticisms it has faced on its way, this work is still seen as being the most elaborate theoretical work written on the problem of illusion in art. Gombrich, perhaps not entirely intentionally, somehow managed to suggest a conceptual platform or structural principle that allows the phenomenon of illusionism, the problem of representation in art, with imitation, realistic tradition, and generally with the evolution of art as such to be considered jointly. In so doing, the author of ***Art and Illusion*** opened up the territory for the discussion on this vast subject and, more importantly, provided the structure through which the subject of illusionism could be better analyzed. As a result, according to Dam Ziska [(2018, p.226)], "philosophers have continued to emphasise Gombrich's treatment of illusion to such an extent that today he is commonly thought to have defended an

illusion theory of depiction." Indeed, it is fairly hard to find any better or more complex work dedicated to the problem of illusion in art.

Often questions have been raised about the sufficiency and integrity of Gombrich's so-called "illusion theory of depiction," especially regarding its universality and the possibility to analyze the processes occurring in contemporary art and beyond. In such a way, for the purpose of tackling in more detail the widely debated question concerning the theoretical presupposition of illusionism in art and the place it all led, here, in this first chapter, I analyze the main approaches that Gombrich adhered to in his theoretical work. I mean, if Gombrich has laid the foundation for a conceptual understanding of illusionism, or at least as it was perceived by academicians who attributed these features to his writing, there might indeed be some serious functional elements that allow the articulation of such a complex subject. Therefore, I consider it very important to identify these constructive elements and thus form an analytical base, so that in the course of further writing it will be easier and more productive to answer the question of what can be learned by close observation of *Art and Illusion* by Ernst Gombrich in relation to today's realities and tendencies taking place in art.

STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLE OF GOMBRICH'S THESIS CONCERNING ART AND ILLUSION

To start the discussion, let me recall the conceptual structure upon which the main thesis of *Art and Illusion* is laid. To some degree, Gombrich (1984) is eager to find the answer to the question of why art has a history at all. It is no coincidence that he states, "If art were only, or mainly, an expression of personal vision, there could be no history of art." (p.4). From here, he goes on to build a logical chain, that if, say, perhaps a particular painter cannot accumulate and develop their artistic mastership quickly enough to be ahead of their contemporaries, or manage the impossible task of running through art evolution in their one life, then one can suppose that only collective knowledge can produce the possibility to store, deposit, and develop collected artistic knowledge further. Gombrich summarizes by referring to Wölfflin, that "'not everything is possible in every period.' no doubt that this skill had progressed from rude beginnings to the perfection of illusion" (p.4). In this way, the evolution of art is intertwined with the crucial phenomenon that appeared during its development, *mimesis*, which was a central part of the "Greek Revolution," as Gombrich calls it. Further, the line of artistic evolution developed in the form of various artistic innovations, such as the elaboration of perspective during the Renaissance period, the mastership of color tones and shading during the 17th century, the

color theories of Impressionists, and many others. Crudely speaking, all this has to do with a development of imitation skill and thus with "the problem of convincing representation, the problem of illusion in art" [p.4]. Gombrich draws a line of connection between illusions in art and the development of art itself as such. For him, this connection provides an answer to the so-called "riddle of style," one of the questions posed by Gombrich at the beginning of the work, meaning why the art of different cultures and epochs depicts objects in strikingly different ways. He expresses "The Story of Art" in a fresh context where "the reader may find that, what then were rather unsupported assertions can now be read in the light of an explanatory theory" [p.313]. Gombrich names the various formations in which the artists of certain periods developed their mastership, and reminds us of the many stages through which it passed. He describes how the primitive artist used to build up, say, a face out of simple forms rather than copying a real face. How the Egyptians and their method of representation in a picture was based more on knowledge than sight. How the Greeks and Romans breathed life into these schematic art forms rooted in older cultures. How medieval art, in turn, used these for telling sacred stories. How Chinese art introduced the nature of contemplation in art. How the scientific perspective or *sfumato*, Venetian colors, movement and expression, were added to the artist's means of representing the world around them during the Renaissance and later. And, finally, how, despite unsuspected "pockets of resistance," strongholds of conventions that made artists apply culturally learned forms rather than painting what they saw in reality, the art of the Impressionists proclaimed that their methods allowed them to render on canvas the act of vision with some form of "scientific accuracy" [p.313]. Accordingly, for the author, each period remains a testament to artistic conventions, thus being a hallmark of these particular ages, geographies, and styles of artistic expression.

In this sense, the structure of Gombrich's hypothesis looks quite reasonable and coherent, despite some drawbacks and points of weakness. It fails, for example, to comment on a certain degradation in imitative art (or in other words the illusionistic faculty of artists) during the medieval period or on the disintegration of the idea of skillful imitation at the turn of the 20th century when multiple radical to tradition artistic movements such as Symbolism, Futurism, Cubism, Suprematism, Dadaism, Constructivism, Surrealism, Abstract art, and others evolved, in which the illusionistic component is somewhat lost or at least its dominant role and relevance is dramatically diminished. Nevertheless, Gombrich's, relatively innovative notion (for its time) of binding illusions and the development of art, is very instructive and has great promise. This standpoint views and presents art as a

practice that needs illusion as an instrument, one that helps to collect and develop knowledge. It is no accident that Gombrich cites the Greeks, who said that "to marvel is the beginning of knowledge and where we cease to marvel we may be in danger of ceasing to know" (p.7). In the course of this idea, we return to the critical utterance by Dam Ziska (2018) that "the 'problem of illusion' is a local problem about a special kind of pictorial representation" (p.229), which now seems quite weak. In other words, Gombrich understands illusion more as an integral part of the problem of perception and thus as the test ground of all artistic tradition, rather than a local phenomenon of specific genres such as that of *trompe-l'oeil* or *quadrature* for example. It seems more plausible that for Gombrich illusion conceptually is more bound to perception than to certain illusionistic traditions such as that of the Greeks or the masters in deceiving the eye of the famous Dutch Golden Age.

The connection between knowledge, or one might say, preknowledge, and the activity of creating illusion in art is quite self-explanatory when Gombrich (1984) describes it:

> But what should a painter experiment with and why can he not be content to sit down before nature and paint it to the best of his abilities? The answer seems to be that art has lost its bearings because artists have discovered that the simple demand that they should "paint what they see" is self-contradictory. (p.313)

Thus, here the author concurrently arrives at a point of contradiction, as well as a deep connection between the eagerness to create the illusion of presence and at the same time the need for knowledge on which to rely in order to depict what the artist sees with their naked eye. This dualistic and sometimes contradictory nature is revealed by the author as a structural principle within several chapters in his book. Gombrich presents this topic with a series of contrasting couples or examples as follows: Chapter 1. From Light into Paint; Chapter 2. Truth and the Stereotype; Chapter 5. Formula and Experience; Chapter 8. Ambiguities of the Third Dimension; Chapter 11. From Representation to Expression. As yin and yang he correlates the painter seeing the light and transforming it into pigment onto the canvas, as in the first chapter; or highlights the dichotomy between the truth of the visual appearance of the world and our stereotypes of perception, as in the second chapter; or distinguishes between the formulae of artistic systems of schemata and the actual artist's experience of seeing, as in the fifth chapter; or illustrates ambiguities of the third dimension while talking about perspective as a mode of the representation of space, as in the eighth chapter; or summarizes the distinction between

representation and expression with examples of various artistic styles and genres, as in the eleventh chapter. All in all, it has to be said that Gombrich operates successfully here with a dichotomy and a dualism, covering the nature of perception, expression, seeing and knowing, learning and testing. Hence, here illusion stands out as a transition point between these somewhat opposing poles, providing the capacity for artistic development and evolution in art. Perhaps exactly this structural principle introduced by Gombrich (to determine transitional areas between subjective and conditionally speaking objective domains) serves as the basis for some of his readers to perceive him as a defender of "illusion theory."

Even though such authors as Dam Ziska [2018] refuse to attribute to Gombrich any theoretical findings in regard to illusionism—"Gombrich does not defend the illusion theory that is commonly attributed to him. He explicitly rejects such a theory," still the same author admits that there is a theory though more subtle and hidden that even Gombrich himself was not much aware of its existence: "Instead, Gombrich defends a much more complex theory which cannot easily be assimilated to any of the main theories that figure in contemporary discussions of pictorial representation. ... Yet, the point that Gombrich sought to make in Art and Illusion turns out to be more subtle than the one that is usually attributed to him." [p.227]. As a whole, it seems quite interesting that even critics who deny the fruitfulness of Gombrich's approach use his instrumentation to build their arguments on and suggest slightly different conclusions based on his findings, or propose a fresher version of *The Story of Art*. The actuality of Gombrich's writing can also be proved by the entire dissertations dedicated to his work; among these, it is worth mentioning the relatively new work by Jonathan P. Auyer, *Illusion in the Commonplace: Reinterpreting Ernst Gombrich's Concept of Illusion* in the Department of Philosophy, University at Albany, State University of New York in 2013.

In coming closer to a major discussion block of Gombrich's vision of art and illusion, let me here highlight one important and perhaps somewhat disputed structural point, without which comment, we could hardly go any further. I am talking, in my view, about a common mistake, desire, or, one could better say, a stereotype: that of connecting naturalism with illusion, something that Gombrich, specifically, does not do. In contrast, Richard Wollheim [1963], who was perhaps the first to aim this criticism at Gombrich, suggests that it is "Gombrich's considered view that, within certain limitations, naturalism is illusion, and that a painting is to be regarded as more naturalistic the more effective it is in creating its illusion" [p.25]. Also, Dam Ziska [2018] points out that there is a need for Gombrich "to

account for naturalism that poses the problem of illusion in art" [(p.229)]. Such judgments indicate that illusion is often being associated and equated to naturalism. But if one takes a closer look at the writings of Gombrich, it is easy to notice that this link is not of direct meaning. The presence of illusion does not guarantee the effect of realistic pictorial representation and naturalism, in as much as naturalism does not automatically evoke the phenomenon of illusion. For instance, Gombrich [(1984)] suggests that "naturalism may be described as the gradual accumulation of corrections, due to the observation of reality" [(p.94)]. So here naturalism is related to the research and observation of reality rather than to creating an illusionistic copy of the latter. Moreover, Gombrich criticizes the "belief that artistic excellence is identical with photographic accuracy" [(p.4)]. Also, in another passage referencing Roger Fry, he insists that "The history of naturalism in art from the Greeks to the Impressionists is the history of a most successful experiment, the real discovery of appearances" [(p.262)]. Gombrich tries to avoid the mistake of relating naturalism and convention, where naturalism is presented as a style or genre of art. He verifies that "It has become an accepted fact that naturalism is a form of convention—indeed, this aspect has been somewhat exaggerated" [(p.289)]. With this, Gombrich underlines the tie of "observation of reality" and "discovery of appearances" with an emphasis on building artistic knowledge and art in general. In light of these facts, illusion, conceptually, acts more as a product of this research than as the objective in itself. In other words, it can be said that illusion is more derivative of the artistic process rather than the artistic goal. So illusion is not compulsorily equal to naturalism; it has more subtle and complex ties than a direct connection. In support of this view, it is worth noting here a following passage by Gombrich, where he talks about the painting exercises by Fantin-Latour "There are black patches on the apples where Fantin-Latour painted highlights. In thus inverting the relationships, the painter drives home the message that this is an exercise in painting, not in illusion." [(p.226)]. Therefore, the idea of exercise and research prevails, with illusion serving perhaps only a minor role. Moreover, as a matter of fact, illusion can also be caused by abstract images, having fairly little in common with naturalism. However, it should be noted that sometimes illusion, as an artistic goal, could seriously guide art in its movement. In Gombrich's words:

> In antiquity the conquest of illusion by art was such a recent achievement that the discussion of painting and sculpture inevitably centered on imitation or *mimesis*. Indeed, it may be said that the progress of art towards that goal was to the ancient world what the progress of technics is to the modern: the model of progress as such. [(p. 8)]

It comes to be so that after all, the interrelation of naturalism and illusion can and is much debated, but it is perhaps accepted that to equate these two domains fully, despite their similarities, is an exaggeration.

And, finally, in order to completely avoid confusion in definitions, I will dwell here on one more nuance that requires clarification. I am talking about illusion and illusionism. These terms, at first glance, are quite similar, but still have crucial differences. Of course, illusionism is a derivative of the word illusion, but it suggests a broader interpretation and potential meaning compared to its primary source. In this way, we have to separate illusion as a single element— a phenomenon being presented in art or elsewhere—from illusionism as a conceptual domain that can potentially unite a wide spectrum of theories, viewpoints, narratives, and contexts. Consequently, illusion can be seen as a particular case or autonomous element in contrast to illusionism as a conglomerate of various types of theories describing the cases of illusions in art or in other areas of science. In other words, illusion is an object of study and illusionism is a theoretical model or area of research based on the various cases of the former. In this way, one may relate illusions to certain historical artifacts, art genres, art movements, or styles of certain artists, but these have to be separated from illusionism as a theory that suggests a certain reading of art history. Moreover, among these definitions there is another slight confusion that may arise when reading the texts of Gombrich and his opponents. Here I am talking about using different words to refer to the same phenomenon. For example, when Gombrich ties the evolution of art to the progression of illusions, he himself does not call it illusionism or "the theory of illusion", however, in their turn, critics do otherwise. To some extent, this makes it difficult to compare Gombrich's texts with those of his opponents, since they do not share common terminology when talking about the same thing. All this is rather confusing; however, we must take into account this disconnect and the fact that Gombrich's followers or critics introduced somewhat different terminology on top of the descriptions originally proposed by the author. That is why, when we see terms like "illusionism" or "theory of illusions" in relation to Gombrich's work, we must understand that they are superimposed onto concepts originally explained in other words.

Now having covered the controversy surrounding terminology, we have cleared space for further discussion of some of the major structural elements of Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* thesis. We see that the author does not have a single linear story but structures his major thesis around four thematic parts: Part 1, The Limits of Likeness; Part 2, Function and Form; Part 3, The Beholder's Share; and

Part 4, Invention and Discovery. Although, as we remember, Gombrich announced that he would present the "The Story of Art" afresh with a new look, he does not adhere purely to a chronological structure. At the beginning his writing is however quite consistent, starting from the ancient Egyptians to the Greeks and the Romans and so on, but deeper into the discussion the story line goes back and forth numerous times over the span of art history. In this sense Gombrich does not strive to be strict in narration but rather flexible in bringing various factors from different epochs and cultures. As a result, it seems that for him, it is more important to introduce and support the four conceptual positions that form each part of the work rather than to create a singular unity. Thus, each thematic part consists of three chapters (except the first), where each chapter draws upon a certain, particular issue that contributes to the development of the main argumentation. As such, together, all the chapters construct a sort of set of ideas and approaches to the main thematic parts which occupies the space between representation and perception, being together united under the name of Gombrich's work *Art and Illusion*.

PART 1 The limits of likeness

CHAPTER 1
FROM LIGHT INTO PAINT

The first part, "The Limits of Likeness," starts with a chapter "From Light into Paint," where Gombrich talks about the capacity of artistic representation and the limits of likeness, which the first cultures had at the very beginning of artistic evolution. He points toward the very early stages of art, where one can "see the outlines of iconology, which investigates the function of images" (p.7). This poses a question which, according to Gombrich, is still unsolved: "Are painters successful in the imitation of reality because they 'see more', or do they see more because they have acquired the skill of imitation?" (p.8). In other words, from the very beginning the question of illusion and its relationship with scientific inquiry is raised. Are artists eager to research and in this case art is their instrument for doing so, or do artists want simply to deceive the beholder by creating effects of illusion without digging too much into the depths of scientific observations and understanding? Briefly put, is an artist a researcher or a superficial

entertainer? This question highlights to some extent the dichotomy principle discussed earlier. Further, Gombrich references the writings of Constable and comments, "he was later to sum up in his lectures at Hampstead 'Painting is a science and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why, then, may not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments?'" (p.27). This research principle is something Gombrich also attributes to contemporary artists, being far from imitating the visual world, he says: "Instead of exploring the visible world, they probe the mysteries of the unconscious mind or test our response to abstract shapes" (p.28). From an opposing standpoint to where imitation is seen as just entertainment or trickery, Gombrich cites a letter by the painter Constable where he describes a new invention called the *diorama*, which was available by the 1820s. "'It is in part a transparency; the spectator is in a dark chamber, and it is very pleasing, and has great illusion. It is without the pale of the art, because its object is deception. The art pleases by reminding, not by deceiving.'" (p.31). It seems here that Gombrich does not fully support any particular concept of artist as a pure scientist or as a skillful entertainer; he rather prefers an intermediate position, saying that we should perhaps amend the rigid formulations and say that "What a painter inquires into is not the nature of the physical world but the nature of our reactions to it. He is not concerned with causes but with the mechanisms of certain effects." (p.39). To put it differently, Gombrich holds a point that perhaps an artist neither makes pure copies of what we call "reality" by being a true scientist nor completely avoids an understanding of it. Further, Gombrich notes that an artist seeks

> to explore the capacity of our minds to register relationships rather than individual elements. Exactly how he does it in any particular instance is his secret, but the word of power which makes this magic possible is known to all artists— it is "relationships". (p.31)

Unfortunately, Gombrich's final vision of the major approach of artists do not directly refer to specific areas of science, but it is safe to assume an emphasis on an artist's research in the field of the psychology of a beholder, where the artist can reconstruct the relationships of the present real world on the surface of the canvas and be sure that the viewer is able to decipher what the artist has painted. Then Gombrich pays attention to the code of various art media in which a principle of on or off is applied, as such it does not matter in which medium whether the filled-in squares represent the figure or ground: "All that counts is the relationship between the two signals" (p.32). He illustrates this notion with the examples of Greeks

cryptograms and the works of mosaicists of classical antiquity, where we become so obedient to the artist's suggestions that we respond with perfect ease: for example, the notation in which black lines indicate both the distinction between ground and figure and the gradations of shading that have become traditional in all graphic techniques. In this regard, Gombrich draws attention to the role memory plays in perceiving a painting or an artwork. In doing so, he relates conversions implemented by an artist from light into paint as a process transmitted in code, placed on the canvas in its correct relation to everything else. Here an image can be translated by a beholder once again from mere pigment into light. "And the light this time is not of Nature but of Art" (p.32), and if one matched the depicted object or space against the canvas, it would be more a "transposition, not a copy" (p.38). So Gombrich reflects on a principle of the minimum level of data that needs to be sufficiently provided in order for the beholder's reaction, since the latter has memories and experiences of perceiving space and objects. In this way, the minimum "limits of likeness" could be enough to decipher visual information. As a result, exactly these limits of likeness that an artist sets for interpreting "reality," being different in various époques and historical periods, often cause conflicts between the artist and the public, between tradition and innovation, since, "On the one side we are shown the purblind public, bred on falsehoods; on the other the artist, who sees the truth" (p.39).

Furthermore, Gombrich reflects on the ideas of Sir Winston Churchill, who speaks of a coding process that begins en route between the retina and our conscious mind. All outside information such as color, shape, brightness of things remains to us relatively constant, even though we may notice some variation with the change of distance, illumination, angle of vision, and so on. And "only when we are faced with special tasks involving attention to these matters do we become aware of uncertainties" (p.43), which, by the way, can be quickly adjusted to. Gombrich demonstrates this with the example of the movies when we are ushered to a seat very far off-center. At first the screen and what is on it look so distorted, but with the aid of the physiological adaptation of the eye, we soon get the feel of the relationships, and soon the world assumes its familiar form. Here, Gombrich tries to reveal the main characteristic that allows art to exist and develop. This is the ability of humans to "recognize identities across the variations of difference, to make allowance for changed conditions, and to preserve the frame work of a stable world" (p.43). Without this faculty, "art could not exist," insists Gombrich (p.43). He also attributes similar notions of interrelations to artworks themselves. Taking an example frequently described as a

conflict between the objective methods of science and the subjective impressions of artists and critics, Gombrich illustrates restoration work, where special note should be taken not only "of the chemistry of pigments, but also of the psychology of perception," meaning that not only fine restoration of "individual pigments to their pristine colour" is needed, but something infinitely more tricky and delicate has to be preserved: "relationships" (p.45).

In addition, Gombrich communicates a notion of a relationship not only within the sphere of the perceptible "reality" by the artist in the picture produced but also to a wider scope. He also attributes these relationships to qualities of a so-called "psychology of art" that each artistic period had. And thus, we hardly can say that one period of art is better, more correct, or more professional than others: "not everything is possible in every period" (p.4). So, Gombrich postulates that "our taste must, of necessity differ from that of past generations" and it might be true that "the Victorians erred so frequently, it is all the more likely that we, too, will often be mistaken, despite the improvement in our techniques" (p.47). To support this idea of alteration in the psychology of the perception of art, or in other words alteration in tastes, Gombrich recites a passage in Pliny where one may read of Apelles' inimitable way of toning down his pigments with a dark glaze "so that the brightness of colours should not hurt the eyes." He deduces here that there is no knowledge of "what degree of brightness offended the sensitive taste of a fourth-century Greek or a first-century Roman" (pp.47–48). Moreover, the matter of relationships in art can be witnessed not only within any given painting, but also between paintings as they are hung or seen. Gombrich continues by giving an example of shifting a perception while observing artworks by different painters:

> As we look, in the Frick Collection, from Hobbema's Village with Watermill among Trees to Constable's White Horse, the latter painting will look as full of light and atmosphere as Constable meant us to see it. Should we choose another route in the gallery and come to it with our eye adjusted to the palette of the school of Barbizon, of Corot, for instance, Constable's painting will seem to be eclipsed. (pp.48–49)

Or, for example, for contemporaries of Giotto the works of this famous painter came with a shock of incredible lifelikeness. Through the quotation from Boccaccio, Gombrich emphasizes this amazement "There is nothing, which Giotto could not have portrayed in such a manner as to deserve the sense of sight" (p.51). It may seem too exaggerated to us, but Gombrich insists that every époque has its level of expectation and as a result a certain shock if these expectations

are far beyond the presented facts. Here he provides an example of the first encounter with cinema, where the distance between expectation and experience was such that many enjoyed the thrill of a perfect illusion. "But the illusion wears off once the expectation is stepped up; we take it for granted and want more" (p.51). Perhaps, following Gombrich, today we may still find examples such as evolving 3D video, projection mappings, installation art, online computer-generated renderings, right up to deepfakes and so on, which from their first introduction caused a stir in the public, as well as in political arenas, but later have become more familiar and commonplace in many cases (Installation art, 2019; Clarke, 2014).

As a result of all this discussion, Gombrich (1984) labels these levels of expectation with the psychological term "mental set," where all culture and all communication depends on the interplay "between expectation and observation, the waves of fulfillment, disappointment, right guesses, and wrong moves" (p.49). Thus, he summarizes the idea that the history of art is full of reactions that can only be understood as variations of these mental sets, which Gombrich equates to artistic styles. In doing so, he explains the adherence of certain artistic periods or art schools to a specific "mental set," involving its own standard of perceiving and deciphering "reality," encoding it into painting and perceiving it by the beholder of a certain historical époque: "it is the 'more or 'less' that counts, the relationship between the expected and the experienced" (p.49). In this way, Gombrich relates the history of art to the evolution of the perceptual state of the human and regards the whole "Story of Art" as a psychological matter. It is no accident that he brings in the quotation from Max J. Friedländer, who stipulates that "Art being a thing of the mind, it follows that any scientific study of art will be psychology. It may be other things as well, but psychology it will always be." (p.3). But at the same time, Gombrich admits that to him as much as to historians, these simple psychological facts present some difficulties "when we discuss the relation between art and what we call reality" (p.51). Regarding the past from the position of modern times may be like looking through the wrong end of a telescope, which may make this observation biased. In order to "come to Giotto on the long road which leads from the Impressionists backward via Michelangelo and Masaccio, and what we see first in him is therefore not lifelikeness but rigid restraint and majestic aloofness" (p.51). To put it differently, instead of the perfect lifelikeness and mastership of naturalistic representation of Giotto as a painter of the new époque, we may tend to perceive him as more a representative of the medieval tradition. Thus, by encouraging readers to adjust their mental set to these different media and different notations being presented in

various époques and art schools, Gombrich finalizes his first chapter of writing and invites readers to examine representation in terms of truth and the stereotype.

CHAPTER 2
TRUTH AND THE STEREOTYPE

If the first chapter was dealing with a transition going from light into paint and vice versa by means of art, here the author concentrates more on image or painting in relation to artistic conventions. Thus, here reality begins to be perceived more objectively, or one could better say, scientifically. In other words, Gombrich dedicates this part of writing to the schematism by which we deal with the world. That is why the foreword for the second chapter includes a passage from Immanuel Kant saying that "The schematism by which our understanding deals with the phenomenal world ... is a skill so deeply hidden in the human soul that we shall hardly guess the secret trick that Nature here employs" [(p.51)].

Gombrich starts with the question of the temperament or personality of the artist, his selective preferences, and tastes that form, already known to us, a "mental set" or widely speaking "style"; whether it is the style of the period, the style of the artist, or the style of the genre or painting. A quotation from Emile Zola, who called works of art "a corner of nature seen through a temperament," opens this discussion [(p.52)]. According to Gombrich, temperament plays a significant role in the process of the artist interpreting reality. "When this transformation is very noticeable we say the motif 'has been greatly 'stylized'" [(p.52)]. But at the same time, taking stylization into account, in the end it does not necessarily obscure our "reading" of the motive—take, for example, the Bayeux tapestry, with its countless "deviations from reality." So here, utilizing Ludwig Richter's views, Gombrich arrives at the point where the limitations of stylization, or even the limits of the tools used, significantly restrict the implication of artistic possibilities and create a border to further expansion. Nevertheless, from here, says Gombrich, one may analyze these limits in relation to objectivity and thus get nearer to the riddle of style.

The question of why style should impose similar limitations is less obvious to Gombrich than the limitations of artistic tools and media. "The artist, clearly, can render only what his tool and his medium are capable of rendering" [(p.53)]. Furthermore, Gombrich poses a wider question:

> Historians of art have explored the regions where Cézanne and van Gogh set up their easels and have photographed their motifs. Such comparisons will always retain their fascination since the almost allow us to look over the artist's shoulder—and

> **who does not wish he had this privilege? But however instructive**
> **such confrontations may be when handled with care, we must**
> **clearly beware of the fallacy of 'stylization'. Should we believe**
> **the photograph represents the 'objective truth' while the**
> **painting records the artist's subjective vision—the way he**
> **transformed 'what he saw'?** (p.53)

From this standpoint, Gombrich doubts that one may draw a connecting line between "the image on the retina" and the "image in the mind" and states that such speculations easily lead into a morass of the unprovable. In a further critique of this point, Gombrich compares how far the picture that forms in the artist's mind corresponds or deviates from the image as a photograph does to a surveyor's record, or as a poem to a police report. Instead of seeing it as a straightforward process of transmitting, so to say, photography of reality into the artist's mind, for example from the landscape to the retina, Gombrich sees it as:

> **an endless succession of innumerable images as the**
> **painter scans the landscape, these images then send a complex**
> **pattern of impulses through the optic nerves to the brain.**
> **Even the artist knows nothing of these events, and we know**
> **even less.** (p.54)

Gombrich then ponders over the terms "true" and "false," which in his opinion can only be applied to statements or propositions. Thus, a picture is never a statement in the full sense of the word, as much as a picture can no more be true or false than a statement be blue or green. It is exactly due to the absence of this logic that much confusion has been caused in aesthetics, through the disregard of this simple fact. Although this confusion may be quite understandable in the context of the tradition in our culture of labeling pictures, images, paintings, etc. it nevertheless does not provide any objectivity or correctness of the facts and realities. For instance, the expression "the camera never lies" long ago passed through the harsh critics, arriving at a more informed position regarding the possibilities of manipulation. Therefore, Gombrich, as much as other thinkers, denies a direct liaison between the label and the content of a picture. He illustrates this notion by describing the situation of reading the name of a painter under a landscape painting. Usually in such a way we know we are thus informed that the named person painted it. But then one

> **can begin arguing whether this information is true or**
> **false. How and when we agree, in such a case, will largely depend**
> **on what we want to know about the object represented. The**
> **Bayeux tapestry, for instance, tells us there was a battle at**
> **Hastings. It does not tell us what Hastings "looked like."** (p.56)

Subsequently, for Gombrich, it "is hardly surprising, therefore, that pictures of people and places changed their captions with sovereign disregard for truth" (p.57).

From here, Gombrich takes a little step back and talks about schemata. For this, he does not accentuate the linkage to the notion of "true" or "false" directly, but describes it as a secondary formation. Instead, he argues that the procedure of any artist who wants to make a truthful record of an individual form relies primarily on the idea of the depicted object or a scene, rather than on assumptions on the level of truth with regard to objectivity, or so to say photographic reality. In this way, a preexisting blank or formula enters the artist's mind prior to distinctive features that can be attributed to the observation of an individual artist. Gombrich emphasizes this with the example of the publishing projects of the early printing press, such as Hartmann Schedel's so-called **Nuremberg Chronicle**, illustrated with woodcuts by Dürer's teacher Wolgemut, where the same woodcut of a medieval city recurs with different captions, such as Damascus, Ferrara, Milan, and Mantua. According to Gombrich, such a fact proves that the concept of a city with its main castle dominated over the individual features of each of the presented cities. Therefore, if we assume that such a stereotypical approach reduces the individual qualities of the objects and scenes depicted, then this is too bad for information. So, to illustrate this notion, Gombrich recalls the introduction of comparison between the formularies of administration and those of the artist's stereotypes:

> In medieval parlance there was one word for both, a simile, or pattern, that is applied to individual incidents in law, no less than in pictorial art. And just as the lawyer or the statistician could plead that he could never get hold of the individual case without some sort of framework provided by his forms or blanks, so the artist could argue that it makes no sense to look at a motif unless one has learned how to classify and catch it within the network of a schematic form. (p.60)

As a result, these schematic templates or, as Gombrich puts it, "formularies," serve as a starting point for the artist. Similarly to the famous Rorschach test, where a person tries to see familiar figures and adapt inkblots into meaningful pictures, the artist, too, tries first to classify the blot and fit it into some sort of familiar schema, saying it is triangular, or it looks like a fish. Further, having selected a base understanding or association about a schema to fit with the form approximately, the artist will proceed to adjust it, noticing other, more specific details. Here Gombrich reveals the process of experimentation the artist undertakes during the probing to accommodate various

schemata, ideas, familiarities or concepts of the depicted object and links it to the process of copying. In this way, he explains that, while copying, we learn from these experiments and proceed on through the rhythms of schema and correction. In sum, "The schema is not the product of a process of 'abstraction', of a tendency to 'simplify'; it represents the first approximate, loose category which is gradually tightened to fit the form it is to reproduce" (p.60).

In addition, Gombrich brings another important point, which emerges from these psychological discussions about copying that he carried above. He alerts to a danger in merging the way a figure is drawn with the way it is seen. In reference to Professor Zangwill, he cites,

> **Reproducing the simplest figures constitutes a process itself by no means psychologically simple. This process typically displays an essentially constructive or reconstructive character, and with the subjects employed, reproduction was mediated pre-eminently through the agency of verbal and geometrical formulae.** (p.60)

At the practical level, Gombrich regards this process as the following: If a figure is flashed on a screen for a short moment, we cannot retain it without some appropriate classification. The label or caption provided will influence the choice of a schema or class of objects. In doing so, if we happen to hit on a good description, we will better succeed in the task of reconstruction. In summarizing all the discussions, by the end of the chapter, Gombrich poses a wider question about the degree of freedom that exists for artists to change and modify their own idiom, which reply might shed some light on the explanation of style. Thus, he links the current discussion to the further debate.

Function and form

CHAPTER 3
PYGMALION'S POWER

In the second part of the work, Gombrich dedicates efforts to research the question of "Function and Form," consisting of three subchapters; "Pygmalion's Power," "Reflections on the Greek Revolution," and "Formula and Experience." Generally speaking, in this block of writing he talks first of historical approaches to the replication of reality, the essence of which can be summarized by the myth of Pygmalion. Although focusing on the ancient Greek tradition, Gombrich does also touch on other periods, mainly the Renaissance, and others, such as medieval and prehistoric ideas of imitation and copying. The first two chapters have seemingly the same purpose in trying to show the limits of aiming toward a perfect "imitation," as something set by the nature of the medium, on the one hand, and by the psychological procedure undertaken by the artist, on the other. In the final chapter of this part, he pores over the dichotomy couple—formula and experiences— an area where the artist elaborates.

In getting to the details, let me here summarize some of the major concepts and ideas Gombrich is trying to get across to the reader. In the first part, he forestalls the Pygmalion story with a fairy tale of the Guiana Indians that strikingly have so much in common with classical Greek myths. Through this bond he emphasizes the deep connection between the evolution of art and schematically primitive forms of the ideas of imitation, leading finally to figuratively speaking of "revival of artificial creation." With regard to the famous Greek myths, Gombrich focuses our attention to the fact that an earlier and more awe-inspiring function of art was not aimed at making a "likeness" but at rivaling creation itself. Perhaps here Gombrich focuses on the fact that the idea of likeness occupied a rather secondary position when compared to the primary goal of bringing to life an artificial object, whether it is duplicating an existing human as in the Guiana Indians' fairy tale or an imagined human as in the myth about Pygmalion. Exactly in relation to this, Gombrich cites the Lucien Freud, who says that:

> A moment of complete happiness never occurs in the creation of a work of art. The promise of it is felt in the act of creation, but disappears towards the completion of the work. For it is then that the painter realises that it is only a picture he is painting. Until then he had almost dared to hope that the picture might spring to life. (p.76)

In a similar vein, Leonardo da Vinci extolled the power of the artist to create, saying that the painter is "the Lord of all manner of people and of all things." No wonder artists can be quite disappointed by not reaching these heights of perfection. As Leonardo notes: "Painters often fall into despair … when they see that their paintings lack the roundness and the liveliness which we find in objects seen in the mirror" (p.79).

Through these citations and explanations, Gombrich reexamines the famous passage in the *Republic* where Plato introduces the comparison between a painting and a mirror image. Although Plato's concept of the hierarchy of ideas and implementation has haunted philosophy since this ancient period, Gombrich finds it beneficial to rethink it once again in the context of imitation and art. He again recalls Plato's formula of the three folds that make up any phenomenon. First of all, there is the idea of an object, secondly, the creator of an object, for example, a carpenter who translates the idea or concept of the "couch" or "bed" (an example that Plato provides in his text) into matter, and finally, the painter, who represents the carpenter's couch in one of their paintings. As such, this brings the artist to a place of being "twice removed from the idea." (p.79). Thinking

about this concept, Gombrich deduces, "The more we think about Plato's famous distinction between making and imitating, the more these border lines become blurred" (p.80). I think here he means that from the early stages of Greek art dating back to the 4th century the faculty of imitation became so high that this line between "carpenter" and "painter" nowadays has been blurred and mingled. And although Gombrich tries to clear up this notion by saying, "In other words, there is a smooth and even transition, dependent on function, between what Plato called 'reality' and what he called 'appearance'" (p.80), still, he fails to explain how this notion works in regard to the highest register, which Plato calls the level of ideas. Further, it seems that Gombrich indeed is talking more about the practical and creative level than the initial Pygmalion idea to make things alive. That is why he states that all we call culture or civilization is based on the human's capacity to be a maker, to invent unexpected uses, and to create artificial substitutes. (p.80). So this means that over time, a major focus of creation descended to the pragmatic and practical level rather than probing the conceptualization in the heights of ideas. That is why the idea of creating "real" things began to shift through art history toward the idea of creating "similar to real" things. Gombrich illustrates this with the example of innumerable works of cunning craftspeople who, besides precious toys, intriguing machines, artificial singing birds, and angels blowing real trumpets, also created artificial lakes, artificial waterfalls, and even artificial mountains. In line with this, Gombrich denies the high level of the order of things suggested by Plato, saying that "for Plato and those who followed him, definitions were something made in heaven." and continues by questioning:

> **What is the artist's task when he represents a mountain —does he copy a particular mountain, an individual member of the class, as the topographic painter does, or does he, more loftily, copy the universal pattern, the idea of a mountain? We know this to be an unreal dilemma.** (p.81)

He is rather skeptical about allocating ideas to the unreachable level, as proposed by Plato. Gombrich refers to both philosophy and psychology, which he believes have rebelled against this Platonic "time-honoured view of the mountain". In this way, Gombrich's nihilistic attitude to Plato's concept of "ideas" results in the conclusion that the painter or creator in general can only particularize, articulate, and make distinctions where before there was only an undifferentiated mass.

In rejecting Plato's idea of the ideal, Gombrich further discloses the view that we are carrying in ourselves a twin nature poised between animality and rationality, which finds expression in that twin world of symbolism with its willing suspension of

disbelief. And even being so, we still can remain in control while we "half-surrender to counterfeit coins, to symbols and substitutes" [(p.83)]. It could possibly be controversial to say so, but it seems that Gombrich finds it more fruitful to examine the two lower Platonic levels, since there is no opportunity or ground to discuss the highest due to its immateriality and ephemerality. That is why Gombrich pays attention to classifications and the role they play in the artist's navigation of the world of possibilities and interpretations:

> To our emotion, a window can be an eye and a jug can have a mouth; it is a reason which insists on the difference between the narrower class of the real and the wider class of the metaphorical, the barrier between image and reality. [(p.84)]

In this aspect of classification, Gombrich again addresses his view of the psychological aspect of the Rorschach test, where inkblots are offered to the subject for interpretation. Referencing Rorschach, Gombrich postulates that there is only a difference in degrees between ordinary perception, the filing of impressions in our mind, and the interpretations due to "projection," but the process is all the same. Thus, he concludes, "there is also a difference of degree rather than of kind between what we call a 'representation' and what we call an 'object of nature'" [(p.85)].

Gombrich supports these assumptions by looking back into history, saying that the test of the image is not its lifelikeness but its efficacy within a context of action, where lifelike qualities of art serve the function perfectly, but if the context does not require the high level of credibility, the merest schema will suffice, and it will "work as well or better than the real thing" [(p.89)]. Depending on the historical period and its cultural context, artworks may release a similar response, since they belong to the same class. In such a way, according to Gombrich, "The craftsman of Jericho did not think eyes indistinguishable from cowrie shells any more than Picasso thinks baboons indistinguishable from motorcars" [(p.89)]. So, he ascribes a reduction of the image to its bare essentials as enough of a degree of precision for certain types of art: for instance, the substitute may well be a magic rune rather than a naturalistic image. After all, Gombrich is persuaded to defend that the greatest lesson of psychology an art historian should learn is the fact of peaceful coexistence in humans of incompatible attitudes, saying that there never was a primitive stage of humankind when all was magic. There has not been a process of evolution in art that wiped out an earlier phase; on the contrary, different institutions and different situations favored and brought out different approaches to which both the artist and their public learned to respond. For Gombrich, it is clear that beneath

these new attitudes lies what he calls "mental sets," which do not disappear over time—"the old ones survive and come to the surface in play or earnest" (p.91). The reduction of Gombrich's reasoning may be summed up in a formula that he himself labels "making comes before matching" (p.93), where the artist has to know and construct a schema before they can adjust it to the needs of portrayal.

CHAPTER 4
REFLECTIONS ON THE GREEK REVOLUTION

This, the fourth chapter offers some important insights into classical Greek art in connection to those conceptual findings and ideas that Gombrich considers revolutionary—"the conquest of naturalism." The author admits that the incredible development of Greek art toward naturalistic credibility not only lies in the development of artistic mastery but coincides with the rise of all those other activities that belong to civilization: the development of philosophy, science, and dramatic poetry. With all these factors together, Gombrich infers that this astounding development of Greek art neatly illustrates the formulas of schema and correction, of making before matching, which were broadly illustrated in the previous chapter. So, referencing Schäfer, he stresses that the "corrections" introduced by the Greek artist in order to "match" appearances are quite unique in the historical perspective. This approach is indeed far from being natural, which makes it a great exception when compared to other cultural traditions. What is more complex for Gombrich is a question of why this approach spread from Greece to other parts of the world (p.95).

Leaving this question open, Gombrich comes back to the discussion of Plato's famous passage in the *Republic*, which suggests:

> **Does a couch differ from itself according to how you view it from the side or the front or in any other way? Or does it differ not at all in fact though it appears different . . . ? The same magnitude, I presume, viewed from near or far does not appear equal.— Why, no.—And the same things appear bent and straight to those who view them in water and out, or concave and convex, owing to similar errors of vision about colours and there is obviously every confusion of this sort in our souls. And so scene-painting in its exploitation of this weakness of our nature falls nothing short of witchcraft, and so do jugglery and many other such contrivances.** (p.101)

In this lengthy quotation Gombrich finds the reason for the artist's failure to represent the couch. Accordingly, this representation may include only one aspect of appearance, because being still conceptually "the couch," it appears to a beholder differently. That

is why Gombrich sees Plato's passage as appealing to the lower part of the soul, to our imagination rather than to our reason. So, by that logic, the images produce a wide "non objectivity" of the true idea, and therefore it must be banished as a corrupting influence. But in drawing this conclusion, Gombrich nevertheless notes that, perhaps due to the distinction of registers of perception that Plato and other Greek philosophers and thinkers managed to conceptualize in liberal art, a wide field for interpretation was offered to the rigid artistic schemes of ancient Greek art.

Next, Gombrich admits that it was in exactly Plato's period, toward the middle of the 4th century, that the Greek revolution was moving toward its climax, and only then that the tricks of foreshortening were joined by those of modeling in light and shade to produce the possibility of a real *trompe-l'oeil*. In a relatively short period of time, archaic art began to stir to life, taking the Greeks some two hundred years, scarcely more than six generations, to arrive at the point of very realistic art. Gombrich suggests that only a change in the whole function of art can explain such a revolution, referencing the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and Minoans, who failed to progress in a similar way and remained in a state of rigid schemata, taboos, and stylization. The same limitations were also typical for pre-Greek art and prevented it from conjuring up lifelike scenes. Orthodox cultures with their mythological narrative, stereotypes of gestures, grouping, and inability to represent a spatial setting hindered further development. Thus, it was exactly in these conceptual shifts that the responsibility for the whole function of art occurred in Greek culture by the 4th century. Gombrich sees a departure from the near-Pygmalion phase of "making" to the emancipation of the visual image, whether it be painting, sculpture, or any other medium of art. This, therefore, lets him conclude that "Now it is precisely the acknowledgment of such a twilight realm, of 'dreams for those who are awake', which may constitute the decisive discovery of the Greek mind" [p.102].

Furthermore, Gombrich relates similar processes to the period when the Christian Church had to battle with this unwelcome concomitant of illustration, from the very beginnings of Biblical cycles. He continues to propose that it may well have been the same difficulty that restrained earlier cultures from embarking on pictorial narratives of sacred themes. But when artists were given the theoretical capacity or so to say "license" to vary and embroider the myth or to dwell on the "how" in the recital of epic events, "the way was open for the visual artist to do likewise" [p.103]. Even by taking the whole history of Western art, Gombrich insists on the same principles, where we have this constant interaction between narrative intent and pictorial realism. Thus, a different "mental set," with which each

culture or historical period approaches a so-called "reality" or even to mythological narrative defines each unique way of seeing things in art with "different eyes." And so, providing future progress in art demands the sacrifice of diagrammatic completeness that was common for the earlier functions of art. (p.111). Even though Gombrich makes it evident that understanding as such may not be very difficult to acquire, the demand of an alteration of the "mental set" is a challenge. He illustrates this in the example of the taste of Australian Aboriginal people, who were shown pictures of birds. They were disturbed by the absence of full representation, such as when the foot of a bird was missing in an attempt to convey perspective. Here Gombrich again links this notion to Plato's objection to the sacrifices of illusionism. By this, he repeats the pull of gravitation that the Greek inventors had to overcome toward learning the skills of *mimesis*.

At the tail end of the chapter dedicated to reflection on the "Greek miracle," Gombrich discusses stories of invention in art that for many centuries after, or more widely speaking for all Western art in general, have set a sort of standard and departure point for the whole development of realistic or naturalistic art. Here he recalls a story of inventions, quoting Quintilian, who called the sculpture of Myron's Discobolos "particularly praiseworthy for its novelty and difficulty" (p.113). Among other artists who discovered new effects to increase illusion and lifelikeness, it is worth mentioning the names of Myron and Phidias, Zeuxis and Apelles. Numerous stories were associated with the names of these famous Greek masters, telling of their incredible artistic skill. The writers of the Renaissance or later periods echoed these anecdotes that extolled the powers of painting to deceive the eye as the immanent potency in the history of Western art. All the seminal documents of creativity and mastership of the painters linked art with the solution of problems and challenged future generations. Thus, according to Gombrich, art has become an instrument in which a change of function resulted in a change of form. And although this process became slower during the medieval period, still its inertia did not fully eliminate the discoveries of Greek art. For example, over time, "the classical heritage of narrative was implicit in the illustration of the gospel story which challenged the imagination of poets and artists till the means of increasing the life likeness of representations again became the object of systematic search" (p.117). Hence, Gombrich testifies to the decisive role the "Greek Revolution" played in the functionality of art and its development over the succeeding centuries.

CHAPTER 5
FUNCTION AND FORM

The final fifth chapter of the second part of the work examines the notions of formula and experience in regard to *mimesis*, or better to say, naturalistic or more truthful depiction. Referencing the previous chapters, Gombrich again talks about the schemata, the canon, or even the basic geometric relationships, which the artist must know for the construction of a plausible figure. But since these strict canons became overlaid in Greek art by the search for beauty and proportion, what can an artist rely on in their search for credibility? By asking this question, Gombrich probes the concept of *mimesis* a little further. Testifying to Mr. Ayer's observations that copyists and topographic artists sometimes make curious mistakes, Gombrich continues the debate and explains it by the lack of a schema. Such cases he calls "pathology of portrayal." It seems that he means here that since there are no longer cultural canons of pre–*mimesis* art, there should be some other ground to step on and build a picture. A hieroglyph or pictograph could normally function in the contexts of prehistoric or even medieval art, but in the world of *mimesis* one has to search and choose other canons that best suit the artist's purposes and goals. It can start with more general classes of things of which individuals are merely instances and continue to more particular features specific to a certain object. These items of the first approach class Gombrich associates with Plato's couch and ordinary nouns, such as man, sheep, hound, or lion, denoting concepts, "universals" after which the artist can continue toward individual features of each class.

Furthermore, he brings the reader to an idea of a union between knowledge and art which allows the implementation of canons of a new kind. In this way, a schema becomes not a given guiding map but a product of research and observation implemented by the artist themselves. That is why Gombrich gives the most illustrious instance of this union in art to the genius of the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci. He cites his passage about the laws of biological growth that Leonardo studied to depict trees more naturally and repeats his words that the artist is a "'Lord and Master of all things' who knows the secrets of nature and can 'make' trees as he hoped to 'make' a bird that would fly" (p.124). Here, again, Gombrich turns back to the concept of Plato and his formula of the universal idea, equal to a perfect pattern, descending from a intelligible world, "a place beyond the heavens," to a tangible world full of imperfect copies and derivations. Here, he links this notion to Neoplatonism, which reintroduced the Platonic idea in a new form. Emerging academies put emphasis on "the painter, [who] unlike ordinary mortals, is a person endowed with the divine gift of perceiving, not the imperfect and

shifting world of individuals, but the eternal patterns themselves" (p.125). That is why the artist may and basically should purify the world of matter by erasing its flaws, and approximate it to the idea in their artworks. Exactly in approximation to the Platonic ideas, Gombrich sees this orientation of the first art academies toward the study of antique Greece heritage with their geometrical relationship and representations of reality in an "idealized" form. This adherence to the idea of ideal or etalon Gombrich illustrates by the example of doctrine, which held sway in the academies for at least three hundred years, from 1550 to 1850. Seeing the universal in particular as typical of the academic tradition, he considers self-deception, which is also in alignment with his overall criticism of Plato's concept of the "sublime idea." Thus, Gombrich gives his dues to the fact that the process of changing the ideals of natural beauty, to a certain degree, and perhaps a very decisive one, rests on the practice of teaching. Therefore, teaching becomes an epicenter of the alteration of the mental set, perceptive field, and the way artists regard reality around them.

Consequently, Gombrich sees the teaching of tradition as a key element that allowed for a secure continuity of art between the Middle Ages and the 18th century, providing its evolution due to the teaching methods and the sway of pattern which were unchallenged. During this period, material for copying immeasurably increased with the coming of prints and the distribution of plaster casts of works of the classics. In addition, multiple anatomy books and books on proportion together with of the study of the nude in which the artist put their acquired knowledge to the test played significant roles. As a result, the predominant mode of teaching in academies was that you had to first learn and practice how to draw for example "a man" with the help of copying antique prints and sculptures before you were even allowed to try your hand at the life class and "to wrestle with a real motif." Here Gombrich finds a psychological inconsistency in accepting academic standards embodied in formulas' "abbreviations" or "simplifications": he reports that the artist needs not to think first of a real form of the object they are depicting but rather to reduce to the abstract oval for example (as to one of the most primitive shapes with which artists usually start their sketch, study, drawing or any artwork in general). Only after this can they proceed from this starting point and clothe the schema with flesh and blood. That is why Gombrich admits that training the eye or learning to see due to phraseology can be a misleading assumption, since the fact that what we can learn is not to see but to discriminate. "If seeing were a passive process, a registration of sense data by the retina as a photographic plate, it would indeed be absurd for us to need a wrong schema to arrive at a correct portrait," insists Gombrich (p.136).

That is why the perception and work of the artist is always an active position, conditioned by expectations and adaptation to situations. In the course of this argument, Gombrich specifies the term "seeing" by adding a more precise synonym "noticing," saying that "we notice only when we look for something" (p.137).

In the next block of writing, Gombrich describes the way the dry psychological formula of schema from Middle Ages developed compared to postmedieval artists and progressed further up until late 18th and 19th century art. "To the Middle Ages, the schema is the image; to the postmedieval artist, it is the starting point for corrections, adjustments, adaptations, the means to probe reality" (p.139). As a result, starting from the Renaissance, such sacred discontent, constant search and learning started to pervade art no less than science. Here, Gombrich highlights conceptual contradictions in searching and a reliance firmly on the ideal. It seems that his analysis says that the artist cannot do both, although they were always struggling in the implementation of this juxtaposed method. That is why Gombrich interprets the history of late 18th and 19th century art as the history of the struggle against the schema. He also admits that this process started even much earlier. Referencing Meder, Gombrich points out that it was, perhaps, Rousseau who first held forth in *Emile* in 1763 against the traditional way of teaching the elements of drawing. Nonetheless, there was always a constant criticism against such reconsiderations of academic traditions, which, indeed, did not presuppose any place for experimentation and research. Even in the late 19th century, just before all the radical changes in the art of the 20th century, voices of adherence to the classical tradition were heard. For example, Degas dismissed the excited talk of his Impressionist friends with the remark that painting is a conventional art and an artist "would better occupy their time by copying drawings by Holbein" (p.140).

Gombrich finds the solution to this paradox in the citation of the English landscape painter John Constable, who expresses somewhat what of a *mélange* of all the above-discussed concepts of tradition, schema, struggle against interpretation, copy and other aspects of creative work:

In Art as in Literature, there are two modes by which men aim at distinction; in the one the Artist by careful application to what others have accomplished, imitates their works, or selects and combines their various beauties; in the other he seeks excellence at its primitive source NATURE. The one forms a style upon the study of pictures, and produces either imitative or eclectic art, as it has been termed; the other by a close observation of nature discovers qualities existing in her, which have never been portrayed before, and thus forms a style which is original. (pp.141–142)

Gombrich indicates here Constable's paradoxical admission of mixing "mannerism"—traditional schemata—with the plea for experimentation. This controversy has been overcome by continuous advances in which the achievements of one observer were used and extended by the next, which in turn seems to be quite a common practice for science and correspondently for art, too. Gombrich assumes that no scientist or painter would refuse to use the works and findings of their predecessors for fear of becoming a slave to tradition. In doing so, he resumes that it matters little what filing system we adopt. As it was illustrated with the example of utterances by Constable, Gombrich continues, saying that "without some standards of comparison we cannot grasp reality" (p.142). By this he means the simultaneous process of adaptation of preceding visual models and their overcoming by new experimentations and trials. As a result, these considerations allow Gombrich to conclude that it was exactly due to the search for new standards that the grand classical manner of narrative painting died a natural death in the 18th century and opened up the space for the evolving of new schemata and compelled the artist to intensify the search for particular truths.

PART³ The beholder's share

CHAPTER 6
THE IMAGE IN THE CLOUDS

The first chapter of the third section gives an account of the ability to read a "cryptogram" on the canvas. Here a reader of the area of codes encrypted by the artist is brought to the other end—decoding—where we, as viewers, perceive a painting or any other work of art. This chapter explores and explains the beholder's share in the reading of the artist's image.

 Now on the receiving end of an artistic work, Gombrich starts by saying that an ancient writer who probed much more deeply into the nature of *mimesis* than Plato or Aristotle is Philostratus, with his moving document of declining paganism, ***The Life of Apollonius of Tyana***. Here Gombrich relies on insights from the following dialog carried by the philosopher who, in the best Socratic manner, cross-examines his companion Damis:

'Tell me, Damis, is there such a thing as painting?' 'Of course,' says Damis. 'And what does this art consist of?' 'Well,' says Damis, 'in the mixing of colours.' 'And why do they do that?' 'For the sake of imitation, to get a likeness of a dog or a, horse or a man, a ship, or anything else under the sun.' 'Then,' Apollonius asks again, 'painting is imitation, *mimesis*?' 'Well, what else?' answers the stooge. 'If it did not do that it would just be a ridiculous playing about with colours.' 'Yes,' says his mentor, 'but what about the things we see in the sky when the clouds are drifting, the centaurs and stag antelopes and wolves and horses? Are they also works of imitation? Is God a painter who uses his leisure hours, to amuse himself in that way?' No, the two agree, these cloud shapes have no meaning in themselves, they arise by pure chance; it is we who by nature are prone to imitation and articulate these clouds. 'But does this not mean,' probes Apollonius, 'that the art of imitation is twofold? One aspect of it is the use of hands and mind in producing imitations, another aspect the producing of likenesses with the mind alone?' The mind of the beholder also has its share in the imitation. Even a picture in monochrome, or a bronze relief, strikes us as a resemblance—we see it as form and expression. 'Even if we drew one of these Indians with white chalk,' Apollonius concludes, 'he would seem black, for there would be his flat nose and stiff curly locks and prominent jaw ... to make the picture black for all who can use their eyes. And for this reason I should say that those who look at works of painting and drawing must have the imitative faculty and that no one could understand the painted horse or bull unless he knew what such creatures are like.' (pp.146–147)

Through this long extract from Philostratus, Gombrich sums up the problem of the reading of the artist's image. He assumes that an image created by "imitative faculty" can be perceived in exactly the form of a "projection," which as a phenomenon became the focus of interest for a whole branch of psychology. Gombrich makes an analogy between interpretation of drifting clouds told by Philostratus and the Rorschach test, with its symmetrical inkblots used for psychological testing. The active ability of a human to recognize things or images in these accidental shapes proves for Gombrich an idea of perceptual classification. This process unfolds another way around compared to the work of the artist. Now it is a turn of the beholder to "read" a message encoded by the artist. "What we read into these accidental shapes depends on our capacity to recognize in them things or images we find stored in our minds," (p.147) argues Gombrich. In regarding the

problem of interpretation, he also mentions the 18th century British landscape painter in watercolors Alexander Cozens, who built all his work around the modification of random blots into landscape motifs. His peculiar book, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*, is a great illustration of this aspect of perception involving a two-sided process of perception where our mind is choosing between various possibilities. It is also worth a reminder here of another representative of this approach whom Gombrich also addresses, it is again Leonardo da Vinci with his *Treatise on Painting*. Similarly to experiments with "blotting" by Cozens and the Chinese artistic tradition with their great "spontaneity," Leonardo speaks of a similar method of "quickening the spirit of invention." The great master of the Renaissance advises:

> **You should look at certain walls stained with damp, or at stones of uneven colour. If you have to invent some backgrounds you will be able to see in these the likeness of divine landscapes, adorned with mountains, ruins, rocks, woods, great plains, hills and valleys in great variety**; **and then again you will see there battles and strange figures in violent action, expressions of faces and clothes and an infinity of things which you will be able to reduce to their complete and proper forms. In such walls the same thing happens as in the sound of bells, in whose stroke you may find every named word which you can imagine.** (p.151)

And even a story known from Pliny, where a painter who labored at representing the foam at the mouth of a dog did it in vain until, in despair, he threw a sponge at the panel and so achieved the desired effect, is aligned within this same conceptual row of ideas.

As a result, Gombrich leaves no room for doubt that the perception of an image is a complex multisided process, where we can gain a true idea of the importance of that force in the give and take of art. He therefore emphasizes the significance of this process by saying that the latter "reveals itself only if we take account of the mind of the beholder" (p.153). Starting from here, Gombrich draws a line of progression where art becomes emancipated from its ritualistic context of classical antiquity and appeals deliberately to people's imagination in later periods. Thus, from Plato's formation of art where the artist did not create the thing itself but only a counterfeit, a mere dream or illusion, artistic evolution arrives at the point where the artist addresses a public that is ready to accept the artistic vision. In other words, Gombrich testifies to taking the shape of an entirely new idea of art, in which the painter's skill in suggesting must be matched by the public's skill in taking the hints. For the purposes of illustrating this notion, he takes a close look the famous doctrine of

Castiglione's *sprezzatura*. This is an artistic technique where a master works with ease:

> **One single unlaboured line, a single brushstroke, drawn with ease so that it seems that the hand moved without any effort or skill and reached its end all by itself, just as the painter intended it, reveals the excellence of the artist.** (p.155)

Such a type of art indeed requires an appropriate mental set to recognize in the loose brushstrokes of a "careless work" the images intended by the artist. That is why even a lack of finish does not interrupt the ability of the beholder to align their imagination with the artist's intentions. In this category of classic painters working with the imagination of a beholder by means of suggestion and wide interpretation of seemingly unpolished works Gombrich names Velazquez, Reynolds, Gainsborough and some others. He admits a great deal of enjoyment in the projections when regarding works of such prominent painters. He supports this notion by reciting a passage from Roger de Piles, who discusses the differences in styles:

> **As there are styles of thought, so there are also styles of execution … the firm style, and the polished… The firm style gives life to work, and excuses for bad choice; and the polished finishes and brightens everything; it leaves no employment for the spectator's imagination, which pleases itself in discovering and finishing things which it ascribes to the artist though in fact they proceed only from itself.** (p.158)

The French critic Count Caylus, talking about the reasons why he and others prefer an unfinished and rapid sketch, a mere hint, to an explicit image, also explains it by the flattering feeling of being "in the know." Finally, at the close of the chapter, Gombrich infers that by regarding these multiple aspects of perceiving artworks, he arrives at an emerging psychological theory of painting that takes account of that interplay between the artist and the beholder. He further proposes that the image has no firm anchorage left on the canvas—"it is only 'conjured up' in our minds" (p.160). Through this long transformation from the crude schemata of ancient art (and therefore minimum interpretations that emerge in the mind of the beholder) to more complex art closer to the 17th and 18th centuries, art gradually mutated into styles that left much more room for interpretation by the beholder. "The artist gives the beholder increasingly 'more to do', he draws him into the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of 'making' which had once been the privilege of the artist" (p.160). As a result, in line with this doctrine, for Gombrich such art phenomena as the Impressionistic art with their

"triumph of objective truth," where a beholder needs to read across brushstrokes and solve visual conundrums becomes clear. So, the art of the 20th century challenges our ingenuity and makes us search our own minds for the unexpressed and inarticulate.

CHAPTER 7
CONDITIONS OF ILLUSION

In this chapter we approach perhaps the core argument in Gombrich's whole concept with regard to illusion. This section details the question of illusion and the way it occurs in art, the artist's, and the beholder's minds. Gombrich sums up the findings of previous chapters through the words of Philostratus's hero Apollonius, who express the idea of the imitative faculty and the mechanism of the beholder to recognize it. He also continues further disclosure of the phenomenon of illusion and discusses the conditions of its manifestations.

It follows that all representation relies to some extent on what Gombrich calls "guided projection." He again returns to Philostratus's words, saying, "No one could understand the painted horse or bull unless he knew what such creatures are like." Similarly, the blots and brushstrokes of the Impressionist landscapes "suddenly come to life" when "we have been led to project a landscape into these dabs of pigment" (p.161). Psychologists class the problem of picture reading with what they call "the perception of symbolic material," the basic facts of which were already described by William James in his *Talks to Teachers* before the turn of the 20th century. Here, Gombrich draws on his own experience of working for six years with the British Broadcasting Corporation in the "Monitoring Service," where he, along with his colleagues, had to keep watch on radio transmissions from friend and foe during the Second World War. Some of the most important transmissions were often barely audible. It was necessary to select from one's knowledge of the possibilities in certain word combinations and to project them into the noises heard. From this perspective, Gombrich admits to the fact of the extent to which our knowledge and expectations influence our hearing. Thus, he makes evident that the problem of perception is twofold: firstly, to think of possibilities, secondly, to retain one's critical faculty. That is why one has to keep projection flexible, to remain willing to try out fresh alternatives, and to admit the possibility of defeat. In this notion, Gombrich concludes, with reference to his own experience of voice detecting, the effect of suggestion was so strong that the "expectation created illusion" (p.162). My view is that here he is expressing one of the key elements in describing the functionality and concept of illusion. Under the term illusion, he means an understanding of a distorted voice message, which, despite interference, can reach the listener.

So, in turn, it can be assumed that a similar principle can be applied in a broader sense, including the categories of the visual.

But let us move forward and see how Gombrich unfolds other aspects of the conditions needed in creating illusion. He addresses the problems of transmission, reception of communication, and terms such as "message" and "noise." Although Gombrich specifies that the technical and mathematical aspects of "Information Theory" will always remain a closed book to him, he still appreciates at least one of its basic concepts: the function of the message to select from an "ensemble of possible states" and "auditory hint." To put it differently: the wider the ensemble of possibilities, the wider the scope for interpretation. Or, the other way around: where there is only one such possibility, the hint is in itself redundant and there is, in fact, no special message. The word we must expect in a given context will not add to our "information." In regarding this notion highlighted by Gombrich, we may also add and recall here similar findings connected to semiotics as elaborated by Yuri Lotman in his work, ***The Structure of the Artistic Text*** (1977).

As a simple way to illustrate the aspects in his work with perception, Gombrich draws reference to the mastership of conjurers who set up a wide range of expectations, a semblance of familiar situations, which make our imagination run ahead and complete the scene obligingly without knowing at which point we have been tricked. Following these principles, art first went through the Pygmalion phase of action and illusion, which could turn into deception only when the context of action set up an expectation which reinforced the artist's handiwork. Here Gombrich cites the anecdote from Pliny about how Parrhasios trumped Zeuxis, who had painted grapes so deceptively that birds came to peck at them. He invited his rival to his studio to show him his own work, and when Zeuxis eagerly tried to lift the curtain from the panel, he found it was not real, but painted, after which he had to concede the palm to Parrhasios, who had deceived not only irrational birds but an artist. For Gombrich, the famous story of illusion in classical antiquity illustrates the point to perfection and lays the foundation of such artworks as *trompe-l'oeil.* Ever since, painters relied on the mutual reinforcement of illusion and expectations: the painted fly on the panel, the painted letters on the letter rack, the broken glass pane in front of a picture, etc., which together arrive at a similar level to that of Parrhasios' trick. Gombrich (1984) deduces at this point that where the expectations in art "cannot be controlled they have to be created" (p.165). A psychological interpretation here would be that there are two obvious conditions that must be fulfilled if the mechanism of projection is to be set in motion. One is that the beholder must be

left in no doubt about the way to close the gap; second, that a "screen" must be given, an empty or ill-defined area onto which the expected image can be projected.

For a deeper explanation of what Gombrich calls the "screen," he addresses the art of the Far East. Chinese art theory discusses the power of expression through absence with brush and ink:

> …figures, even though painted without eyes, must seem to look; without ears, must seem to listen… There are things which ten hundred brushstrokes cannot depict but which can be captured by a few simple strokes if they are right. That is truly giving expression to the invisible. (pp.165–166)

According to Gombrich, it is the restricted visual language of Chinese art with its kinship to calligraphy that encourages an appeal to the beholder to "project" on the artist's suggestion and to "complete" the image by oneself. The empty surface of the shining silk is as much a part of the image as the strokes of the brush. According to another Chinese treatise, which Gombrich also references, "When the highest point of a pagoda reaches the sky, it is not necessary to show the main part of its structure. It should seem as if it is there, and yet is not there" (p.166). These considerations enable Gombrich to say that it is easy to demonstrate reached content by giving both conditions— familiarity and an empty "screen," which, in turn, seems the first and most elementary method of overcoming the limitations of the medium. As a result, some part of the motif will always be hidden from us, and there will always be some overlap. It is exactly what Parrhasios does by his skill to "promise" what he cannot show "and to reveal what he obscures" (p.167). Gombrich admits on the whole that "artists have come to accept the limits of these powers of suggestion through incompleteness" (p.169).

Gombrich goes further to bring another artistic example of incompleteness in the Impressionist paintings, which he compares to the paintings of conventional realists. He admits that Impressionist works have little to say about details and historical artifacts, but reveal other qualities that are inaccessible to classics. In this, he discusses the degree of detailing and expression. Gombrich exemplifies this in the comparison of an impressionistic sketch of a race by Manet (FIG.1) with the Victorian realist Frith with his *Derby Day* (FIG.2). He proposes that on the one hand, the Impressionist Manet creates an illusion of expression, light, movement, but omits meticulously elaborated details. On the other hand, the realistic work of Frith reveals a great deal of detailing and historical documentation of the event but says little about the emotional atmosphere of the scene. To regard this notion of data and degree of informativeness,

Gombrich turns his attention to Nietzsche, who admitted that all who claim to copy nature must be led to the demand of representing the infinite. He agrees here with the German philosopher that the amount of information reaching us from the visible world is incalculably large, and the artist's medium is inevitably restricted. Even the most meticulous realist can accommodate only a limited number of marks beyond the threshold of visibility: "in the end he will always have to rely on suggestion when it comes to representing the infinitely small" (p.175). Gombrich illustrates this principle with a painting by Jan van Eyck. He advocates that we have the impression that the master painted every stitch of the golden damask, every hair of the angels, every fiber of the wood, but diving into the details, we see just the fractions of the latter. "They must be based on an illusion" testifies Gombrich (p.176). He believes that this illusion is assisted by the "etc. principle," when the assumption we tend to make is based on a few members of a series from which we extrapolate them all. In a similar way, Vasari outlines this issue by saying that artist needs to be "hovering between the seen and the unseen" or what Parrhasios relates to the technique of *sfumato* as to "understand what one does not see" (p.176). Thus, Gombrich discloses that in such a manner, for example, distance from the canvas weakens the beholder's power of discrimination and creates a blur which mobilizes his projective faculty. We must always rely on guesses, on the assessment of the reading of symbolic material to our reaction in real life.

Here again Gombrich returns to his term "mental set" after describing several psychological aspects of perceiving artworks and reports that this has a lot to do with a state of readiness:

> to start projecting, to thrust out the tentacles of phantom colours and phantom images which always flicker around our perceptions. And what we call 'reading' an image may perhaps be better described as testing it for its potentialities, trying out what fits. (p.180)

For the conditioning of this testing, one needs a "screen," an empty field in which nothing contradicts our anticipation. This is the reason why the impression of movement is so much more easily obtained with a few energetic strokes than through elaboration of detail, or why a vivid sketch, being just a "visual hint," to put it in Gombrich's terms, better elucidates the finished work of art for us than a detailed, serious large canvas. In this context, he proves credibility to the words of Constable, who claimed an artist's right to present their paintings less as records of the visible world than as indications of an artistic experience. For Gombrich, it all leads to a communication, which consists of "making concessions" to the recipient's knowledge. He

FIGURE 1.
MANET, E. (1875). *At the races*
[**Oil, wood, 12.5 × 21.9 cm**].
Washington, DC:
National Gallery of Art.

FIGURE 2.
FRITH, W. P. (1856–58). *The Derby day*
[Oil, 100×220 cm].
London: Tate Gallery.

writes, "It is dictated by the context and the awareness of possible alternative interpretations that have to be ruled out. The beholder's identification with the artist must find its counterpart in the artist's identification with the beholder." (p.186). In this way, the sacred precincts of art seem to be the territory where the image is used for communication. Thus, Gombrich thinks that we can study that assessment of probable intention and the tests of consistency that lead to interpretation and illusion.

In discussing the question of conditions of illusion, Gombrich summarizes that ambiguity is clearly the key to the whole problem of image reading. Here he recalls the famous rabbit or duck illusion, where the beholder may illustrate the ability of a human to make a tentative projection and test an idea by suggesting various readings. He argues that we are so well-trained in this game and miss so rarely that we are not often aware of this act of interpretation. Once a projection is detached, one must switch to the alternative. Hence, Gombrich concludes in regard to projections that "The example demonstrates, I believe, what we mean by the 'test of consistency'— the possibility of classifying the whole of an image within a possible category of experience'" (p.188).

CHAPTER 8
AMBIGUITIES OF THE THIRD DIMENSION

In this chapter, Gombrich studies the power of interpretation using perspective as a framework. If in the previous chapter he stressed the power of suggestion, in the current one he supplements the process of projection, which is triggered by recognition or guessing. By guessing, the beholder tests the medley of forms and colors for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape when a consistent interpretation has been found.

Gombrich starts with a statement that visual representations, as much as signs, stand for objects of the visible world, and these can never be given as such. It is always an appeal to the visual imagination of the beholder and must be supplemented in order to be understood. Moreover, he remarks on the limitation of capacity by saying that "no image can represent more than certain aspects of its prototype; we have no means of guessing which aspect is presented to us" (pp.194–195). Referring to the wisdom of Philostratus, Gombrich repeats that "no one can understand the painted horse or bull unless he knows what such creatures are like" (pp.195–196). Expanding this idea, he points out that a picture of an unknown animal, or an unknown building, will tell us nothing of its size, proportions, materials, etc., unless some familiar object allows us to estimate some of the properties. That is why one may be misguided unless unfamiliar with

laws of perspective. Gombrich, therefore, acknowledges perspective as the most important trick in the armory of illusionist art. He relates to the writings of Sir Herbert Read where he says that "We do not always realize, that the theory of perspective developed in the 15th century is a scientific convention; it is merely one way of describing space and has no absolute validity" (p.199). And furthermore, talking about the tenacity of the illusion in regard to perspective illusions passed on in peepholes, he verifies that "whether we want it or not, the illusion is there" (p.200). To illustrate this notion, Gombrich describes demonstrations in the form of a peep-show having three variations to observe the collection of lines in three-dimensional form. From the first standpoint, one may see a tubular chair, from the second, a skewed object, which only assumes the appearance of a chair, and in the final third one, it is not even one coherent object, but a variety of wires extended in front of a backdrop on which is painted what we took to be the seat of the chair.

> Since we know chairs but have no experience of those crisscross tangles which also 'look like' chairs from one point, we cannot imagine, or see, the chair as a crisscross tangle but will always select from the various possible forms the one we know. (p.200)

Here Gombrich again attributes interpretation of objects to the question of the ambiguity observed in greater detail in the previous chapter. This example of the chair he attributes to inherent ambiguity, which reminds us of the reasons why we are so rarely aware of it. Because the power of suggestion of perspective is so strong, it explains the amount of trickery that utilizes perspective as a main tool to deceive the eye. And it concerns not only straight configurations of perspective but also spherical perspectives, utilized in illusionistic ceiling paintings or the skewed configurations known as *anamorphosis* (FIG.3). Further, Gombrich brings some paradoxes of the theory of perspective known by such Renaissance masters as Piero della Francesca and Leonardo in regard to Euclidian geometry. This concerns the depiction of columns or spheres in perspective from one single standpoint, where, being shifted from the main axis, the latter seems skewed and distorted although geometrically correct. By doing this, Gombrich emphasizes that perspective is merely a convention and does not represent the world as it looks (FIG.4).

Here Gombrich brings to the surface a very interesting notion by asking what "ordinary" perspective is. On the one hand, he says that "ordinary perspective demands a converging image" (it seems he is talking here about any perspective having a vanishing point); on the other hand "The peep-show arrangement could
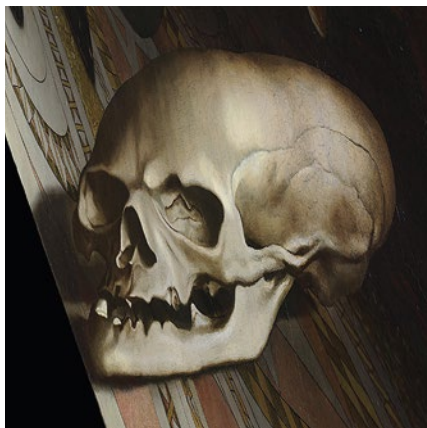
DETAIL.
The anamorphic skull as restored in 1998.

FIGURE 3.
HOLBEIN, H. THE YOUNGER. (1533). *The ambassadors*
[**Oil on oak, 207×210 cm**].
London: National Gallery.
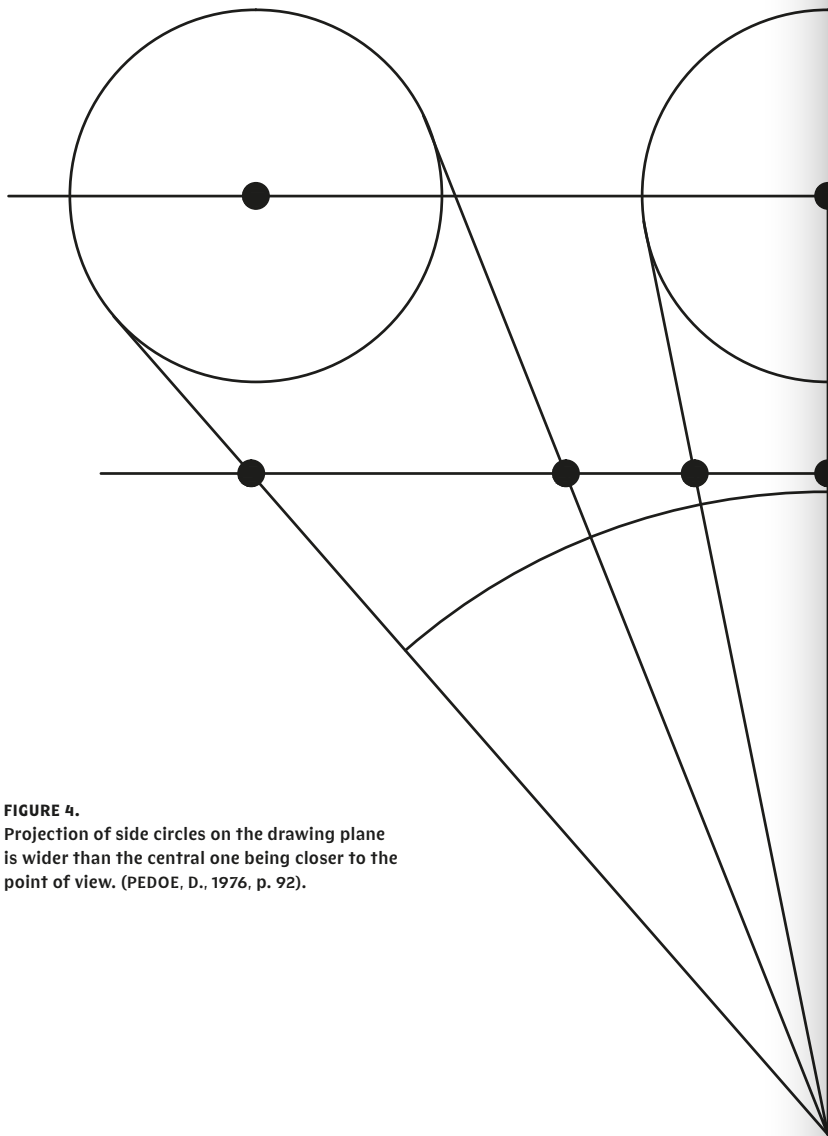
FIGURE 4.
Projection of side circles on the drawing plane
is wider than the central one being closer to the
point of view. (PEDOE, D., 1976, p. 92).
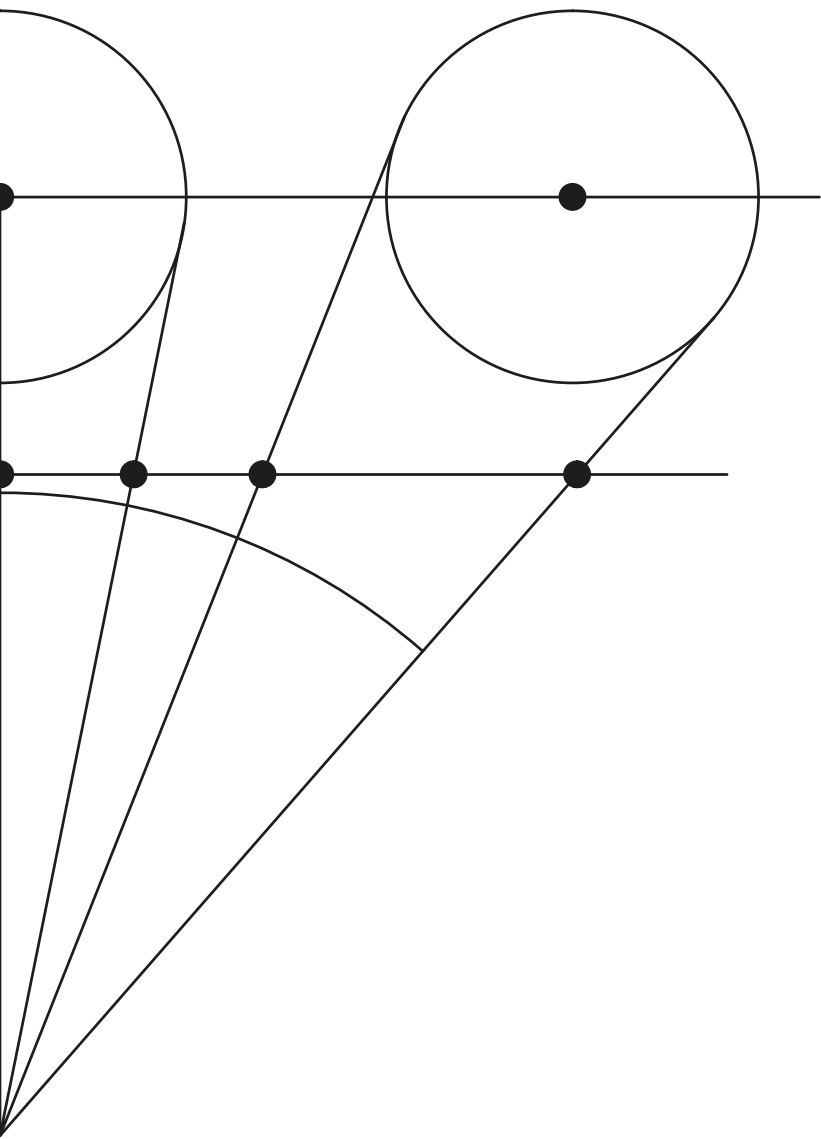
therefore look right while the world of our visual experience would still be subtly different, non-Euclidean, and curved (as has been claimed), like Einstein's universe" [(p.206)]. So it is hard to say what is "ordinary" in these circumstances for Gombrich. Also, Gombrich does not clarify what he means by perspective as such. Is he talking about one focal point perspective, two focal point perspective, three or even four focal point perspective? Is it aerial, planar, spherical or may be even reverse perspective, which also converges but only toward the viewer? There are so many questions that Gombrich omits. Perhaps he does not see them as relevant in his course of argument, or maybe he does not prefer to dive into the detail in an unfamiliar area. Nevertheless, Gombrich discusses the degree of trust in perspective as a sphere of the convention and eligibility of the correction of perspective. He reminds us here of Plato's protest at the trickery of sculptors, who lengthened the proportions of statues destined to be seen from below, because they failed to represent things as they really are. From another point of view, the digression on perspective aims at sorting out various spurious problems from that of ambiguity and thus leads to a correct relational model of three-dimensional objects. Gombrich takes a step aside and does not adhere to a certain type of perspective presentation, leaving the question open for further discussion. Instead, he goes back to the psychological aspect of illusion, where perspective is not as much a variety of interconnected spatial relationships, but rather one of conventions or accommodated models, well-learned by the beholder and stored in their experience. "It is not for nothing, therefore, that perspective creates its most compelling illusion where it can rely on certain ingrained expectations and assumptions on the part of the beholder" [(p.210)].

Turning to psychological aspects of the discussion of perspective, first of all Gombrich warns the reader that his point of view is relatively far from most schools of psychology, including, to a certain degree, the Gestalt school. He criticizes them for minimizing the role of learning and experience in perception and postulating an inborn tendency of our brain. Their theory centers on the electrical forces which come into play in the cortex during the process of vision. Therefore, these forces tend toward simplicity and balance and always make our perception weighted, as it were, in favor of geometrical simplicity and cohesion. Take in particular the Gestalt school: it insists that the simplicity hypothesis cannot be learned. "To probe the visible world we use the assumption that things are simple until they prove to be otherwise" [(p.220)]. In contrast to the dominant perception theories, Gombrich reveals a learning faculty of humans which results in perceiving complex forms and shapes. Exactly due to the educated eye, the beholder can read sophisticated messages scripted on the

canvas. For instance, the decorators of classical antiquity used the most striking pattern, reversible cubes, on walls and pavements, which can be read either as a solid cube lighted from above or as a hollow cube lighted from below. It seems that these ancient masters must have known of our ability to switch between various readings as much as our mind being ready to recognize perspective and spatial relationships, otherwise such ornaments could hardly make any functional meaning. So Gombrich suggests that:

> **It might be said, therefore, that the very process of perception is based on the same rhythm that we found governing the process of representation: the rhythm of schema and correction. It is a rhythm which presupposes constant activity on our part in making guesses and modifying them in the light of our experience. Wherever this test meets with an obstacle, we abandon the guess and try again.** (p. 219)

By the end of the chapter, Gombrich generalizes the global dichotomy of image carrier and image as an illusion in its own right. He recalls the injunction by Maurice Denis to the Nabis: "Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a plane surface covered with paint in a certain arrangement" (p. 224). Hence, at the same time, the picture is a surface and the pictogram—an illusion of some other reality than just color dumps. Gombrich proposes that "we may even train ourselves to oscillate between the two readings, but I doubt whether we can hold them both" (p. 225). Here he comes closer to an understanding of the central problem of the history of art that he set out in the introduction of his research. Gombrich raised the question of why representation should have a history and why it should have taken humankind so long to arrive at a plausible rendering of visual effects that create the illusion of lifelikeness. As a preliminary result, he sums up the history of art as the gradual discovery of appearances. He very much aligns this with an idea of growing stages, where humanity starts with an infant type of perception and gradually proceeds and matures to adulthood. For example, Gombrich attributes primitive art with that of children, with symbols of concepts. Further, symbolism gradually approximates more to actual appearance, although inevitably cultural habits make it difficult even for artists to discover what things look like to an unbiased eye. In such a way, he insists that it has taken from Neolithic times till the 19th century to perfect this discovery. Gombrich also admits that in the frames of development of European art this evolution progressed more or less continuously, with such turning points as the discovery of linear perspective or the full exploration of atmospheric color and color

perspective in the works of the French Impressionists. In this way, the distinction between "seeing" and "knowing," which can be traced back to classical antiquity, is brought to another level during the course of art evolution. Now, by discussing the problems of representation, Gombrich admits that this terminology, where the image relies on "'knowledge' only, is 'purely conceptual', and the history of art, as we have seen, becomes the history of the expulsion of this intruder" (p.235).

PART 4 Invention and discovery

CHAPTER 9
THE ANALYSIS OF VISION IN ART

In the chapters of the previous third part, Gombrich discussed the approach by the copyist through schema and correction, the artist's choice of a vocabulary, which is subsequently adjusted to correspond to their prototype. Now he asks, "why it is that such schemata are needed if all the artist has to do is to match what he sees, area by area?" (p.246). The answer is seen by the author in the fact that "there are greater obstacles in the way of such a mosaic approach than merely the difficulty of forgetting our knowledge of meanings" (p.247), implying that even simple forms and patterns have a way of transforming themselves before our very eyes.

Gombrich suspects that the eye knows of meanings of which the mind knows nothing. Therefore, the juxtaposition of shapes and colors plays the most unexpected tricks, known as optical or visual illusions. In support of this assumption, Gombrich references Professor Edwin Boring, who insists that "the concept of illusion has

no place in psychology because no experience actually copies reality" (p.247). Consequently, the reliance on visual experience alone seems doubtful. Gombrich attributes the so-called "eidetic faculty" to the same problem, where even the scrupulous task of copying nature facsimile-wise presents difficulties of a much higher order than those of remembering. And even if one stipulates that the creation of such a facsimile copy is feasible, we still have to take into account the fact that the real facsimile can be produced only when it is the same size as the original, to say nothing about color matching, differences in light saturation, and other visual parameters. In this way, Gombrich arrives at a point where he deduces that fidelity to visual experience becomes both a moral and an aesthetic imperative.

Overcoming that problem, Gombrich illustrates with the examples of Cézanne and the Cubists. He suggests that Cézanne knew that you cannot plan the organization of visual experience because an artist cannot predict the mutual effect of all the elements of a picture. Hence, Cézanne left multiple unfinished canvases full of experiments; "trial pieces which made him retrace his steps and start again on the road into the unknown that would enable him to 'redo Poussin from Nature' through exploring alternative methods for suggesting a solid organized world" (p.250). According to Gombrich, a similar task was challenged by the Cubists, who, in turn, took the opposite path. They left aside the whole tradition of faithful vision and tried to start again from the "real object" which they threw against the picture plane. Omitting the laws of projective geometry, the Cubists' paintings result in a confusion of "telescoped images." In this way, they claim that their paintings represent reality more really than a picture based on widely accepted perspective relations. And even more, in order to strengthen this dilemma between copying and adherence to schema, Gombrich addresses the upholders of the academic tradition. He cites the passage by Roland Fréart de Chambray, one of Poussin's patrons. In his work, *Idee dela perfection de la peinture* (published in 1662) dedicated to academic theory, he admits a similar conflicting notion:

> Whenever the painter claims that he imitates things as he sees them he is sure to see them wrongly. He will represent them according to his faulty imagination and produce a bad painting. Before he takes up his pencil or brush he must therefore adjust his eye to reasoning according to the principles of art which teach how to see things not only as they are in themselves but also how they should be represented. For it would often be a grave mistake to paint them exactly as the eye sees them, however much this may look like a paradox. (p.251)

To sum this up, Gombrich admits that all these theoretical and artistic evidences talk in favor of the fact that "illusionist art grew out of a long tradition and that it collapsed as soon as the value of this tradition was questioned by those who relied on the innocent eye" (p.251). In other words, the schemata were at one point an instrument to develop art further, but at the same time a regression, since none of the schematic approaches could serve as the basis to represent the complexity of the world in full. Thus, a struggle against the schematic representation of the world served as the basis for art evolution. In such a way, universality of accepted practice, on the one hand, and reliance on the naked "innocent eye" on the other, were significant factors in this process of "story building" in art.

By probing further the idea of a need for schemas with a view to overcoming it, Gombrich observes it through the problem of ambiguity. But before doing this, he reminds the reader that all representations are regrounded on schemata which the artist learns to use, and in turn explains why they are so dependent on tradition. The artist is given something which is to be made like something else. Gombrich says, "Without making there can be no matching" (p.251). In order to start on the difficult path of adjusting, the artist has to have some example of relationships and the way visual elements interact, which can be provided by tradition and certain schemata of the time. In this regard, Gombrich criticizes some modern psychological theories contending that achievement in arts is due to the innocent eye or so-called "stimulus concentration". In contrast, he considers that such a theory turns out to be not only psychologically difficult but logically impossible. He references findings in the previous chapters about the impossibility of having awareness about witnessing ambiguity. Therefore, stimulus is of infinite ambiguity. And only for the person who has learned to look critically by probing their perceptions and trying alternative interpretations is it possible to transmit visual experience in the form of a painting or in other languages and media they have learned. Here Gombrich draws a parallel between fine arts and languages, by saying that long before painting achieved the means of illusion, humans were aware of ambiguities and had learned to describe them in language. Similes, metaphors, poetry, myth, testify to this notion. He asks, "who taught us the possibility of seeing a rock as a bull and perhaps a bull as a rock" (p.251).

Finally, in revealing the vitality of the problem of ambiguity, Gombrich references Konrad Fiedler, who noted the difficulty of extending our knowledge especially in the "discovery of appearances" that is really the discovery of the ambiguities of vision. In this way, probing to see the process of painting as as simple a process as turning the message of light into the code of paint with

a help of memory, as psychology elucidates, he concludes that "the memory that performs this miracle is very much a memory of pictures seen" (p.252). So Gombrich comes to the conclusion that only a picture painted can account for a picture seen in nature. Thus, he stipulates that only by having experience of "reading" pictures in terms of nature could one turn round and see nature in terms of pictures. But it all leads to the supposition that the first picture would have never been painted. However, Gombrich admits that looking at the history of art, we have seen that the first picture was not intended much as a likeness. In addition, few early civilizations made the change from making to matching, and only where the image has been developed to a high degree of articulation has it resulted in illusionist art. Moreover, Gombrich explores here the interesting fact that even when naturalistic art gained its dominant position, the imitation of nature remained quite selective and not every motif invited the artist. Consequently, the visual vocabulary of the time showed a great deal of tenacity, "a resistance to change, as if only a picture seen could account for a picture painted" (p.253). So, Gombrich supports the fact of the stability of styles in art and exemplifies it with works of Gainsborough rooted in his admiration of Dutch paintings and some other examples. That is why he appreciates "Constable's description of landscape paintings as experiments in what he calls 'natural philosophy', that is, in science" (p.258).

Further, Gombrich advocates for the revision of the story of visual discoveries and parallels it with the history of science:

> This description of the way science works is eminently applicable to the story of visual discoveries in art. Our formula of schema and correction, in fact, illustrates this very procedure. You must have a starting point, a standard of comparison, in order to begin that process of making and matching and remaking which finally becomes embodied in the finished image. The artist cannot start from scratch but he can criticize his forerunners. (p.258)

He underlines the importance of language that the viewers and painters both learn and master, which, as a result, leads to transposition. For example, the Impressionists taught beholders not to see nature with an innocent eye but to explore an unexpected alternative that turned out to fit certain experiences better than earlier paintings. Or, as Oscar Wilde said, there was no fog in London before Whistler painted it. Gombrich admits here the notion that art has the ability to teach the viewer to see. When one looks lazily into the world, "the artist removes this veil of habits scarcely [and] does justice to the marvels of everyday vision" (p.262). Gombrich stresses this partnership and the act of

acceptance, not because one needs to worship success and popularity in art, but because we cannot speak of experiments without some standard by which to judge their success or failure.

To summarize this, Gombrich references Roger Fry's generalization that "The history of naturalism in art from the Greeks to the Impressionists is the history of a most successful experiment, the real discovery of appearances" (p.262). However disputable the term "discovery" might be, since one can only discover what was always there, this notion still seems rather well-grounded. By this he does not mean interpretations of the visual world are always right: on the contrary, Gombrich underlines that the first hypothesis is often mistaken, and remains so if one lacks adequate clues for eliminating false guesses. Through this method of elimination, which may include such cross-checks as touching, moving, and examining things, painters learn the skill of interpreting visual impressions as such. As a result, the ability of an artist to be aware of ambiguities teaches them how to decide between alternative interpretations and possible reactions. Gombrich infers about the painting that, "as we scan the flat pigments for answers about the motif 'out there', the consistent reading suggests itself and illusion takes over. Not, be it said, because the world really looks like a flat picture, but because some flat pictures really look like the world." (p.264). By saying this, he reveals that the very function and intention of any naturalistic art was driven by a search for the medium of painting. Hence, for Gombrich, long before experimental psychology, the artist had devised the experiment in reduction and found that the elements of the visual experience could be taken to pieces and put together again to the point of illusion. He attributes today's possibility for the beholder to contemplate the world around us as pure appearance and as a thing of beauty to this precise invention.

CHAPTER 10
THE EXPERIMENT OF CARICATURE

In this chapter, Gombrich addresses the culture of caricature, where he probes the idea of depicting something non-real, derived or inspired by an actual appearance of the sitter. He investigates the genre of caricature as a medium, which has a wide field of "projection screen," making it possible for beholders to see some other facet of a person than reality is eager to offer.

Gombrich holds the idea that when the public is prepared to "take as read" stylized or laborious images, it is rather possible for the artist to explore further the possibilities to interpret reality to a more explicit degree. Here he illustrates the evidence of how this was achieved by a reminder of the Chinese formula: "Ideas present, brush may be spared performance" (p.266), and the idea is more truly present

the less there is to contradict our projection. Gombrich also references the laborious pictures by Uccello and Piero della Francesca, who soon ceased to be necessary for the suggestion of space and solidity when the public was "prepared" to see things correctly and interpret them in the line with the artist's intentions. By that time, the requisite mental set had been established among the beholders, and even the careful observation of all the clues was not only redundant but something of a hindrance. One effect could do the work of many unless there was no blatant contradiction in the work which hindered the illusion from taking shape. Mentioning again the core path of perception being based on methods of trial and error, Gombrich asserts that often observation of the visible world equals that of an exploration of our own imitative faculty. In regard to Töpffer's views, he looks for what psychologists would call "the 'minimum clues' of expression to which we respond, whether we meet them in reality or in art" (p.273). In this way, Gombrich deduces that, "If there is a hierarchy of clues to which we react instinctively, expression will surely trump light" (p.274). From this conclusion, he starts to unfold the phenomenon of caricature, which Gombrich sees as important in revealing the notions of "projecting and reading."

He begins with basic information, saying that the institution of caricature dates only from the last years of the 16th century (p.275), which, in his opinion, by implication proves the fact that this medium evolved relatively late in art history. It has to do with the maturity of "perceptive faculty" that needed time to form. As a result, the arrival of that visual game was significantly delayed. According to Gombrich, "the invention of portrait caricature presupposes the theoretical discovery of the difference between likeness and equivalence" (p.275). In this regard, he cites the 17th century critic Filippo Baldinucci, who defined the art of mock portraiture as follows:

> **the word signifies a method of making portraits, in which they aim at the greatest resemblance of the whole of the person portrayed, while yet, for the purpose of fun, and sometimes of mockery, they disproportionately increase and emphasize the defects of the features they copy, so that the portrait as a whole appears to be the sitter himself, while its components are changed.** (p.275)

In other words, Gombrich wants to underline the components of resemblance and exaggeration in creating the portraiture. The sitter may be depicted in a much-distorted manner, but as soon as their key features, "a constellation of features from the melody of expression," are delivered to the beholder, and even in a very hyperbolic manner, the beholder can still easily perceive them due to their "prepared"

mind set. Gombrich asserts that caricature fully rests on the plea of equivalence rather than on lifelike resemblance and photographic precision. He goes even further by saying, "All artistic discoveries are discoveries not of likenesses but of equivalences which enable us to see reality in terms of an image and an image in terms of reality" (p.275). Subsequently, Gombrich defends the idea that equivalence never rests on the likeness of components so much as on the identity of responses to certain relationships.

In this regard, Gombrich references the guardian of the academic tradition, Arnold Houbraken, who wrote the biographies of the Dutch masters. In his writing devoted to Rembrandt, this academic argues that Rembrandt rejected the road to perfection offered by the academic method, the road of tradition, in favor of the imitation of nature. So, Houbraken maintains that Rembrandt's approach demands the impossible, especially concerning rapid movement, running, flying, jumping, and, perhaps the hardest part, the "expression of human passions." By giving Rembrandt's mastership his due, this guardian of the academic tradition explains his talent by an unusual visual memory—a memory so retentive that it could hold any phase of any movement and use it in his art. In contrast to his opinion, Gombrich sees that this explanation is still unconvincing. He is rather inclined to consider that the ability to deliver "the relationships" is more essential than deliberate copying of reality or building an academic ideal of the object depicted on the canvas. To support his assumption, Gombrich addresses William Hogarth, who in his autobiographical notes was much concerned with the problem of acquiring a retentive memory for physiognomies and expressions. And he, too, doubted whether copying from nature or in academic classes would really be of use to the artist in this respect. In contrast, the painter should "learn the language" of objects and try to find "a grammar to them." For Gombrich, this approach has to do with a term of schemata and such components of it as "character" and "expression." (p.280)

As a result, humorous art developed significantly due to the freedom from restraint and certain legitimate place in art it occupied. It allowed the masters of grotesque satire to experiment with physiognomics to a degree relatively impossible for the serious artist. From here, Gombrich illustrates the further evolution of art, being based not as much on imitation, as in previous centuries, but more on the conventional character of art as such and expression. He perceives humorous art or caricature as a hallmark of this evolutionary shift. In support of this assumption, Gombrich addresses Rodolphe Töpffer, who comes to insist increasingly on the conventional character of all artistic signs and concludes that the essence of art is not imitation but expression. In Töpffer's method, "to 'doodle and watch what happens'"

Gombrich sees exactly the preconditions for further departure of art from imitative to explorative faculty, where the language of art is noticeably extended. He supports this assumption by bringing in the words of Picasso, who said, "I do not seek, I find" (p.286). After all, Picasso does not plan but watches the weirdest beings rise under his hands and assume a life of their own. This example indicates for Gombrich the difference for the artist between relying on "schemata" (whether this is academic work in class, exploration of nature outdoors, or face-to-face observation of an object) and probing to interact with playful creations evolving from the world around. He perceives Picasso as "a man who has succumbed to the spell of making, unrestrained and unrestrainable by the mere descriptive functions of the image" (p.286). Gombrich attributes this new art language to self-regulating mechanisms that engineers call "feedback," which consists of a most rapid and subtle interaction between impulse and subsequent guidance. In doing so, the modern painter may apply so-called "automatic painting" similar to the principles of Rorschach blots in order to stimulate their own mind and those of others toward fresh inventions. Gombrich identifies a consistent pattern of associations between the broadening of artistic conventions and the liberation of artists and their viewers in their interpretations and judgments. By this he explains the reason for the departure from imitative to more and more abstract art, which finally freed himself of any conventions and social ideas of decorum. Gombrich exemplifies this trend with the art of Paul Klee, "who described how the artist-creator first builds and shapes the image according to purely formal laws of balance and harmony and then salutes the being that has grown under his hand by giving it a name" (p.287).

Thus, in the final passages of the chapter, Gombrich notices that historical alterations in art conventions predicated the offset of art in turning away from the visible world. He sees that in modern times, art may really have found an uncharted region waiting to be discovered and articulated, despite all the possible difficulties in the way of depicting this "inner world" on the canvas. Gombrich states, "To the artist the image in the unconscious is as mythical and useless an idea as was the image on the retina" (p.288). Consequently, he admits that the artist can only make and match, and out of an elaborated artistic language select the closest equivalence.

CHAPTER 11
FROM REPRESENTATION TO EXPRESSION

In the last chapter, Gombrich summarizes and structures the concept of the thesis which he has developed from the very start. His idea to tell "The Story of Art" relied on the series of conceptions presented

in such forms as schemata, language, mental set, ambiguity, system of probes and errors, and some others. Being very much intertwined with and influential on each other, all of them provide the keys to understanding the development of art and illusion. One of the major problems Gombrich addresses in this part of the text is the phenomenon of style, a sort of language to communicate knowledge, tradition, personal artist's preferences, mental set, and other factors that allow art to proceed from representation to expression.

Gombrich holds the position that there are keys and locks for the accessibility of visual information, in which the artist and the beholder are fully involved. This connection consists of two poles. One is the knowledge of the artist, based on the schemata they obtained during apprenticeship in art school, and their personal ability to "read" reality "out there." The second is the viewer, dependent on their readiness to perceive a painting with a "mental set." Gombrich asserts that the question is not how nature "really looks," but whether pictures with such features suggest a reading in terms of natural objects. When we are "keyed up" by expectation, by need, and by cultural habituation, all this "preliminary setting of the lock" helps us to decode or partly open the area of reality "out there." In this way, the artist does not so much copy reality as rather suggest the reading of it to a viewer. Thus, in the following, Gombrich turns his view to the understanding of realism. Recalling a much-debated question at the time of Plato on whether the language of words, the names of things exists by convention or by nature, he extrapolates this notion to art (p.289). Gombrich claims "that visual and language are strongly interrelated saying that there is more in common between the language of words and visual representation than we are sometimes prone to allow" (p.291). In this way, imitation seems to be not copying, but a situation where a certain language allows, in frames of its own media, us to approach the original source. That is why the new attempts or the use of "new language of art" during endless trial and error undertaken by the artist may reveal a glimpse of the reality behind it. So Gombrich gathers that these so-called imitations are not imitations proper, but approximations within the given medium of language.

From here, he draws a line between apprenticeships of art skills and learning of a language, which, in turn, can be equaled to the all-pervading qualities we call "style." As much as a student imitates the accent of a native speaker, artists have imitated their great predecessors. Gombrich illustrates this statement by van Gogh's copy of a print after Millet (FIG.5) and some other examples. Next, Gombrich moves on to the idea of parallels between sound and color, poetry and visual experience. Hence, he defends that "language, like the visual image, functions not only in the service of actual description

and subjective emotion, but also in that wide area between these extremes where everyday language conveys both the facts and the emotive tone of an experience" (p.294). Vocal imitation may not stop short where the realm of sound ends, but is able to extend beyond into that of sight, movement, or sounds, which can indeed imitate or match visual impressions. For Gombrich, words like "flicker," "blinking," and "scintillating" are good approximations in the language to the visual impression. This interpenetration splashes impressions over from one sense modality to another: from sight to sound, and from sound to sight. For instance, one may speak of "loud colors" or of "bright sounds," and it seems everyone knows what we mean. Through countless permutations, there are such terms as "velvety voice" and "a cold light," taste with "sweet harmonies" of colors or sounds, etc. In this way, by exploring the laws of *synesthesia*,[1] the creative mind was looking for transition points and expression of one medium through another. Gombrich, therefore, refers to Professor Roman Jakobson, who drew special attention to the fact that *synesthesia* concerns relationships, to Rimbaud, who assigned colors to the five vowels, thus converting auditory impressions into visual ones, or to other similar attempts undertaken by musicians, who were fond of representing the visible world in tones. (p.295) As a result, here, by providing parallels with different sensory media, Gombrich again reclaims his statement introduced in the course of previous chapters. He infers that a representation is never a replica. In the various forms of art, whether ancient or modern, the artist produces neither duplications of what they have in mind nor duplications of what they see in the outer world. "In both cases they are renderings within an acquired medium, a medium grown up through tradition and skill—that of the artist and that of the beholder" (p.298). So, Gombrich brings the reader back to the starting point of this book, the concept of style. He reveals that art criticism borrowed this term and notion from the ancient critics of literature, especially from the teachers of rhetoric, and reminds the readers that the application of the term "style" to painting and sculpture dated precisely only from Poussin's period, thereby emphasizing the connection of language and visual arts (p.301). In addition, he testifies that having such "a keyboard of relationships, a matrix or scale that has intelligible dimensions of 'more' or 'less', there is perhaps no limit to the systems of forms that can be made the instrument of artistic expression in terms of equivalence" (p.300). That is why Gombrich assumes that the expression "to paint the passions" can be entirely appropriate. And it seems that this is not an immediate expression but one dependent on conventions.

1   Synesthesia is a neurological condition in which information meant to stimulate one of a person's senses stimulates several of their senses.

FIGURE 5.
VAN GOGH, V. (1890).
Snow-covered field with a harrow (after Millet)
[Oil on canvas, 72.1×92 cm].
Amsterdam:
Vincent van Gogh Foundation.

In probing the question of artistic language further, Gombrich reviews the findings of the preceding chapters of his book, the main purpose of which was to investigate "the limitations in the artist's choice, his need for a vocabulary, and his restricted opportunities for widening the range of representational possibilities" (p.303). At the same time, the author reveals that these limitations are a source of strength for art and its possibilities. Since art operates with a structured style governed by technique and the schemata of tradition, representation could become the instrument not only of information but also of expression. In this way, Gombrich emphasizes that art not only represents or reports on reality but has an ability to express it in various forms and media. To illustrate this notion, he provides a list of various styles of landscape paintings. For example, landscape can be in the heroic, pastoral, rural, or humble styles, amongst others. The presence of different genres of pictorial representation of the same source, in this case landscape, according to Gombrich, speaks in favor of the fact that there is a subtle interaction between an artist and their style going on. Moreover, such factors as motivation and the social, historical, and psychological environment play a significant role in the determination of artistic choice in each époque. Accordingly, Gombrich (calling it useful and comprehensive) cites Constable's friend's definition, saying that "The whole object and difficulty of the art, indeed of all the fine arts, is to unite imagination with nature" (p.310). Through this quotation, the difficult relationship of the artist, the product of historical and cultural traditions and their education and schemas learned in art academies, with the nature "out there" is highlighted.

By the end of the chapter, Gombrich returns to the purpose of his book, which is to explain why art has a history and why its history developed in one direction rather than another. He believes that although the second question can never be completely answered, some evidence for reconstructing the course of art can be comprehended. Perhaps one may trace preconditions of certain processes rather than expecting to obtain strict answers. Gombrich questions why the painter cannot just simply sit down before nature and paint it the best way they can. The answer seems to be quite obvious, taking into account all the materials presented in Gombrich's research. The great emphasis on language, schemata of representation and mental set of the artist and the beholder structures our understanding of "The Story of Art" in a more complex way. All this leads the author to say:

> In investigating the growth of the language of representation we may have gained some insight into the articulation of other languages of equivalences. Indeed, the true miracle of the language of art is not that it enables the artist to

create the illusion of reality. It is that under the hands of a great master the image becomes translucent. In teaching us to see the visible world afresh, he gives us the illusion of looking into the invisible realms of the mind. (p. 311)

In this manner, Gombrich ascertains that "we can never neatly separate what we see from what we know" (p.314). Here he means that seeing the patch on the close-by canvas as a distant mountain is to transform it, in turn, according to its meaning. For Gombrich, these "transformations explain the paradox that the world can never quite look like a picture, but a picture can look like the world" (p.315). He says that it is not exceptionally the "innocent eye" that can accomplish this match, "but only the inquiring mind that knows how to probe the ambiguities of vision" (p.315). In this way, Gombrich makes generalized statements by saying that when he wrote "The Story of Art," "the explorations by surrealist artists of the ambiguity of shapes, the game of 'rabbit or duck?' would provide the best point of entry into the labyrinth of representation" (p.315). He also references Dali's way of letting each form represent several things at the same time as an artistic quintessence of the development of the argument of the representation that Gombrich developed through his entire work. In addition, he shares with readers the discovery he made during the course of writing. Gombrich notes the concept of "effort after meaning" that enables viewers of art to decode "cryptograms on the canvas," where exactly these cryptograms or forms of language will tend to hide ambiguity from us as long as possible. It follows that the desire to recognize ambiguity behind the veil of illusion becomes a core argument of telling "The Story of Art." As a result, Gombrich hopes that in this fresh context, previously rather unsupported assertions can now be read in the light of an explanatory theory.

Bottici's CRITICAL THEORY of Images, Imagination, and the Imaginary with Regard to Notions of Gombrich's THEORY OF ILLUSION

T HE CLOSE READING and detailed analysis of Gombrich's work *Art and Illusion* conducted in the previous chapter suggests several preliminary thoughts and findings for this research. First of all, one has to admit that Gombrich's work is indeed well-argued and of a thorough conception. This allows us to regard illusions in art not just as a marginal phenomenon confined to the territory of a genre or style popular during a certain period, whether *quadrature, trompe-l'oeil* or vanitas still life, but as one of the major instruments or catalysts in the evolution of art. Of course there is criticism and dispute around Gombrich's ideas, but still his book is and should be considered a fundamental work on the theory of illusion. Perhaps that is why authors like Hopkins [2003], Lopes [2005], Veldeman [2008], and Tullmann [2016] still address Gombrich's work when regarding the interaction

of illusion and art. Furthermore, the contemporary researcher Dam Ziska [2018], who has dedicated a great deal of his research to analyzing Gombrich's ideas, insists that Gombrich "helped establish the study of pictorial representation" [p.225]. Finally, a notion of the significance and vitality of Gombrich's theory can be taken from the simple fact of the multiple republishing of his book *Art and Illusion* since its first edition in 1960. The last edition of the book was published in 2014 with the same exact name, the 6th edition of the original.

      The second conclusion that can be drawn from a careful analysis of the reaction to Gombrich's writings is that even criticism refers more to the nature of his arguments or to certain points of view rather than to the whole concept. In other words, not the entire "Story of Art" is put into question but certain facets or qualities of it. For example, Johan Veldeman [2008] claims that Gombrich's idea of illusions is only meant to apply to realistic pictures:

> **Gombrich insists that realistic pictures 'deceive' the eye, as it were, and give rise to illusionistic experiences of their subjects. To say that seeing-in is illusionistic is to say that seeing an object in a picture is phenomenally indistinguishable from seeing that object face to face.** [p.493]

Alternately, Dominic Lopes introduces small corrections by specifying that delusion is a relative element to illusion in regard to Gombrich's theory. Even though Gombrich did not use the term delusion in his book, however, Lopes [2005] makes clear that:

> **The first step in unpacking this proposition is to note that illusion does not require delusion. Seeing a scene in a picture may not cause one to believe that one is seeing the scene in the flesh, and no view that entails otherwise can be correct.** [pp.29–30]

All in all, it seems that the theory stays the same and not much has been reformed, which leads in an interesting direction, stating that Gombrich's finding was somehow encapsulated in itself and did not find any further development in relation to the arts in its modern forms and current discourse.

As we know, "The Story of Art" told by Gombrich stopped somewhere in the époque of modernism and was mainly focused on what had happened between ancient Greece and the middle of the 20th century in European art. But does that mean that Gombrich assumed that his ideas are not applicable to modern times or other cultural traditions? Can his theory be used only for analyzing the formative period of European art and is less relevant for the analysis of the current state of art? These are very intriguing questions in which regard Gombrich (1984) provides us only with a brief hint about what the art of the future will rely on:

> In turning away from the visible world, art may really have found an uncharted region which waits to be discovered and articulated, as music has discovered and articulated it through the universe of sound. But this inner world, if we may call it so, can no more be transcribed than can the world of sight. To the artist the image in the unconscious is as mythical and useless an idea as was the image on the retina. There is no short cut to articulation. Wherever the artist turns his gaze he can only make and match, and out of a developed language select the nearest equivalence. (p.288)

So, the author gives only a rough sketch of what the future of art will look like in relation to illusion by emphasizing the role of the invisible world. It is perhaps exactly due to the common understanding at the time that the art of the period was inclining toward abstraction and non-realistic forms that such theorists as Gombrich had a tendency to believe this would continue. Modern art would continue to follow a direction detaching it from realistic and photographic type of art and relying more on an inner image or the unconscious. We know now that this did not happen quite in accordance with Gombrich's deductions and that various types and forms of modern art, including installations, video art, projections, and modern sculpture also appeal to a naturalistic type of visual vocabulary. Nevertheless, both critics and supporters of Gombrich's ideas have failed to extrapolate his concept to the modern day; to use his theory of illusion with regard to

processes in our highly technologized world. It seems that even though the subject of illusionism in visual arts was broadly discussed in academic circles during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, with time it has lost relevancy and fallen out of the central focus. Indeed, it was questions of space, perspective, modes and forms of spatial representation in different époques of art history, perception as psychological and bodily processes that preoccupied thinkers of Gombrich's time. It was especially those theorists at the time who were interested in the psychology and physiology comparisons of perception, with the different ways the space was presented in art of various historical periods. They tried to understand why spatial representation was so strikingly inconsistent, if one takes ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, the Christian medieval period, the Renaissance, or the period of the so-called Dutch Golden Age, with whole books addressing these questions. Take, for example, Boris Rauschenbach, a preeminent physicist and rocket engineer, working on the development of the theory and instruments for interplanetary flight control and navigation in 1955–1960s, who later wrote several works dealing with the question of the perception and representation of space in fine art. *Perceptual Perspective and Cezanne's Landscapes* [1982], *On My Concept of Perceptual Perspective That Accounts for Parallel and Inverted Perspective in Pictorial Art* [1983], and *Perspective Pictures and Visual Perception* [1985] to name three examples.

Nonetheless, the questions of illusions associated with the perception of space gradually became of less interest in later academic debating circles. Perhaps for some, advancements in technology offered answers to these questions, as computers could deal with any spatial relation and convert it into any representational mode. For example, today's engineering, architectural or other design software such as AutoCAD,[2] Autodesk 3ds Max,[3] and many others can offer many forms of representation. These visualized objects and spaces, ranging from orthogonal projections to axonometric, complex perspectives with different viewing angles, and even spherical perspectives, can be generated seemingly infinitely. The user of the computer program is able to choose any mode of illustration suitable for their tasks, not to mention being able to freely

and easily switch from one to another. Now it seems that the question of the historical justification for the choice of one or another way of depicting space has significantly faded into the background. Indeed, the representation of objects and space is no longer determined by the artistic style of specific historical periods or "mental sets," if one puts it in Gombrich's terminology. Now, the user of computer programs can use as many "mental sets" or "styles" as needed. But does this mean that Gombrich's concept has solved all the problems associated with illusion and art; that is, it has fulfilled its historical role and thus left modern discourse? Should we just set aside the notion of illusion in relation to art and close this chapter forever? Or should we attempt to reframe and rethink the theme in a modern context and continue to seek a place for it in our aesthetic vocabulary? Can illusionism and the theory of illusions be in fact reassessed, revisited, and even reactualized within the current possibilities offered by today's highly technologized world?

Indeed, there is the idea that art and the practice of image-making are intrinsically tied to the production of illusions. Whether we are talking about realistic *mimesis* or Op art, often such illusory genres of art have determined our attitude to how we see the world, how we perceive art, even despite the many trends of abstraction that inhabited modernism and still live today. But how do we reckon with this unsung legacy from art history, especially as the boundaries between simulation, reality, artist, and program software dissolve over time, when speculative models become the foundations of a new reality, where seemingly real human faces can be generated through Generative Adversarial Network (GAN)[4] (neural networks) that scan and react to global data

2   AutoCAD is a commercial computer-aided design (CAD) and drafting software application. Developed and marketed by Autodesk, AutoCAD was first released in December 1982 as a desktop app running on microcomputers with internal graphics controllers.

3   Autodesk 3ds Max, formerly 3D Studio and 3D Studio Max, is a professional 3D computer graphics program for making 3D animations, models, games and images.

4   A generative adversarial network (GAN) is a class of machine learning frameworks designed by Ian Goodfellow and colleagues in 2014. Given a training set, this technique learns to generate new data with the same statistics as the training set. For example, a GAN trained on photographs can generate new photographs that look at least superficially authentic to human observers, having many realistic characteristics.

sets? How can we relate to the very concept of illusion, which was so incorporated into the craft and competence of art as a means of communication up until the last chapters in the history of art? In this new context of the high-tech world, can we dispute the assumed inconsistency of illusion theories with contemporary creative practices, or can we reveal that these theories are a continuation and highly relevant to contemporary discourse? These are very interesting and challenging questions to which I may not be able to find answers, but at least I will try to get closer to their possible solutions.

On the whole, writers dealing with Gombrich's theory of illusion seldom search for current evidence or reincarnations of his findings. The discussions rather remain in the margins of various studies covering limited historical periods, or often concern only the constituent components of his theory. This means that Gombrich's concepts rarely find a place in today's debate on the arts. I suppose there are several reasons for this situation. Firstly, Gombrich himself did not update his work by including the state of the art of the late 20th and beginning of the 21st century into the later editions of his famous book; secondly, researchers perhaps did not see potency in the "theory of illusion" in relation to the course of evolution that followed art into the current decades. Also, few researchers have attempted to correlate Gombrich's ideas with other forms present in modern discourse, both artistically and in the wider field of science and knowledge. In this regard, I believe his concept did not disappear without a trace: more likely, it changed position, form, and vocabulary, which, in turn, made it difficult to detect. This situation left a somewhat unproductive break. But taking into account the apparent isolation of the ideas of Gombrich from modernity, I believe its relevance persisted throughout but in a more subtle form. In fact, today's levels of representation make the issue of illusion and ephemerality more relevant as things become more, so to say, "real," not only within art but across society and even in politics. Perhaps now is the time to address the legacy of Gombrich and rediscover the links between his ideas and modernity. It seems that we have already moved from Gombrich's world, where art appealed to the objective world

through the creation of the illusion of its presence, to a world where there is not much room for naturalism, where illusions serve as a tool for creating a new reality full of virtual items, where the ever-growing gap between the real and imaginary world according to Bottici (2019) can collapse at any moment, which literally puts us in a very uncertain and dangerous position. Indeed, today the distinctions and boundaries between the imaginary, the illusory, the abstract, and the real are significantly blurred. That is why, in turning to Gombrich's work, I want to focus my comments on his theory, which I think can be seen as something more than a mere study of art history, where illusion serves exclusively to shape art. I believe that Gombrich proposed a more complex relationship in which illusion combines and articulates perception and representation, in relation to the numerous phenomena that people encounter. It seems to me that this aspect is important for understanding today's reality, where the realism of any idea depends on its representation, especially when that representation is, in turn, complicated by imaginary spaces, imaginary objects, and even imaginary politics.

This is why, for the purposes of relating Gombrich's theory of illusion to contemporary modus of thinking, I probe to take his path further in time. I strive to widen the debate and observe the actualization of Gombrich's ideas in the territory of images, imagination, and the imaginary. Thus, this chapter is dedicated to the new directions in critical theory proposed by the Italian philosopher and writer Chiara Bottici (2019) in the book *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary.* Although this book primarily addresses questions of critical social theory, with a focus on interconnected contemporary struggles around gender, race, sexuality, class, and globalization, my interest here is on its base components, relating to images, imagination, imaginal, and the imaginary—elements which the author places at the foundation of her research. Potentially, I see strong ties between Gombrich's ideas based on the principle of approaching reality through creating an illusion and Bottici's writings theorizing social imagination. Indeed, these two works are conceptually very close, although they have never

before been compared and juxtaposed. For this reason, I find it beneficial for the research to draw a connection between the two theorists and allow ourselves a fresh view of a question of ephemerality, images, and illusion. Undoubtedly, for Gombrich and Bottici, these themes serve different purposes in their studies and are quite different in nature; however, many similarities and correspondences can be found. As a result, I hope here to synthesize the detailed analysis of Gombrich's work *Art and Illusion* performed in the previous chapter with basic elements of critical theory proposed by Bottici, which together could help create well-grounded responses and position Gombrich's findings better in a contemporary setting.

Indeed, Gombrich and Bottici have very much in common when regarding these two conceptual proposals in relation to the imaginal and illusional in their basic principles, but because of their specialization in their disciplines, the authors develop their arguments in rather different directions. Gombrich works toward an interpretation of art evolution, while Bottici extrapolates philosophical notions of the imaginal, non-real into social and political discourse. Nevertheless, without touching on the political dimension of Bottici's work, the comparison of her thesis with Gombrich's theorizing promises a renewal and actualization of the artistic discussion on illusionism. In order to start drawing a line of connection between Gombrich's and Bottici's writings, let me first introduce the major principles around which the idea of illusion and the imaginal, in terms of philosophical merit, is brought into the subject of critical theory by Chiara Bottici. Firstly, Bottici asserts that because, on a philosophical level, the amount of work on the concept of imagination/ the imaginary/the imaginal is still minimal when compared with work focusing on reason/rationality/the reasonable, there is a need for an elaboration of this uncultivated area. Thus, she sets the aim of her book as being "to analyze the relationship between politics and our capacity to image, and to do so through a theory of the imaginal." (Bottici, 2019, p.7). Secondly, Bottici provides the reason why such an enterprise is important in today's discourse by pointing out two main arguments. On the one hand, she admits the human capacity

to form images, which as a result leads to an influence in the role of forming contemporary politics. For example, in referencing to Marazzi [(1995)], she explicates the influence of this domain of the imaginal on the processes of production and the consumption of commodities in modern society. On the other hand, Bottici [(2019)] argues that we remain ill-equipped to face this new influence of the imaginal in our social, and also hence in our political, life. In this way, "particularly today, in the conditions of a global society of 'the spectacle', a more vigorous engagement with the problem of the conditions for a 'public imaginal'" [(p.7)] would be welcome. To surmise, she argues that politics has always been imaginal, because we cannot think of it without imagining a public and therefore a claim to legitimacy. By giving great dues to the concept of the imaginal and paying great attention to the process of globalization, which movement in her opinion, brought us to a point of no return, she assumes that "the role of images in contemporary politics is such that they no longer simply mediate our doing politics, but now they risk doing politics in our stead" [(p.11)]. Hence, to a great degree, Bottici emphasizes the importance of the comprehension of the philosophical notion of the imaginal in relation to its manifestations in actual and objective reality.

In other words, Bottici's main argument, and simultaneously her main concern, is the faculty of each personality to generate and thus rely on their own imagination and interpretation of reality. This results in a proliferation of multiple images that in their own right are capable of creating another reality than that from which they were initially drawn. And what is most important is that this new imaginary reality can be manipulated by any force, including political ones. So she warns us that there is a significant reliance on these factors in perception and of image-type representations by public society, so much so that there is a potential danger of losing grasp of real things. Leaving aside the idea of political manipulation of one's own imagination, which Bottici does scrutinize in her writing, it is the imaginal component of her thesis that I am very interested in here. Her basic idea, politics aside, is very much in association with the concept of *Art and Illusion* and relevant to previous discussions. For instance, we

may recall from the detailed analysis of Gombrich's writings described in the first chapter the notion of a certain extended space or language through which perception, articulation, and communication with reality occurs, which, in return, forms tangible entities of artistic works. In the same manner, Bottici, in her proposal, appeals to the faculty of a person's imaginal, one that creates an external interplay of the imaginary between social members and the political environment that results in quite real consequences. In both cases, whether it is Gombrich explaining the nature of artistic works by means of creating illusion, or Bottici describing political reality by means of social philosophy, they appeal to an external element of the subject's domain that in return structures itself. So albeit complex, it is perhaps the conceptual base, embedded and formulated through this external agent in relation to individual or social groups, that unites Bottici's and Gombrich's propositions.

But before proceeding to a detailed analysis of Bottici's ideas and their comparison with the Gombrich's concepts, let me introduce the terms she uses in her work and how they differ from those of her colleague. It may seem that the terminology of both theorists does not coincide, but even with a fairly cursory glance at what Gombrich and Bottici describe in their theoretical proposals, it becomes obvious that they are more similar than different. For example, terms such as imagination/imaginary/imaginal that Bottici uses are analogous to the context in which Gombrich operates in his discussion of the problem of illusion in the visual arts. Perhaps, from a linguistic point of view, Bottici's imaginal and Gombrich's illusional offer slightly different meanings, but at the same time, one might tend to perceive these two terms, perhaps not as completely synonymous, but to a certain extent as related concepts. Generally speaking, both of them appeal to something unreal, ephemeral, which, in turn, is the opposite of the real, objective, true. Thus, one may propose here that when viewing Gombrich's illusions and Bottici's formations of imagination, we sense a somewhat common language. This is especially evident in the fact that, despite the use of different words, both theorists address a common fundamental theme,

which is the concept of the image. For both theoretical proposals, the idea of the image underlies the entire lines of reasoning: while for Bottici, the image gives life to complex socio-cultural phenomena, for Gombrich, the image serves as the starting point for creating the effect of the illusion of credibility and presence in the tradition of Western art.

It should also be noted that for all the seeming similarity in the use of images as a starting point for research, both theorists treat pictorial material differently, especially with regard to the nature of their origin. For example, for Bottici, the authenticity of images is rather belittled or even eliminated, since the world simply consists of them, regardless of whether they are, so to speak, "real" or artificially created. So when we think about the agency of the imagination/imaginary/imaginal in regard to Bottici's thesis, for her the world is just a conglomerate of unveiled images. In such a context, the question of illusions, if we turn to Gombrich's terminology, becomes redundant and even unnecessary. Whatever the origin of images, all that matters is their impact on our lives, social, and political realities. Bottici shows this thesis most clearly when she refers to the idea of the spectacle introduced by Guy Debord (1994), in the sense that the spectacle of reality, as it is, is composed of images, where we cannot fully vouch for the authenticity of what is happening. Similarly, the modern phenomenon of Artificial Intelligence (AI), capable of generating any visual material in unlimited quantities, speaks in favor of Bottici's idea that the authenticity of images is of secondary importance. To put it bluntly: "spectacle prevails over content" (Bottici, 2019, p.2).

In turn, for Gombrich, the origin of images has a stronger and a more fundamental meaning. For him, the whole experience of art rests on the illusion of creating credible reality and a representation of the original source, whether it is a portrait, a landscape, or any other motif. For Gombrich, the whole story of European art, which in his opinion is placed between the ancient Greeks and the Impressionists, is the skillful creation of realistic images. It is no coincidence that his supporters or critics said that the issue of illusions in his theory is closely associated with the problem of realism in art.

Nevertheless, in many ways it should probably be considered that when we talk about an image, with regard to Gombrich's thinking, we mean an image as a form of representation of a tangible reality around us, or at least a reality that is as close as possible to it. And even if we turn to historically fictitious or religious subjects presented in art history, they are largely shaped by the experience of depicting real prototypes with their subsequent compilations and mixtures. Furthermore, Gombrich argues that even when art turned toward less realistic and more sensual art, such as, for example, Impressionism or other experimental movements in art, tradition and accustomed artistic schemata were required for these daring experiments. So, to move away from the image of the world as it appears before our eyes to abstract, non-figurative art, for an artist it was necessary to first develop means of displaying reality "out there," and only then depict subjects less related to the visual form of the world. In other words, if the artist sets themselves a task of depicting a subject outside of the realistic tradition, they, oddly enough, base their artistic method of expression relying on the experience of art developed centuries before them with a strong reliance on realistic scenes. Perhaps this is why Gombrich considers the phenomenon of abstraction in art, for him another experiment, as a dangerous undertaking. He sees art as "a living chain of tradition still links the art of our own days with that of the Pyramid age. The heresies of Akhnaton, the turmoil of the Dark Ages, the crisis of art in the Reformation period, and the break in tradition at the time of the French Revolution each threatened this continuity." (Gombrich, 1984, p.474) So, referencing the art of the time, Gombrich disputes that "despite some promising experiments," "the crisis has not yet passed the danger point," especially when the tradition is destroyed in favor of modern trends detached from the idea of reproducing real motives. Consequently, the image being based on the original subject, no matter how compiled or imagined the latter may seem, is extremely important for Gombrich's theory.

Turning to another structural element which is similar to Gombrich, it should be noted that Bottici in her work does not simply illustrate the notion of the imaginal

with regard to various thinkers and writers, or a philosophical discourse; she notes the disconnect of the term from its seemingly obvious opposite number, reality or truth. For this reason, her analysis focuses on detecting exactly when the revolt in comprehension and perception of the term imaginal during the course of history occurred and then its relationship to philosophical thinking. Bottici argues that the term has changed during the course of time so dramatically that at some point it started to mean completely the opposite of its original meaning, thus restructuring the whole view on the matter. Here, I find a great deal of coordination of her notion with Gombrich's description of advancement in artistic schemata, which made it possible at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century to depart from naturalistic, *mimesis* type art to more expressive and experimental art, for example, of Impressionism or other avant-garde movements such as Symbolism, Futurism, Cubism, Suprematism, Dadaism, and others. Indeed, similarly to Bottici, Gombrich detects revolts, or better say artistic paradigm leaps, that led to a completely different understanding of reality in its artistic dimension. Although in *Art and Illusion* (1960/2014) he does not say directly that through the course of art history the term reality has changed its meaning to the opposite, he very clearly indicates the movement in that direction. To make this transformation clear, it is worth citing here the words of Malevich, who saw the only true realism as a new direction in art, opposing classical academic realism for a new expressiveness in art, where the painting's elements are built independently of form, color, and position one toward another (Malevich, 1995-2004, p.21). In this way, this transition, and then alteration in the comprehension of reality in the form of the naturalistic, painting radically changed its position and started to mean something quite opposite. It is with this regard that the notion of moving between one state and another can be explicitly revealed through the juxtaposition of the writings of Bottici and Gombrich.

On the whole, it seems that by deepening the analysis of Gombrich's and Bottici's notions further, we trace interesting transitional areas where the social and artistic meaning of seemingly self-explanatory terms alter over the

course of time, which, in its turn, restructures the resulting outputs. Comparative analysis of the commonalities between Gombrich and Bottici facilitates more detailed study and thus comprehension of concepts surrounding the illusionary and the imaginary, their relationship to reality and objectivity, the complex nature of their interplay, and changes in understanding of once established terms. So to reemphasize: my interest in Bottici's writing is not linked to political invariants, but rather to the structuring of the imaginal with regard to its functionality. Therefore, it is precisely the analysis of the imaginal as a complex interplay of the personal and public domains that will allow us to better understand the relationship of Gombrich's artistic ideas to contemporary issues of reality, artistic practices, and the connection of illusions with reality "out there."

Bottici's vision of the imaginal and the illusional

IN HER ANALYSIS of imaginal, Bottici runs through a lengthy list of philosophers and thinkers, from as early as ancient Greece with Plato and Aristotle right up to the modern with Hillman, Hopper, Arendt, and others, where each theorist has their own vision with regard to the imaginal and what is real. As mentioned earlier, according to Bottici, the very term or concept of the imaginal took different forms and was altered over the course of time. She notes that, "the notion of reality is not a priority of human understanding that can be defined once and for all and thus used to determine what is purely imaginary and what is not" (Bottici, 2019, p.3), which, as a result, led us to more detailed and careful analysis of the matter. Thus, her starting point is the notion that "defining the imagination as simply the faculty to represent what does not exist—the unreal—is inadequate" (p.3). She suggests several readings of

the terms relating to the ideas of imagination, the imaginary, and the imaginal. Bottici asserts that to attribute imagination primitively to non-existent matter is a possibility existing only in the frames of aesthetic or utopian domains. This view, rooted in the 18th century with the triumphs of modern science, where imagination was seen as a potential threat to the methodical work of reason, remains very influential even today. However, she notes that such an understanding of the imaginal as an opposition to the real is fundamentally misleading, because the notion of reality is not a given in the idea of human comprehension. Bottici reminds us that we, too often, forget that the definition of reality changes considerably from one context to another.

In further support of this point, she provides the example that the Greeks and the Romans did not even have a word designated to reality. In turn, the term *realitas* was coined only relatively recently in history, in late Scholasticism: originally associated with God, it was used as a synonym for perfection and essence (*essentia*) of the things. Thus, for example, God could be called the most real being (*ens realissimus*), and the real was not opposed to what is purely fictitious (*fictum*) or something of a mental being (*ens rationis*), a notion that can be seen in the writings of Spinoza. However, later this distinction started to drift toward the separation of *fictum* and *realitas* with the theorizations of Kant, where imagination and fantasy started to be associated with the unreal. So Bottici highlights here that the transition between real and unreal, or imaginal and factual is not, and never was, well agreed or established. Further, addressing Aristotle and other authors who recovered ideas of ancient philosophy for modern debate in regard to capacities to represent what does not exist, Bottici [2019] highlights the complex interconnection and interdependence of the imaginal and real. She stipulates that in the light of the neo-Aristotelian approach:

> **imagination is more than mere fantasy**: it is the capacity to produce images in the most general sense of the term, independently of whether or not what they represent actually exists; in this view, imagination includes the capacity to represent what does not exist, but it is also

not limited to this. It is a much more radical view, in that it includes the production of images of both existing and non-existing objects. (p.4)

Thereby, she tries to find ways to merge or, so to say, relate various separations in historical theoretical debate into a more unified and cumulative hypothetical construction. For this purpose, Bottici turns to Cornelius Castoriadis, who, in her opinion, unites Aristotelian and Kantian insights. She perceives Castoriadis's vision of the imaginal as a radical approach, since it includes both potentialities. First is that without imagination there could not be any reality as such, and second, imagination can always potentially question its objects by disclosing possible alternatives. Accordingly, for Bottici, the view of Castoriadis unifies the manifold into a single image, where the concept of imagination can be perceived as "the transcendental faculty of synthesis par excellence" (p.4).

But just before getting to introduce her terminology and proposal to treat the imaginary in the modern debate, she defines an area of tension in which, to her mind, lies an unsolvable ontological impasse. She starts with the fact that ontologically it is hard to distinguish social and individual imagination in regard to its interaction with reality on a conceptual level. In recalling the insights of psychoanalysis, where the individual is created through a process of socialization by an imaginary significance of society, she appeals to Castoriadis, who, in similar psychoanalytical vein, describes the immersion of social members into the social imaginary, a context in which the "free imagination" is shaped. In this idea, Bottici sees the overcoming of the Kantian approach and the philosophy of the subject that it presupposes. But, in turn, she notes that by overly emphasizing the role of social contexts, we may risk "exchanging a problematic philosophy of the subject for an equally problematic metaphysics of the context" (p.4). Although Bottici originally perceived Castoriadis's thesis as unifying ambivalent notions in its aspiration, here she detects that at times the theorist speaks about an "absolute scission" between the two poles of the instituted and instituting social imaginary. Accepting the distinction between

the social-historical and the psychological, which Castoriadis calls the "psyche" or "psychical monad," the author underlines the radically different nature of the individual and the social basis. Thus, he argues that the process of socialization is always violent in relation to the individual. As a consequence, external social instruments modify and structure the individual psyche, so that personal individual entities start to function according to socially instituted objects, rules, and the world in its wide social sense. It is only through such an internalization of the world that individuals can exist in society. It is exactly this that Bottici defines as a weak area, where she questions Castoriadis's thesis in regard to the "monadic isolation and fundamental 'heterogeneity' between the psyche and society" (p. 5). In reference to Whitebook, she asks the question: if we find ourselves within the monadic isolation of the unconscious, how can communication be possible in the first place? It is in this paradox and in metaphysical opposition that Bottici sees the signs of a deeper philosophical dilemma. So, she suggests that

> **if one starts with 'imagination,' conceived as an individual faculty, then the problem is how to account for the at times overwhelming influence of the social context. If we begin with the concept of the 'social imaginary,' then the problem is how to reconcile it with the free imagination of individuals.** (p. 5)

By detecting such conceptually problematic territory, Bottici ascertains Castoriadis's difficulty in solving this dichotomy and finding an easy way out.

As a result of detecting this terminological and conceptual tension, Bottici appeals to the insights of the recent French debate and proposal of a theory where the imaginal is a conceptual tool which, in her opinion, is better adapted to overcome such a conceptual impasse. To understand this issue in more detail, she introduces the operational terminology that she follows in her writing. Foremost, she manifests that "*Imaginal* means simply that which is made of images and can therefore be the product both of an individual faculty and of the social context, as well as of a complex interaction between the two" (p. 5). Thus, Bottici contrasts the imaginal

with imagination and the imaginary. Further, she argues that the imaginal emphasizes the centrality of images over the context in which they are produced. For her proposal, the individual or social origin of images is largely irrelevant and overly omitted. Meanwhile, she recalls that even though the concept of the imaginal was recently recovered from a Muslim Sufi philosophical tradition and is widely attributed to Arabic philosophy, it was originally a Latin term. Derived from the Latin *imaginalis*, it denotes something that is made of images. Thus, in the context of Bottici's thesis, she embarks on a double entity: it goes both beyond the Copernican revolution with its philosophy of the subject that preserves imagination as an individual faculty, and also beyond the equally problematic metaphysics of the context, meaning the imaginary as a given social context. Incorporating these two components, Bottici argues that "human beings are not only rational animals but also, and even prior to that, imaginal animals" (p.6).

She even goes further by saying that images emerged before language and contain a surplus of meaning that often cannot be articulated and explicated through linguistics. In her opinion, images may appear before and even after language, because descriptions risk being incomplete or may turn into a betrayal of the images, as in the case of a symbol being interpreted and thus fixed into a series of linguistic descriptions. These ideas may seem familiar to the notions of translation of artworks into music or other media, which often results in significant loss or distortion of information when translated into another "language." In a similar vein, Bottici indicates that the interpreting of images and the imaginal somehow lead us, as viewers, away from the essence and cease to display the full multiplicity of meanings. This is why, in order to distinguish the concept of the imaginal from other philosophical traditions, she places the emphasis precisely on images. Bottici admits that many philosophers tried to find a way to mediate the individual and the social, starting from the Hegelian notion of the spirit, the phenomenological notion of the life world, up to the Wittgensteinian concept of the life-form. Among the latest attempts to bridge the gap between the social and

the individual, she names Jürgen Habermas, who recovered George Herbert Mead's intersubjective model. But still, Bottici thinks that none of these philosophical traditions has really focused on the primacy of images. Even though she agrees that in most philosophical approaches images play a crucial role, she argues that their role is largely limited by the frames of a linguistically mediated process of socialization. Therefore, Bottici formulates an idea of the imaginal as a concept focusing on images not only within but also before language. In doing so, she reduces the term imaginal to its bare reading. As a result, such a reduction helps Bottici overcome the tension between the social and the individual, which she perceives as a conceptual impasse in most philosophical readings relating to imagination. In order to avoid falling into the trap of a discussion of the distinction between the real and fictitious, Bottici underscores that "in contrast to the imaginary, which is often associated with the unreal and fictitious in common language, the concept of the imaginal does not make any assumptions as to the reality of the images that compose it" **(p.7)**. Referencing the *Oxford English Dictionary*, she reminds us of the linguistic meaning of the *imaginal*, saying that it "denotes primarily what pertains to imagination or to mental images, whereas imaginary primarily means what exists only in fancy and has no real existence and is opposed to real or actual" **(p.7)**. Because of this, Bottici draws a conceptual distinction between the meaning of imaginal before its relation to reality, truth, objectivity, etc. and after, when the imaginal turns into the imaginary—the interpretations produced by philosophers, related and adapted to a certain epoch, indeed in which we may be witnessing a change in the hegemonic understanding of reality itself.

In other words, in order to establish her thesis, Bottici proposes focusing the notion of the imaginal as a concept carrying no philosophical or historical burden. Instead of addressing philosophy and history through old authorities and extracting notions of imagination/the imaginary/the imaginal for the purpose of creating contemporary discourse, she suggests a reductive framework of the meaning, as a sort of preconditional form of discussion that then relates

to philosophical thinking. So, structurally speaking, Bottici suggests moving not from philosophy to terminology and understanding but rather from a clear and simplified reductive definition to then go to different philosophical areas to build an instructive picture of the concept. She calls this approach "purely analytical." Accordingly, instead of adhering to a philosophical or historical path, Bottici choses the third way and agrees to accept, at least for the beginning, the common usage of the terms imagination/imaginary/imaginal usually associated with the unreal but only as a starting point from which she embarks on a genealogical critique aimed at disentangling them. This is why, she says, she is "not interested here in historical continuities, nor in faithfully reconstructing the thought of some illustrious theorists of imagination" (p.13). For the purpose of separating her approach from the common, mostly relying on reading the history of philosophical thinking with its strong ties with chronology, Bottici emphasizes the component of philology in her research. Hence, she determines the purpose of her work as "focusing on the unhurried and at times almost imperceptible conceptual moves that crystallize in the usage of words" (p.14). It is exactly in the linguistic genealogy of imagination that she sees the promise to detect the major conceptual breakthrough in philosophical comprehension of reality and fiction. Bottici suspects that behind the birth of a new word (or new usage of an old word), there is a deeper philosophical rupture. Therefore, she adheres to the idea of reconstructing those ruptures and admits that these ruptures or shifts may be problematic to overcome in the frames of philosophical discourse strongly embedded into its historical or conceptual location. That is why she sees a great potency and promise in the concept of the imaginal as an effective ontological tool to overcome these limitations and impasses.

So in summary, by observing the major principles of Bottici's terminology and her research in general, we can detect an interesting connection with the approach that Gombrich also adheres to. Both authors are trying to construct relations between rather wide territories of history and knowledge by means of a starting point of relatively unified,

simplified, and reductive notions. For Bottici, it is the concept of imagination, while for Gombrich, it is an illusion. Thus, both theorists commence with terms somewhat reduced to their bare semantic meaning and further expand them in relation to various concepts and ideas. For instance, for Bottici, imagination at some point begins to be supplemented with such terms as imaginal, imaginary, and other readings, depending on the discourse of certain historical periods or philosophers. Similarly, for Gombrich, the notion of illusion expands toward the various interpretations of the subject in different artistic traditions, cultural settings, and personal artistic styles. In such a way, having framed this formula as a center of gravity for the development of their arguments, both Bottici and Gombrich then go on to relate their notions to the wider territories of philosophical and artistic discourse. It follows then that this approach moves toward significant historical elements in philosophy or art, rather than following a chronology of historical events and extracting the needed information from each single period. The authors more or less adhere to classical periodization but feel free to go back and forth within that historical span, focusing in a more detailed way on relevant elements, moments, or periods that highlight points that in turn form more detailed arguments in their holistic context. In a similar vein, although the imaginal and the illusional are ontologically far from one another, the polarities between which the discussion lies are similar. It is located somewhere between truth and fiction, the imaginal and real, the illusional and veridical. For that reason, both theorists stand within similar problems of articulation between two contrasting poles.

In order to develop the argumentation further, both Bottici and Gombrich in their research inevitably have to relate to some kind of definitions in terminology, the discourse of ontological and philosophical traditions. But here difficulties arise, since in each context the subjects may be read differently, if not completely oppositely. We remember how Bottici referred to ruptures in the use of the term imaginal, when, for instance, in the scholastic tradition it was associated with God and was used as a synonym for perfection as the most real being,

but already with Kantian philosophy and later elaborations of this term, in philosophical discourse the imaginary became associated predominantly with something unreal. In such a way, the same term may at different points in history become its own opposite. Gombrich here, too, faces a similar difficulty. If one is to perceive illusion as a notion purely opposed to the real, especially in the frames of European art tradition, one may tend to think that illusionistic artworks are those which depict solely naturalistic subjects (hence, creating an illusion of the real). But one may object here by saying that abstract art also can incorporate illusionistic components without relying on that "real" source. In this sense, realistic painting does not perhaps automatically imply illusion or non-illusion, and also abstract art is not necessarily built exclusively upon non-realistic elements. From a theoretical perspective on art, too, we may indicate a similar problem of defining terms. In this context, it is worth mentioning the passage by Malevich from his manifesto *From Cubism to Suprematism*, where he argues that Greek and Roman masters' realism was distorted and lost its relation to truth and reality and now reality and truth exist only in abstract art. Although Gombrich himself does not directly describe this transitional period when the transformation from realism to abstract art took place (in this respect he talks more about the transition to another pictorial language, starting with the Impressionists), he remarks on ruptures in discourse similarly to Bottici. This exactly explains the common methodology that both authors adhere to. Instead of searching for illustrious antecedents in the history of ideas, keeping track of ever-changing terminology, or attempting to construct a different "transcendental perspective," as Bottici calls it, they both prefer not to go against common sense but rather to reveal the structural contradicting definition of the terms in regard to such complex and disputable philosophical notions as truth, reality, objectivity, imagination, illusion, and their multiple derivatives. Now, it is hoped, there is more clarity on how Bottici and Gombrich sought to overcome the conceptual impasse and grasp other relevant issues. Because if one tries to define the fundamental philosophical categories, there is almost automatically the danger of being dependent

on a certain philosophical school or its frame of reference, and, consequently, one loses the individual point of view and the ability to explore issues other than those already acquired by predecessors. It may be quite an important notion, especially taking into account the phenomenological nature of Bottici's and Gombrich's research both dealing with the subjects of an inherent fluctuating nature.

Bottici's transition of reality to the imaginal —the first revolt

AFTER DEFINING THE KEY ELEMENTS of Bottici's and Gombrich's approaches, I would like to dive into more detail in regard to Bottici's writing and extract notions that correlate in great depth with Gombrich's theorizing on artistic practices in regard to illusion. As noted earlier, Bottici **(2019)**, instead of going through the nexus of philosophical discourse, chose to rely heavily on philology and philologists, who, in her opinion, like an archeologist, go "in search of more or less fragmentary relicts of the past, and apparently insignificant details can at times be more enlightening than grandiose edifices" **(p.14)**. Even though Bottici claims that her approach is rather of the philologist, she nevertheless touches upon philosophical discussion and goes through quite a lengthy list of philosophers and thinkers who reflect on the theme of the imaginal, imagination, and the imaginary. The list of theorists

includes the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle, the philosophers of Enlightenment, Pascal, Kant, Bacon, theorists of psychoanalysis such as Freud, Jung, Lacan, and Castoriadis, and from more recent accounts Taylor, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Nussbaum, and some others. The main things I am interested in here are not the detailed discussion with regard to the imaginal with its relation to reality and objectivity in the frames of each philosopher which Bottici addresses during the course of her book, but rather in the transition points, where the terminology of discussed matters undertakes significant alterations and changes in connection to initial meanings and positions of philosophy and common understanding. I see promise in relating conceptual tectonic shifts described by Bottici to Gombrich's notions of illusion with regard to similar global alterations of the evolving of realistic/naturalistic paintings during the so-called "Greek Revolution" and starting the "successful experiment" of realistic art. Such a comparison will allow us to better understand the nature of the illusionary and the imaginal in relation to wider ontological entities and, accordingly, relate and update Gombrich's writings into a more current discourse. On top of this, it will permit us to bridge the notions of illusion and the imaginal together that potentially will result in better understanding of the phenomena and formulate a more instructive picture.

Talking about specific transition points, Bottici defines two main rupture moments in the comprehension of the imaginal. The first occurred during the transition after the fall of the Roman Empire and was generally connected with the decline of the ancient world and evolving of Christian doctrine. The second shift Bottici attributes to the 20th century, with the appearance of psychoanalysis and the ideas of the modernists and postmodernists. Here we might also recall Gombrich's periodization, which mostly correlates with Bottici's proposal. Thus, he attributes the evolving of realistic "experiment" starting in ancient Greece and more or less finishing in the period of the Impressionists. Gombrich does not perceive the medieval period as a great rupture on the line of realistic evolution of art; rather he admits a sort of deceleration, braking or even backing out of this

movement, which again received its strong impulse during the Renaissance. The beginning of the 20th century is regarded by Gombrich similarly to Bottici, as a time of a great alteration, but in his case with a significant decline of realistic types of art. In this way, we may identify here that the periodization of conceptual comprehension of structural changes in regard to the illusional and imaginable to a first approximation coinciding in both readings of the historical process. Of course, this is really an oversimplification, and there are a number of factors that can affect this periodization; nevertheless, most reference points relate to each other comparatively precisely. Perhaps this coordination can provide us with a better insight into the subject and an understanding of it in certain historical and artistic contexts.

As a continuation of a more detailed analysis of the author's ideas about linguistic and philosophical changes, it should be noted that for Bottici, behind the birth of a new word or the new use of old words lies a deeper philosophical meaning. So, through these breaks within the genealogy of "imagination," she reveals a fundamental comprehension of the phenomenon. But what precisely happened during this mutation process? Bottici starts with the fact that the first authors for whom one can speak of a fully fledged theory of *phantasia* are Plato and Aristotle, stipulating that perhaps other authors or theories of the past could provide further insights into the subject, but as the only recorded works we have to settle for these. So *phantasia,* (being the closest ancient term to the contemporary imaginal), emerges from certain passages of both Plato and Aristotle. Its use was contrasted strongly with the view of imagination as unreal, encapsulated in today's common application. For instance, as an expert in the art of rhetoric, Plato in his work *Sophist* presents his view of imagination. Bottici [2019] considers that for him *phantasia* is not necessarily false but rather "shares the possibility of falsity with both discourse (*logos*) and opinion (*doxa*)" [p.16]. Therefore, *phantasia* can be reciprocally true and false in both contexts, whether thinking (discourse) or opinion. The only difference Plato sees between these two processes is in the nature of the dialog. In the case of thinking, the dialog is carried by the

soul with itself without spoken sounds, and in the case of discourse, dialog relates itself to the outside world and comes from the soul through the mouth into vocal form. Bottici ensures that assertion or denial can take place in both modes. When judgment takes place in the soul in the course of silent thinking, it is called opinion (*doxa*); when it occurs by means of sensation (*diaistheseos*), it is called *phantasia*. From this, Bottici deduces that for Plato *phantasia* is a mixture of sensation (*aisthesis*) and opinion or judgment (*doxa*), and as a result it can be true or false for both cases.

For Aristotle, too, the nature of *phantasia* is rooted in sensation. Referencing John Cocking [1992], Bottici believes that the ancient philosopher was searching for true reasoning through direct intuition, or through the soul's reminiscence of ideas that were known before their incarnation. Thus, she gives a due to the fact that Aristotle's ideas are derived from the sensible world, where images become an essential intermediary between perception and conception. Certainly Bottici [2019] admits that "for Aristotle, as for Plato, the best thinking rises above images, as it were, but, in contrast to him, can only do so by rising through them" [p.17]. To support this view, she cites a famous passage from *De Anima*, where Aristotle argues that "no one can learn or understand anything in the absence of sense, and when the mind is actively aware of anything it is necessarily aware of it along with an image (*phantasma*); for images (*phantasmata*) are like sensuous contents except in that they contain no matter" [De Anima, 432a]. It is to this passage that Bottici draws special attention, since in her opinion it later provoked some of the most heated debates among philosophers. Indeed, its proposal claims that the mind cannot think without an image or a phantasm (*phantasma*). By *phantasmata*, Aristotle has in mind "a movement (*kinesis*) produced by a sensation actively operating" and associates it with the root-word light (*phaos*) by arguing that without light it is impossible to see [De Anima, 429a]. So, here Bottici points out that in such a concept, *phantasia*—the ancient version of imagination—enables us to produce images that transform various bits of our perception into a total sensation, a fully fledged appearance. In this way, *phantasia* appeals more to

the faculty of thinking processes and a peculiar power of unified perception rather than to the mental state of being lost in imaginary phantoms. For the purpose of illustration, Bottici cites another of Aristotle's passages, but from his work *De Memoria*, where he explains the very possibility of sense perception to constitute scattered images into "one image (*phantasma*) from many" (De Memoria, 434a, 9–10). Hence, she summarizes Aristotle's view on *phantasia* and generally the usage of the term in ancient Greece and even in Roman culture by saying that *phantasia* was intended to mean vision, as in that we have of the stars for example. Bottici supports this conclusion by addressing another body of Aristotle's writings, *De Caelo*, where the philosopher discusses issues such as the nature of the stars and Earth (297b, 31; 294a, 7). By referencing the term *phantasia*, Aristotle infers that "actual vision" can be the basis for demonstrating the truth against its opponents. Bottici underlines the fact that although usage of the term in ancient times may sound strange to modern ears, it meant precisely "appearance" or "presentation." This assumption can be broadly supported by reading the passages of *De Caelo* and other historical literature, which also conform to most philologists' observations.

Here Bottici takes steps to further contrast the ancient understanding of the faculty of imagination and *phantasia* with that of its modern view. She emphasizes this rupture more by the example of the difficulties for modern translators in rendering correctly the Greek term *phantasia.* If one was to translate the term literally, it would twist the meaning to its opposite, and instead of reading *phantasia* as an equivalence of "actual vision" or "true appearance," as was meant by Aristotle, we may misinterpret it as fantasy, having lost its contact with reality and therefore become purely imaginary. To support this argument further from this linguistic point of view, Bottici reminds us of the history of the term and says, referencing Ferraris, that by addressing Latin sources three different terms to describe the Greek *phantasia* were used: *visio, imaginatio*, and *phantasia.* Pointing out that among these terms the most ancient translation was *visio,* she underscores how distant we are not only from the Greek but also from the Roman

understanding of the word. Later, the term *imaginatio* emerged, which merged much in its meaning with widely used *visio*. And only about the time of Quintilian does the oldest term among these three, *imagination*, appear. This started to establish an association between phantasia and unreality or extravagancies as in the works of Theon of Samos, but the connotation of the older meaning could still be detected in the new term, which resulted, for example, in Plato's and Aristotle's dual attitude toward the faculty of imagination in the perception and thought processes. Then both Latin and early European sources utilize *imaginatio* and *phantasia.* Here, addressing Ferraris, Bottici [2019] admits that though there were a tendency to separate the two terms by underlining "the chimerical connotation of *phantasia* in contrast to the realist *imaginatio*, the rule presents so many exceptions that one may wonder whether it actually ever held" [p.21]. Thus, she concludes that the relationship between the two terms remained relatively fluid for a long time, so much so that they were used interchangeably at least until the 18th century.

Moving toward the descriptions of the alteration of meaning in new times, Bottici again recalls the fact that in ancient sources *phantasia* was to a great extent predominantly a synonym for vision and presentation, when, in turn, in the modern epoch the derivations of this term started to be systematically associated with unreality, especially taking into account those philosophers engaged in defining the new scientific method based upon a nonintervention type of perception and idea of scientific objectivity. Further, referencing Friese [2001], Guenancia [2006], and Vattimo [1999], she reveals the notion that imagination became far from being a source of light, as in Aristotle, and turned into a source of darkness and a non-scientific approach to the subject of research. Bottici also addresses such thinkers as Bacon, Galilei, and Pascal to reveal this contrasting approach to the imaginal in the context of a new era with its new relation to reality, perception, and vision. For instance, for Bacon, imagination has no decisive role to play in cognition and can serve human beings only in their poetic creations. In this way, Bottici sees in Bacon's writings a typically modern split, where for the first

time reason and cognition, on the one hand, and imagination and creativity, on the other, were established. In the same manner, the Italian philosopher Galileo Galilei defines the roots of the new scientific method as a juxtaposition of what he calls "mere fantasies" (*mere fantasie*) with objectivity and science. And, finally, similarly, in the French philosopher and scientist of Port-Royal Blaise Pascal, Bottici sees the embodiment of the idea of imagination being "a mistress of errors and falsity" (*maîtresse d' erreur et fausseté*) (Pascal, 1963, p.504), where imagination is seen as a powerful enemy of reason and can sometimes control and even entirely dominate the process of thinking. As a consequence, she perceives such philosophical views as typical of the period of the 17th and 18th centuries, since most representatives of the period claimed the relegation of *phantasia* to the sphere of the unreal. In this way, a process gradually developed of semantic alterations in the domain of the imaginal that dragged on for many centuries, starting from early Christianity, heading onward toward the Enlightenment. As a result, such circumstances allow Bottici to deduce that the genealogical passage from a generally neutral view of Greek *phantasia* to a negative one identifies a striking philosophical and ontological break, reforming the way people came to see the world and thus perceiving it on a very fundamental level.

      To investigate this transition further and try to give this process an assessment, Bottici delves deeper into the discussion and suggests her vision over its conceptual roots. She considers that a flipping of the meaning (turning representation into false vision) is inextricably linked to the process of the emergence of the autonomy of the individual. Bottici argues that the cornerstone of this process lay in the battle for the birth of a new scientific view of the world. It was exactly this new positioning of the individual differently in the system of the relationships of the world with regard to authority that allowed a human to realize "the project of modernity" as we know it today. Perhaps it is not completely new information that the adherents of a new scientific approach needed to legitimize themselves before the theological absolutism which accorded each individual their own fixed position within a hierarchically ordered world,

such as the medieval one, but it seems this relation and positioning had played a crucial role in its philosophical and discursive dimensions. For example, questioning the authority of theologians and the church through a new conception of the universe by Galilei resulted in a collision of different approaches, one relying on scientific factual observations with circles, numbers in hands, and the fantasies of the theologians. As we certainly know, in the theologically oriented structure of the world, in its orderly chain of being culminating in God there was little room for the autonomy of the individual. However, this was replaced by a new homogeneous universe, where the Earth was just one among many planets moving in an infinite universe. What Bottici specifically underscores here is the notion that the battle for a new astronomy was not only a struggle for the birth of a new scientific view of the world, but, more importantly, represented the definition of a different place of being for humans. As a result, humans found themselves defined as individuals, equipped with new instrumentation to measure objectivity through numbers, geometry, and inviolable mathematical rules. This presented the possibility to rely more on factual material than on faculty of imagination, now capricious in nature and raising suspicion.

By these observations, Bottici moves toward the end of analyzing the first conceptual rupture in the span of philosophical and social evolution. By doing so, she generally accepts the idea that from ancient times the imaginal ceased to mean anything real, leaving the space only for false interpretations and dogmatic domains. In this crucial reformation from the territory of the sensual and perceptive, as in ancient Greece and Rome, via the theological beliefs of the medieval period toward the methodical work of reason and scientific vision of the world, one may acknowledge an irreversible path of detaching the imaginal from the idea of objectivity. But even in the course of this transformation, Bottici sees the opportunity for imagination. In referring to Kant and other theorists of the Enlightenment, she detects that at some point imagination was excluded from the domain of knowledge because it was perceived as a source of potential disturbance of scientific work. But even though

imagination was withdrawn from its usual position and relocated to the newly constituted field of aesthetics, which according to Vattimo (1999) was established only in modern times, the interpretation of the term in the discourse of the Enlightenment signals to us the ambivalence of its position. Hence, Bottici notes that in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant emphasizes the central role played by the imagination for the possibility of knowledge (Kant 1781/1998, A101). He admits the primacy of imagination, without which a transcendental faculty of synthesis and knowledge would not function for the human being. Instead of completing an image or object by the faculty of imagination, one risks ending up with a chaotic assemblage of disjointed sense data. Furthermore, in the second edition of *Critique*, published six years later, Kant returns to this subject in a somewhat modified form, treating imagination differently compared to the original proposition. If before it served as a priori condition of knowledge, now Kant distinguishes figurative synthesis of imagination from its intellectual counterpart, transcendental schematism, and asserts that the latter guarantees pure synthesis (Kant, 1787/1998, B152, B181). In this way, even though it is a field of Enlightenment philosophical and scientific discourse intended as a territory free of the erroneous imaginal, still without this component it cannot be thought of as assimilating knowledge. Hence, agreeing with Rundell (1994), Bottici concludes that precisely in Kant's writing we may notice this specific division in regard to the cognitive role of imagination being so important for the elaboration of the ideas of reason during the Enlightenment era. In this way, Kant proposes a neater division between reason and imagination, science, and art, and thus critique and creativity. This results in the situation where "critique collapses into cognitivism and the imagination is treated either mediately or aesthetically" (Bottici, 2019, p.26). By the end of this discussion, Bottici generalizes that the Enlightenment rejected myth and imagination in favor of a new conception of reality where imagination turned into the "unreal." Consequently, it becomes very difficult to answer the question of what is real, especially in the context of Kant, who does not correlate it with a priori of human understanding.

This is why Bottici further dwells on the idea of correlation into the discussion, especially with regard to different contexts and eras, since the concepts postulating such principles of reality have been proved to be comparatively more viable in the context of philosophical tradition compared to the ideas of the Enlightenment.

The second revolt in the discourse of the imaginal

HAVING DESCRIBED THE FIRST RUPTURE in philosophical discourse and the resulting terminological alteration it brought about, here I strive to focus on the second ontological break, where, according to Bottici, *phantasia*, imagination, and the imaginal have become the concept of appearance, or, in other words, the ever-increasing prominence of another term—the *imaginary.* It seems the problem of shifts in terminology have yet another interesting dimension, not only that of the reality or unreality of the imaginary, but also of a transition from a philosophical tradition centered on the philosophy of a subject to a more context-oriented approach. To put it in Arnason's **(1994, p.163)** words, this is the passage from reason to the more context-oriented category of rationality. Exactly here, Bottici determines a conceptual break and relates it to the discoveries of psychoanalysis and the debate of philosophical discourse

during the 20th century. Bottici outlines her analysis by noting that in the 20th century, as perhaps never before in history, it was found that the individual power of the imagination can be annihilated by totalitarian social contexts, thereby showing the naivety of belief in its autonomy. Simultaneously with this, psychoanalysis and structuralism evolved, both contributing to the elaboration of theories explaining psychic life and its complex relations with social interactions. Bottici admits that this research movement was focused, in contrast with previous thinkers, more on the products of imagination rather than on the faculty that produced them. It seems that starting from the 20th century, we found ourselves immersed in a realm configured by our unconsciousness and intensive social influence. Bottici addresses several prominent thinkers who untangle the question of the imaginary in a more elaborate way, in order to better establish an understanding of how the imaginal, as a faculty of the individual, is converted into something external, being projected onto personality by the force of the social and other external domains. Of course, one may stipulate that this external social component consists of the number of individuals and therefore one forms another in both directions; however, as we will see from Bottici's analysis, it may be not that easy to answer. In order to find the possibility of analyzing this coordination in her research, she approaches the second tectonic shift in the discourse of the imaginal, where the emphasis is on the major figures elaborating the concepts of human psychic reality and its connection with the social.

It is no surprise that the first among others in the focus of Bottici's writing is the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. Directly from the beginning of evaluating various concepts, Bottici finds that in the vocabulary of Freud's psychoanalysis there is almost no place for a type of term like imagination. Apart from several conventional remarks on imagination, Freud relegates it to the sphere of the pathological, where it has mostly a connotation of neurotic imagining. Hence, Bottici finds a strikingly surprising fact that psychoanalysis, as a wide movement seemingly centered on the importance of imagination in psychic life, does not

actually use the word imagination. Instead, Freud utilizes another term, *Fantasie* and its relative verb *phantasieren*, but also predominantly in the frames of traditional accounts. All in all, Bottici sees here two basic strategies to tame imagination on its conceptual level. The first she attributes to Kant's second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he curtails imagination by assigning it an auxiliary role between intellect and sensation. The second is by seeing in it as a mere combinatory activity, as in certain Aristotelian accounts to which she relates Freudian theory. Further, referencing another prominent figure, the former member of the Freudian school of psychoanalysis Carl Gustav Jung, Bottici finally discovers that in his writing, obviously highly connected to Freud's concepts, the centrality of imagination is indisputable. She illustrates this notion by Jung's passage where he clearly defines the difference between imagination and fantasy and explains why he prefers the first to the second. Refraining the old doctors who used to say that their work must be realized *per veram imaginationem et non phantasticam* (through real imagination, not fantasy), Jung underscores that it is exactly through an imagination which is authentic and not illusory that productive work can be done. To put it differently, for Jung, according to his own definition, fantasy is unreality, illusion, a phantom, a fleeting impression. On the other hand, imagination is present as an active creation allowing work to be implemented constructively or a goal to be achieved. In the course of this observation, and going back to Freud, Bottici proposes a hypothesis for reasoning why a conspicuous absence of imagination can be detected in the writings of the founder of psychoanalysis. She suspects that the Freudian concept is largely linked to a form of realism where, to put it in Kant's terms, the material conditions of our experience define our actual or subconscious life to a large extent. Thus, exactly due to this division, by the 'real' in the Freudian domain is understood the way that dreams, as well as the daily imagining of the neurotic, can be said to be fantasies.

Although, to some degree, Bottici perceives the Freudian interpretation of imagination and its role in social context as rather conventional and at the same time immanent,

which aligns with the course of the ideas of the Enlightenment with their negative attitude toward imagination as a source of pollution of scientific thinking, she sees in Freud's theory an excellent base and starting point for further development of the concept of the imaginary. Indeed, Gustav Jung and others who grew up from the school of Freudian psychoanalysis developed their visions on the subject. Even in recent decades, the elaborated insights from psychoanalysis, where the concept of the imaginary is understood as a socio-psychological contextualization, continue to gain prominence. Bottici also admits the remarkable fact that precisely due to the writings of Jacques Lacan with his "return to Freud" did new possibilities for the interpretation of Freudian ideas become open. She says even more, meaning that Lacan goes a long way beyond Freud in terms of the questioning of imagination by emphasizing language and the importance of society in the socialization of individuals. In this way, Bottici perceives Lacan's views as very important in the course of the development of the modern debate on imagination in its individually psychological or publicly social components. Besides the fact that the *imaginary* occupies the central place in Lacan's doctrine, in his theory the imaginary domain, together with the real and the symbolic, also forms fundamental orders that are constitutive of the psyche. We also find the special attention Bottici pays to the so-called mirror phase elaborated by Lacan, to which the imaginary is largely due. The same year as Jung was distinguishing between imagination and fantasy, Lacan poured over the constructive order of the psyche and formulated the idea of the mirror phase, which is considered to be a great contribution to psychoanalysis. According to his proposition, this phase consists in that specific moment of infant development (between six and eighteen months) when the infant starts to recognize the image in a mirror as that of their own body (Lacan, 1999). Referencing the theorists of *Gestaltpsychologie*, Lacan argues that the form of the image the child sees in the mirror possesses a surplus: it adds something that is not in reality itself. In this surplus he sees an element that unites personal identification with the person out there, which, in turn, explains the captivating power of the

imaginary domain more generally. Thus, according to Lacan, the imaginary provides us with endless images with which we may identify ourselves, as well as with a powerful tool to overcome that original specter of the total lack of unity of the fragmented body over which we have no command. Thereby, following Bottici, here, ultimately, lies the seductive power of the imaginary in the Lacanian sense of the word.

But what relation does the imaginary have to the real and the symbolic, which Lacan considers the epicenter of the human psyche? To answer this question, we have to see how he transforms the identification with the mirror image of the child's phase into the construction of our psyche in general. Lacan argues that our ego is formed through identification with the images, where the imaginary intrinsically captures us with an endless series of imaginary identifications which only symbolic interpretation can put to an end. The symbolic component creates a certain limitation in order to structure the recurring continuity of the imaginary. And the real in this respect is counterpoised to this symbolic. In this position, the theory sounds very complicated, especially if it is not clear whether Lacan means by this suspension of the symbolic component a moment of penetration into the unreal, where the real "Real" can only be touched during the identification of the imaginary, or whether it all functions in reverse. In this regard, Bottici, too, identifies great difficulties in providing a univocal interpretation of his theory. She admits that while perhaps Lacan's theory does not provide a hypothesis for the origin of the imaginary, the most important value that was brought about in his writings, especially after his structural turn in the 1950s, is that the imaginary becomes a structure constitutive of our being; in other words, the context in which we are immersed. Thus, here Bottici identifies the nature of the second global rupture in the discourse on the imaginal and imaginary, expressed in the formula that if imagination is an individual faculty that we possess, then the imaginary is the context that possesses us.

Therefore, Bottici admits that psychoanalysis influenced much of the whole sphere of humanitarian scientific research, which resulted in increasing amounts of historical,

sociological, and political works specifically focused on the features of the imaginary perceived as a context in its wide sense. She argues that even in empirically driven works, one may detect a shift away from the idea that imagination is an individual faculty that we freely exercise and a movement toward a paradigm of context-oriented imagination. Various forms of social interaction such as traditions, ceremonies, habits and rites, literary forms such as novels, melodrama, and even political symbols have all been studied as means of community building and instruments of "socialization to the social imaginary" (Bottici, 2019, p.37). Among contemporary accounts on the subject of social imaginary Bottici marks such authors as Jonathan Zwicker (2006), who speaks of the "social imaginary of nineteenth century Japan," and Charles Taylor (2004), who by the "social imaginary" means "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (p.23). In the context of this revolutionary shift in the focus of the imaginal, where there has been a move away from an individual faculty of imagination toward a context-oriented imagination tightened with a social-psychological apparatus, Bottici (2019) warns us and questions, if "the problem with theories of imagination as an individual faculty was that they presupposed a problematic metaphysics of the subject, are we not risking here exchanging it for an equally problematic metaphysics of the context?" (p.38). Indeed, what conceptual difference will it make whether we put in the first place the individual faculty of a person to imagine or the socio-psychological context in which they are immersed?

In trying to answer this question, we inevitably and constantly have to decide on the dilemma: is imagination real or unreal? We need some reference point, a position from which we can measure things. Bottici here stipulates that if we argue along with Aristotle that imagination-*phantasia* is true vision, we risk losing contact with the world we live in. But, on the other hand, if we adopt the modern interpretation of imagination- fantasy as unreal, we implicitly

assume the specifically modern concept of reality that the Enlightenment endorsed. Bottici explains this seemingly unsolvable dichotomy by the cultural roots of this discourse and specifics of the development of the European philosophical tradition. Nevertheless, phenomenology promises one of the ways out from this dilemma. In this way, Bottici sees the solution where instead of trying to give a definition of reality or realism one may put the question in parentheses, thus avoiding perhaps unrealizable undertakings to say what reality is. The elaboration of this approach belongs to Edmund Husserl who suggested the concept that since we have no means of determining whether our representations of the world correspond to reality or not, we may choose to leave this question aside and examine instead the way in which our consciousness relates to the phenomenological world. So evolves the formation where the actual world, so to say, the word "in itself," is not that important in comparison with the notions that it arouses in our consciousness in regard to the latter. Thus, according to Husserl [(1901/1984)], an original disclosing of reality lies in consciousness and the research of phenomena initiates this possibility. Hence, exactly this approach allows Bottici to conclude that, as a consequence, phenomenology seems to be much better equipped than other philosophical movements to go beyond the dilemma of imagination, involving the necessity to define what is real and what is not. If the principle of grasping a form of pure idea (*eidos*) lies in the domain of phenomenological method, then any theory, from scientific to judgments of common sense and even naive realism, can all be placed in parentheses.

Therefore, we may even say that with such an approach, we have left behind not only ancient philosophy but also the Enlightenment. But as much as we would like to think that the problems of imagination are solved, we are again brought into a similar dilemma. Even though the question of the reality of imagination is significantly suspended in phenomenology, still, it keeps returning. For good reason, Bottici notices that Husserl in his method assigns to imagination a crucial cognitive and epistemological role. Here he clearly defines, especially taking into account his later

works, that pure fantasy (*reine Phantasie*) and consciousness of images (*Bildbewusstsein*) are rather different notions. All in all, it may again seem that the problem of the reality of imagination is never to be fully settled. This can be clearly seen in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1901/1984, §10, §23) where he states that imagination plays an important role in cognition. Thus, by analogy with Lacan, he suggests that every act of perception entails a threefold structure, including imaginative, perceptive, and symbolic elements. In doing so, he defines an analogy between imagination and perception. And as Bottici rightly notes, this position provokes seeing in Husserl's consciousness of images something close to Aristotle's understanding of *phantasia*. Another category through which Husserl also articulates and identifies imagination or fantasy is the notion of possibility. Bottici (2019) cites his words stating, "what I can fantasize about is possible: in itself and for itself" (p.43). Here she finds the door to what is possible a component of doubt and judgment of what is given. Moreover, the fact that Husserl considers imagination to adjoin such gradations as creativity and freedom gives Bottici a sign that the problem of reality is not yet completely settled. Nonetheless, she gives dues to Husserl's phenomenological approach to imagination, which in turn had a strong influence both within and beyond phenomenology.

Moving toward a contemporary account with regard to the imaginary as to a social and psychological context, Bottici especially emphasizes the theoretical works of Martha Nussbaum (1995) and Meili Steele (2005), who both speak of "public imagination." Although these works may seem similar, each occupies a quite different standpoint. For instance, Nussbaum proposes that literature creates a public domain and thus forms a public imagination. By reading literary texts we develop a capacity to imagine all registers of our being, starting from our individual domain up to embedding ourselves into historical, cultural, and other various public contexts. Exactly this multipolarity allows the development of an ability "that will steer judges in their judging, legislators in their legislating, policy makers in measuring the quality of life of people near and far," to cite Nussbaum's words (Bottici, 2019,

. But, in all accordance with the rather imaginary formation of imagination, Bottici still relates Nussbaum's writing to a purely Kantian approach, since it remains individualistic, correlating fully with a philosophy of the subject and, thus, with the dialectic of the Enlightenment that it generates. She does so mostly because these literature sources in Nussbaum's concept rely more on the individual faculty of each writer than on an entity that lives its own, detached from individual life forms, and thereby shapes the public imagination. Thus, for her, the public imagination is predominantly the place where the act of imagining performed by certain individuals meets those of other individuals. In Meili Steele, Bottici sees a contrast to Nussbaum's approach. Steele uses the concept of the public imagination to show how the imaginative social space that citizens inhabit can be the stage for political discourse and debate. Bottici cites his explanation where he argues that public imagination is "not only the explicit concepts of a culture, but also the images, plots, symbols, and background practices through which citizens imagine their lives" (Steele, 2005, p.6). Hence, Steele emphasizes the importance of social normatives such as history, language, rights, and the like. In sum, for Bottici, both Nussbaum and Steele try to make imagination "public," but with the only difference that Nussbaum does so by attaching it to Kantian subjects, while Steele dissolves these subjects in a social context. As a result, although accepting overall progress toward solving the tension between the public and individual in the context of imagination, especially in its public regard, Bottici considers that the problem generated by the genealogy of imagination is not overcome but instead is fully endorsed. This is why she addresses a last theorist in untangling the problem of the second conceptual rupture in the comprehension of imagination: Cornelius Castoriadis.

According to Bottici, Castoriadis renders the social imaginary more from the position of the individual than of the social domain. Starting with the premises of psychoanalysis, he investigates the space of so-called radical imagination. In his work ***Imaginary Institution of Society***, Castoriadis (1987) perceives imagination as an individual faculty to that of the imaginary

as a social context. In his writing he largely appeals to Aristotle and Kant, and although he considers them entrapped in an ego-logical and psycho-logical philosophy of the subject, still states that "discovery of imagination" rightfully belongs to them. From his side, he reads imagination differently compared to the theorists of the Enlightenment and introduces a new understanding of the latter. Castoriadis converts imagination into a new term, "radical imagination," which in his opinion allows the transcendental imagination of Kant enclosed in relation to the subject to be avoided. Thus, he states, "A full recognition of the radical imagination is possible only if it goes hand in hand with the discovery of the other dimension of the radical imaginary, the social-historical imaginary, instituting a society as source of ontological creation deploying itself as history" (Castoriadis, 1997, p.245). Thus, compared with more modern descriptions, Castoriadis builds his notion of the social imaginary rather differently. For example, in contrast to Lacan, who reduces the imaginary to the specular, to the "image of something" located in the mirror phase and therefore constitutively alienated, Castoriadis suggests reading the imaginary as "the unceasing and essentially undetermined (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of 'something'" (1987, p.3). And although figures/forms/images play an important role in the whole system of Castoriadis's views, here, it is more instructive to concentrate solely on the notion of the imaginary and the context into which the author locates it. So, for Castoriadis the imaginary is intrinsically tightened with the social-historical. He sees it as a complex construction which involves a coordination and interaction of multitude of parts and active components of society, as well as history beside the aforesaid figures/forms/images. For instance, according to Castoriadis, society is by definition social-historical and is instituted by the alteration of time, and thus history itself (1987, pp.167–215). The imaginary in this direction precisely allows society to recognize its own being as a given already—in other words *instituted*, otherwise, by giving a quality of continuity to the nature of recognition of society to be itself—permanently *instituting*—society may find itself

in danger of accepting the possibility of the pure chaos of social order perpetually standing on the fringes of the abyss (p.167). Of course, Bottici reveals here the connection between Castoriadis's concept and Marxism, mostly because Castoriadis himself followed this direction of thought for a certain period of his life. Nevertheless, she finds Castoriadis's approach significantly different to that of the "triumph of determinism over class struggle" attributed much Marxist understanding of history (Castoriadis, 1987, p.30). Hence, Bottici (2019) notes that if in a "Marxist framework, the problem of imagination and of the social imaginary is treated in terms of the function that it performs within a society" (p.48) in Castoriadis's perspective it turns upside down. Thus, Castoriadis distances himself from all forms of Marxist reductionism, and instead of emphasizing the role of social institutions as a major force of historical functionality, he adheres to the concept that every act, both individual and collective, whether labor, consumption, love or war, is impossible outside of the social imaginary (Castoriadis, 1987, p.117). Here, together with Bottici, we can clearly acknowledge a great divergence from the materialistic historical determinism of Marxism in favor of a more complex vision of a social-historical dimension, which has greater possibilities for comprehension of its complex nature.

Another aspect to which Bottici pays great attention is the fact that in Castoriadis' system of views there are limits to the social imaginary. Among several, the first limitation arrives from nature. For example, society may define the meaning of nourishment, but it must start from the need for it. The second limits are imposed by rationality; "by the coherence of the symbolic edifice" as Bottici (2019, p.48) puts it. And finally, another limitation can be found in history in the fact that every symbolism is built on the ruins of the preceding symbolic constructions, so that to break radically with such constructions, one must begin with these as premises (Castoriadis, 1987, p.125). It turns out that with such a standpoint, Castoriadis avoids the danger of an all-encompassing or all-engulfing idealistic subjectivism, while at the same time rejecting any naive form of realism. Moreover, he reappropriates Freud's notion of "leaning on" or *Anlehnung* (or *anaclisis* in Greek) in order to dissociate

imagination from any external agent. Castoriadis does this to denote imagination not as everything, but rather as what has some reference point and thus can provide meaning to whatever may present itself. So imagination is not floating completely in the air of disconnection but has a possibility to lean on or start off any interpretation or explanation. In such a way, Castoriadis gives dues and a certain space to the individual within his theory. As a consequence, this allows Castoriadis **(1991, p.153)** to argue that the social imaginary has a capacity for virtual universal covering so that any intrusion of the foreign and external can immediately be treated as a sign of something; that is, it can be interpreted away and thus exorcized.

And here arrives an interesting dichotomic notion that society is constituted of individuals with their each individual imagination and at the same time this imagination is constituted by the social, whether public institutions, history, or cultural traditions. This is why it is quite obvious that Castoriadis sees the major threat to the instituted society in his own creativity. This very much remains the notion of artistic schemata suggested by Gombrich that we have seen in detail in the first chapter, where the author sees it both as a form of progress and at the same time a reason for oppression and degradation. Castoriadis treats imagination in a similar manner. He identifies a contradictory possibility in the fact that the society that created individuals is at the same time created by them. Thus it turns out that society, while constructed, may be targeted against the social imagination for the purpose of saving the social order and keeping society from the instability that causes imagination in its individual dimension. This is exactly the point that Bottici highlights in Castoriadis's radical imaginary, where, having two explicit dimensions in mind, the social-historical imaginary and the radical imagination, one may reveal the tension between individual and social imagination. Hence, the understanding that these two categories reciprocally imply each other becomes vivid. Indeed, in Castoriadis's system of coordinates, the instituting social imaginary is always at the same time instituted, which in turn means that no society could ever exist if the individuals created by the society had themselves not created it.

Summarizing the aforesaid, Bottici highlights a twofold strategy in Castoriadis's concept of "radical imagination." The first (radical) speaks to the link with the modern project of autonomy informed largely by psychoanalysis and its idea of a human being a product of socialization (Castoriadis, 1987, p.1991). The second (imagination) talks in favor of the ability of an individual or society to question its own products, meaning that the latter is never completely mastered. In this way, imagination is seen not as a source of errors or falsity but rather as a criterion of constructive critique. A critique here is understood as an undetectable element and the condition of autonomy inherent in the concept of the individual as a psychological product giving oneself one's law (Castoriadis, 1987, pp.101–107). All of this brings us back to a point where we may pose a rhetorical question of where in Castoriadis' universe the difference between the real and the fictional lies. And exactly at this point, Bottici presupposes that radical imagination is assigned prior to this distinction. Castoriadis (1991, p.147) underscores the fact that the definition of "reality" itself depends on the instituting and instituted social imaginary. In other words, he suggests treating reality as a domain constructed by imagination. The fact that historically "the word reality has been conceived in so many different ways" for Castoriadis speaks in favor of the position "that the social-historical constitutes reality and not vice versa" (Bottici, 2019, pp.51–52). In this connection, Bottici notices that Castoriadis's logic contravenes the genealogy of imagination, which she reconstructed while describing the first ontological rupture of the term imagination. She underscores that usually in philosophical discourse reality was treated as something given, already existing, and imagination, in turn, could just search for ways to approach it or contradict the latter. Now, in Castoriadis's new inverted logic, the radical nature of imagination is developed and imagination exists before reality. At this end, Bottici admits that he takes us beyond the dilemmas of the genealogy of imagination and avoids the tension that always is caused by contraposition of imagination and reality as contradictive or directly related entities. But if here Castoriadis managed to overcome the first tension,

according to Bottici, the second one still needs to be addressed. By the second tension, she means the dialectic contradiction between the individual and social imaginations. This is the reason why Bottici perceives Castoriadis's metaphysical opposition between society and the monadic core of the psyche as the sign of this conceptual tension, beyond which the theorist himself was not able to go. With this notion in mind, she closes the discussion on the evolution of the imaginal and turns her attention more to a political perspective, which is less relevant for the current research.

The supposition of two approaches

NONETHELESS, IN ORDER TO SUMMARIZE the analysis undertaken above, I think we can derive several helpful conceptual findings. The first and perhaps most obvious one is how terminology over the course of time may overturn an initial meaning of a word, or even the whole system of the concept. Bottici reveals in a very detailed way how imagination with its derivatives such as the imaginal and the imaginary has changed dramatically in meaning over the course of the development of philosophical thought, underscoring that meaning assigned to terminology may not meet the obstacles of the time and, thus, requires new words or a reinterpretation of already existing ones. This process explicitly revealed how this change was not just an ordinary lack of vocabulary but rather the signal of a deep ontological rupture and revolt in philosophical discourse. This fact comes close to Gombrich's

notions with regard to illusion in art, where large-scale alterations also took place during the course of evolution, especially in its European formation. Gombrich's research, as much as Bottici's, regards tremendous alterations in meaning over the course of historical evolution. If Bottici **(2019, p.23)** acknowledged how a generally neutral view of *phantasia* or imagination, which emerged in Greek sources meaning "true vision" or "presentation," had turned into a negative one during the Enlightenment, which was especially reflected in the writings of Bacon, Galilei, and Pascal, in his turn, Gombrich **(1984)** followed how the "Greek Revolution" unfolded by suggesting, in contrast to more ancient cultures with their mythological nature of representation of the world, a new method—*mimesis*, and how this new idea of realistic depiction was sustained firmly from around the 4th century and declined in European art only at the end of the 19th century, by the time of Impressionism, which the author himself calls the "last triumph of objective truth" **(p.160)**. Thus, in Gombrich's work as much as in Bottici's study, we witness a similar reversal of terms, where the notion of realism and comprehension of the latter flipped the meaning from the literal appearance of the real "out there" into the forms of new realism intertwined with some other realities than those that are visually available to us. In this context, it is not surprising that Kandinsky called his abstract works more realistic to him than the realism of Greek *mimesis.* Therefore, we see a similar transformation of the term into its antipode in art as in the case of imagination in the philosophical analysis of Bottici. In this way, these facts allow us to say that both writers sensed similar deep structural changes, which found manifestation in the form of social-political consequences, as in Bottici, or in artistic practices, as in Gombrich.

The second notion that arises from the analysis executed above in regard to the shifting of understanding of terms is the problematic identification of the notion of the real and its location. Perhaps nowhere else than in Bottici's analysis could we better see an ontological resistance to providing any explanation, or at least a description of the real as an opposition or a reference point to imagination, illusion, or any other term complementary to reality. It is

this conceptual difficulty in understanding the real and its inherent opposition to imagination and illusion that unites these two terms from Gombrich and Bottici. Of course, this does not mean that illusion and imagination have exactly the same meaning: perhaps not. But nevertheless, what I strive to demonstrate here is that they ontologically have much more in common due to the fact that during the course of evolution in artistic or philosophical discourse these two notions were often associated as counterparts of the real and objective. It is from this unsolvable contradiction that the whole analysis of imagination was unfolded by Bottici. From almost the beginning, she pointed out the problematic area of distinguishing imagination from any other ontological unities, because, by introducing the definition of imagination or illusion as something opposed or different from some other concept, one inevitably falls into the danger of describing this very counterpart. And this counterpart is no more understandable than the concept we started with. If we stipulate that illusion or imagination is in opposition to the real or any other intangible ontological entities, then one has little opportunity to explain the latter, unless to adhere to certain philosophical or critical social theories. In either case, it turns out that if we only say that illusion and imagination are opposed to the real, or at least reference the latter to some degree, conceptually it does not bring us too far. Does it then mean that, figuratively speaking, we are still stuck in the dilemma of posing the question of whether imagination or illusion is related to something "out there," and if yes, to what degree? Or does relating imagination and illusion to any ontological concept automatically mean ending up in a conceptual impasse, as Bottici puts it? Does it then mean that we are thrown again into Plato's cave, where instead of seeing the light of truth and the real, we must therefore stay content with the shadows on the wall produced by the unbearable source of light? If we question what imagination or illusion is, do we immediately hit a nerve of ontological definition? I propose to discuss these questions, together with the notion of changing terms drawn from a careful reading of Bottici's study, further in the text in a more detailed and dedicated way.

So let me start here with the first, seemingly easiest notion. I am talking about a similar periodization that Bottici and Gombrich adhere to. Indeed, the alterations in understanding of the various forms of imagination coincide to some extent with the evolution of the realm of the realistic type of art. This is an interesting merging evolution of terms with complete rebirth and reassessment. We have witnessed coordination in evolution from the original meaning toward modification and to an opposite over the course of centuries of philosophical and artistic discourse. Of course, it is possible to accept the simplified vision of history, saying that everything is always interrelated and progress in one place inevitably alters everything else. For example, one may argue that the Greeks established such a strong philosophical school and tradition that they influenced the entire course of artistic, philosophical, and technological evolution in European and beyond. To that we can suppose that in various cultures there were also shifts and leaps of ontological discourses, but they did not completely spring new types of art into life or bring about new technical innovations. For instance, artistic traditions of China or India were more resilient than Greek or European ones in relation to philosophical dispute. Or can we directly bind technological revolution with the alteration in artistic faculties and philosophical discourse? For example, Bottici [2019] associates a new scientific view in astronomy with "the battle for a different place for the human being within it." [p.24]. This could be questioned, since technological breakthroughs do not always mean immediate alterations in philosophical thinking, ontological terminology, or artistic techniques (and it does not seem to be the case the other way around). For example, the discoveries of Euclidean geometry did not lead to a correct understanding of perspective representation in ancient Greece, Rome, and early European art before the Renaissance. As a matter of fact, unequipped with theory or sophisticated technological tools, Leonardo da Vinci with a *Camera obscura* or Albrecht Dürer with a greed frame and strings (as we may see at his famous woodcut with lute [FIG.6] from his *Four Books on Measurement*), both managed to elaborate perspective theory and apply it in practice. I am
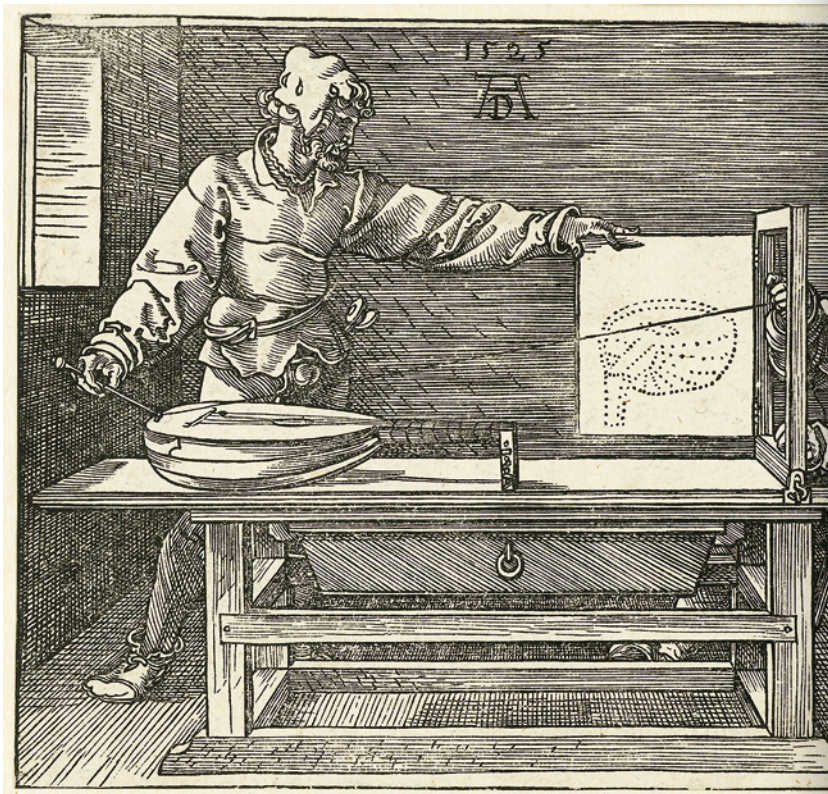
FIGURE 6.
DÜRER, A. (n.d.).
The draughtsman of the lute
[Woodcut, 13 × 18.2 cm].
New York: The Met Museum.

leading to the fact that apparently the phenomena do not always coincide with each other on a calendar, and the cause and effect can be significantly stretched in time. Nevertheless, turning back to the periodizations proposed by Bottici and Gombrich, we may witness that they are surprisingly similar, which, perhaps, speaks in favor of a greater connection of illusion and imagination than of a connection between technological innovations and the emergence of philosophical schools in different historical periods.

But let us also regard here some other interesting congruences. First of all, both authors set as a starting point for their research as the period of Greece antiquity. And if Gombrich at the beginning references ancient Egypt, he does it solely for the purpose of highlighting the true revolution of changes that occurred in the art of the Greeks. Hence, in general, Bottici and Gombrich start their research from a very similar premise. Also, both authors reference Plato as a starting point of their discussion. For example, for Bottici, Plato and in a similar vein Aristotle are the source of the term *phantasia* and the way it functions in the ancient context, binding vision and perception of the word. In his turn, for Gombrich, Plato provides an important concept of a couch (already mentioned in detail in the first chapter) with its three gradations of implementation: as pure idea, as actual object constructed by a carpenter, and finally as a painting executed by an artist. Further, both researchers only lightly touch upon the medieval period and focus further on the evolving scientific formations in the philosophical and artistic dimensions. As we remember, Bottici follows the transformation of the notion of imagination into the imaginal, meaning an individual faculty of interpreting and thus being perceived in time more as the territory of non-scientific approach. Appealing to Kant, who decisively contributed to defining Enlightenment as a philosophical category, she determines the ambivalence of attitude toward imagination where still both approaches meet: the first of the ancient Greek together with Scholastic philosophy and the second of the new scientific era, "the courage to use one's own reason—otherwise said, be autonomous" (Bottici, 2019, p. 24).

At the same time, Gombrich traces the way realistic art, formulated in ancient Greece, through the slowing moment during the medieval period continued its way to the Renaissance and further—elaborating more and more complex schemata that served as better comprehensions of the appearance of the world, leaving less and less space for the immature and unprofessional faculty of an artist. For instance, he underscores the basic difference between the function of art in the medieval context and in later times, which is a distinction between the universal and particular. By illustrating this idea, Gombrich invokes the theme of Plato's couch; he sees in this the origin of classes of things and different degrees of representation. For example, in the earlier stages of the evolution of realistic art (let me here use this term as analogy for the illusional for convenience of narration) minimal requirements for similarity sufficed. In other words, the "universal" met the needs for recognition, which in Gombrich's view corresponds with Plato's "idea of couch," where the idea or symbol that artwork carries is more important than the craftsmanship with which it is made. At the later stages of the development of art, when the means of depicting reality were significantly improved and the usual schemes became more complicated and detailed, works of art began to appeal to the lower levels of the Platonic hierarchy of the image, being associated more with a carpenter or painter, rather than with the level of lofty ideas. Put in other terms, Gombrich (1984, p.122) traces the transition from early universal schemas in art toward the more scientific and thus more detailed and "particular." So, Gombrich acknowledged the progressive improvement of realistic qualities of art and complication of individual readings of reality through paintings or other artistic practices.

Furthermore, Bottici, through the nexus of various philosophers and their complex notions in regard to imagination, arrives at the point where imagination takes its absolute form of disintegrating and alienation from something real and tangible and, as a result, starts to be associated fully with individual faculty, absolutely away from the scientific domain. And finally, the last conceptual inclination that

the author acknowledges in her writing is radical change in perceiving human psyche. Here imagination receives the ultimate critique. If previously individual imagination was seen as a unique faculty of each person and autonomous (if utilizing Bottici's words in regard to Kantian doctrine), in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis, and especially in Gustav Jung's and Erich Fromm's reading of it, society and other outer structures may form the imagination or consciousness of each individual. Hereby, according to Bottici, the imaginal becomes imaginary. Hence, the 20th century brought a new perspective on human perception and imagination where little relied on the uniqueness or independence of each person and theories talked in favor of a preprogrammed human psyche and behavior in the frame suggested by various external agents, starting from the influence of relatives and genealogical ties up to the global processes occurring on the planet. In this way, Bottici arrives at a point where the problem of individual imagination touches the social, so that it is hard to find the border in this interrelated picture, where, following Castoriadis, to whom the author refers in regard to untangling this problematic in the most explicit way, society is constituted of individuals created by the society.

In a similar way, Gombrich [1984] regards the evolution of realistic art, which as we remember he calls "a most successful experiment" in the "real discovery of appearances" [p.262]. The author attributes the improvement of schemata and faculty of artists to the development of educational components, and notably the practice of teaching. For instance, he recalls that students spent years copying prints and drawing after the antique before they were permitted to wrestle with a real motif while studying at the Academy or in individual classes. Also, the material for copying immeasurably increased with the coming of prints and the distribution of plaster casts. In this insistence on the mastery of tradition, Gombrich sees the cause of the fact that continuity of art between the Middle Ages and the 18th century was secured. Fewer and fewer lacunas of the unknown for depicting the world "out there" were left, and art was reaching its peak of realism. By the end of the 19th century, with the evolving of the Impressionists, it

seemed there was nothing else to reach, and this is perhaps the reason why Gombrich stops his "Story of Art" exactly there and completes the description of experiment of the realistic, or maybe better said the illusionistic, experiment in art. Here the author highlights the incredible power of schemata acquired through the centuries of education of both artists and their viewers, in the end giving them the capability to speak the same language. When the Impressionists arrived with the idea of rendering an instantaneous moment, certain beholders were ready to perceive and evaluate such a type of art. This is exactly the point when Gombrich repeats Adolf von Hildebrand's[5] words in regard to his Impressionist contemporaries, saying that they rely much on the faculty of the beholders which may result in absurdities. Consequently:

> **It is the task of the artist to compensate for the absence of movement and space by giving his shapes the lucid completeness of a classical relief. Only thus can he avoid having to rely on the beholder's knowledge and power to guess.** (Gombrich, 1984, p.171)

Thus, similarly to the path of Bottici, which led to the dissociation of imagination as a concept, Gombrich arrives at a position where the beholder in their travel through art evolution finds themselves in a situation where their perception is articulated, educated, and formed by art and its practices. The viewer sees a painting in a particular way they have learned to see. Accordingly, when all these multiple avant-garde movements evolved, rejecting tradition and academism in favor of new experimentation in the pictorial and portrayal, the beholder was ready to perceive them. Hence, relying on already established schemata, new art formations suggested some other reality than that existing in the works of classical realism. Indeed, by the beginning of the 20th century, instead of depicting the world "out there," art had given way to an idea of inner vision and subconscious, a theme of psycho-analysis. It seems that at some point the beholder was ready to perceive these new artistic movements and new realities

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5   Adolf von Hildebrand was famous for his book called *The Problem of Form in the Figurative Arts*, which came out in 1893 and gained the attention of a whole generation.

to which the artists of multiple avant-garde movements such as Symbolism, Futurism, Cubism, Suprematism, Dadaism and many others appealed. Very likely there is no doubt that such kinds of alterations in visual language demanded challenging adjustments of perception for the beholder; still, notwithstanding the difficulties caused by the alterations in visual language, a new type of pictorial representation laid the foundation for a whole complex body of contemporary art. In accord with Bottici, who reveals that through the insights of psychoanalysis we internalized the idea that personality is created through the process of socialization, Gombrich observes a similar evolution, in which a beholder is forged by a long tradition of reading the pictorial, presented in the form of the distribution of engravings, prints, casts of famous artworks, the existence of museums, academies, etc. Suchwise, on the whole, it is worth noting here that Gombrich and Bottici regarded the same processes and perhaps, to a great degree, followed the same path in their investigations, exploring the thesis in a very similar fashion.

The second aspect drawn from reading Bottici's thesis

GOING THROUGH the first aspect of comparing Bottici's and Gombrich's writings, we have revealed similar patterns with regard to the processes that occurred during the evolution of the terms imagination and illusion in their philosophical and artistic perspectives. We saw how the initial meanings of the terms underwent changes, and the meanings flipped to the complete opposite. In this way, imagination in Bottici's research turned from a neutral form of interpretation and vision into alienation and a foreign agent in a new evolving scientific approach, and in Gombrich's study, the visual experiment of the "true realistic" depiction of reality transformed into its opposition at the turn of the 20th century, where in contrast to academic art, a new formation of reality revealed a detaching from visual appearance, relying on inner vision, consciousness, and subconsciousness. Now I suggest paying attention to

the second aspect, which seems to be more complex and complicated, since it deals with the conceptual comprehension of the ontological nature of the aforementioned categories of imagination and illusion. Thus, I dedicate the following pages to untangling this complex issue. I am talking here about Gombrich's illusion of reality as a theoretical concept and how it can be related to the dispute that has unfolded with regard to imagination and its theorizing in Bottici's research. In order to probe the path of conceptualization and widen the dispute on Gombrich's and Bottici's writing further, I hope to shed new light on the question of the theory of illusion in regard to its ontological dimension as well as practical aspects of art.

Although Gombrich himself called *Art and Illusion* primarily a study in the psychology of pictorial representation, still, many theorists perceived the author as the founder of this theory. As a matter of course, it raises the question of whether we can really talk of his work as a theory of illusion, especially in light of Bottici's analysis. Or is illusion just a tool to reveal a history of the pictorial and to tell "The Story of Art," to put it in Gombrich's terms? As I noted earlier, the analysis of Bottici's writings only confirms to us the difficulties of considering Gombrich's thesis from an ontological point of view. First of all is the problem of defining an illusion. As we remember, Bottici had to oppose or correlate imagination with some coordination point in order to draw at least a rough sketch of the term. It seems that we have a similar problem with Gombrich's illusion. Any complex ontological apprehension essentially leads to the question of defining the latter, which in turn might be unachievable by its philosophical nature. It follows that the construction of any theoretical models requires provision in comprehension of counterparts of imagination or illusion, such as the concepts of real, objective, truthful, or any other ontologically complex entities.

If we do this in the spirit of Greek philosophy, we have to accept that falsity and truth are not indistinguishable categories and one can reside in the territory of the other. For instance, in Plato's oratory, *phantasia* as a synonym of contemporary imagination and perhaps even of illusion is not necessarily false but shares the possibility of falsity with both

discourse (*logos*) and opinion (*doxa*). Accordingly, "thinking (*dianoia*) and opinion (*doxa*) and *phantasia* all these occur in our soul as true and false" (263d). In this fashion, imagination, and as much illusion can therefore be both true and false, like thinking and opinion. Thus, Bottici notes referencing *Sophist* that thinking (*dianoia*) and discourse (*logos*) in Plato's philosophy are similar notions with only differences of location. As such, thinking is the inward dialog carried on by the soul with itself without spoken sounds, whereas discourse is the current that comes from the soul through the mouth in vocal form (263e). In Greek terminology and the world's view of Plato, when assertion and denial take place in the soul in the course of silent thinking, it is called opinion (*doxa*); when judgment occurs by means of sensation (*diaistheseos*), it is called *phantasia* (264a). Like so, *phantasia*, being a mixture of sensation (*aisthesis*) (to which in the frame of this discussion we can also attribute sensual qualities of illusion as a perceptive notion) and opinion or judgment (*doxa*) can be both true and false. As a consequence, even though for Plato *phantasia* or any other form based on sensation (*doxa* with *aisthesis*) is a form of knowledge, still, he attributes such judgment to the changing world, which is in his opinion subject to becoming (27d–29b), in contrast to the unchanging world, which is eternal. The fact that, according to Plato, we can only have access to this eternal unchanging world through intellect and reason, since such an unchanging world of ideas is translucent to the intellect means that the position of appearance in his philosophy is rather weak due to its relation to the lower hierarchical levels. Yet, as is explicitly reflected in *Theaetetus*, the term *phantasia* is associated with sensation (*aesthesis*) and thus attributes its meaning to a genuine form of knowledge. Since the verb "to appear," *phainesthai*, appeals to *phantasia* and *aesthesis*, Plato observes that "there is *aesthesis* only of what really is." He equates to a certain degree *aesthesis* with *episteme*, which in sum he uses in *Theaetetus* (152c) for knowledge. In this way, although there is a certain degree of skepticism in Plato's theory of ideas toward any form of appearance rooted in sensation, he does not systematically associate *phantasia* with falsity and unreality, since the latter shares the possibility of

falsity with the *logos* itself. Extending these philosophical notes toward the subject of illusion, especially in Gombrich's reading, we may see that since illusion is attributed more to the sphere of appearance, it can be read as a bearer of both true and false judgments. In doing so, one may propose that, looking at the concept of illusion through Plato's perspective, the difference between illusion and the real is rather blurred, especially in its formation of *phantasia* and *aesthesis*. In other words, from an ontological point of view in the realm of Plato's philosophy, the distinction between illusion and real, imitation and instance does not really matter.

Furthermore, it is not compulsory that illusion means a false statement; the truth can be detected in various readings of an unchanging world of ideas. This notion was precisely explained in Plato's concept of the couch, which Gombrich also addresses in his work, where the initial idea of the couch exists in the unchanging world of ideas and then gradually descends into to the world of appearance through the work of a carpenter, who executes it in matter, and then in the form of a picture drawn by a painter. And although the artist is twice removed from the idea of the couch, nevertheless, they relay a certain degree of its very concept. "I mean, that you may look at a bed from different points of view, obliquely or directly from any other point of view, and the bed will appear different, but there is no difference in reality. And the same of all things." (Plato, p.391). To this end, this passage from Plato's *Republic* speaks in favor of relevance between illusion and its opponents or counterparts. It leads us to the point that there is no sense even in trying to define illusion as some false or faulty reading of the initial truth of Plato's unchanging world of ideas, nor it is necessary to discuss the impenetrable world of the transcendent. Representation or sensation can in their own domain have the right to descend the "idea" to the beholder in the form of a material object or in the form of a painting. On the other hand, accepting Plato's idea that "there is *aesthesis* only of what really is," it follows that any sensation imagined or detected by an artist, for example, belongs to reality due to its very quality to be registered in people's minds. Accordingly, abstract, non-figurative, as much

as any realistic art, all can be attributed to the sphere of the real and objective, since the artist with their inner vision can register a certain reality, even though the beholders of these paintings might not share the intuitive vision of the creator. Following this logic, the abstract paintings of Mark Rothko or Kazimir Malevich can be entirely real and objective to our sensational world as much as masters of realistic painting such as Johannes Vermeer or Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. Thus, as noted earlier, the reading of Plato's ideas with regard to illusion and the illusionistic type of art create complex intertwined unities where meanings are so complicated by the variety of interpretations that this unstable conglomerate can be suspended only by the rigidity and resistance of a world of ideas, being a prerogative of an unpredicated world that descends its ultimate will (idea) from up downwards, as we saw by exemplifying the concept of Plato's couch.

Probably here, when we are talking about the structural principles of Plato's ideas, a remark should be made on the subject of the extent to which, in principle, it is legitimate to use the term illusion as such. For instance, the term illusion is a kind of archeological term that was used for a long time to explore reality from Plato's time. It was firmly embedded in philosophy, as well as art history terminology. Perhaps exactly due to the formula suggested by Plato that speaks of the division and hierarchy of things, we believe to some extent in the real "real," in the idea of the original and copy. In this respect, Gombrich seems more like a follower of Plato, although, as we remember from the detailed analysis of his writings, he was skeptical about the highest level of the Platonic hierarchical structure and denied the principle of pure ideas, floating somewhere in the sky of the world of divine beings. To a large extent, he was oriented more toward the levels of the carpenter and painter, if one adheres to the Platonic terminology. Indeed, leaving aside the question of pure ideas, the principles of Gombrich's "artistic schemata" and the formula of "trial and error" in his approach to the real world are more in line with the Platonic tradition than with more radical modern views that deny any hierarchy of things. In this regard, it is worth recalling perhaps the most persistent

critic of Plato's tradition, Gilles Deleuze. In his famous ***Plato and the Simulacrum*** (1983), the author suggests an "overthrow of Platonism" by stating that "abolishing the world of essences and the world of appearances" (p.45) is a long-term project that goes back to Nietzsche's tradition, Hegel and further to Kant. In this way, Deleuze proposes a kind of completion of that trend with the critique of Platonism which he saw in his philosophical predecessors and justifies its complete overthrow. First he finds a reason for the logic of the Platonic triad, which he repeats in a Neo-Platonic way: "the unsharable, the shared, the sharer," and then, having found a point of weakness, he denies the whole idea of any hierarchical relationship. Thus, Deleuze sees "the motive for the [Platonic] theory of Ideas" in the "will to choose, sort out," where the principle of dialectical procedures allows one to "represent the whole system," presumably meaning the ability to represent the world as a hierarchical model. Moreover, for him, "The Platonic dialectic is not a dialectic of contradiction nor of contrariety, but one of rivalry (***amphisbetesis***)—a dialectic of rivals or claimants" (p.46). As a result, taking Plato's ***Phaedrus*** as a counterargument and pointing out that the idea of myth as such is conceptually opposed to any kind of hierarchical relationship, he concludes that "the myth of the circulation of souls seems to interrupt the effort of division" (p.46). So Deleuze arrives at the point where he allows himself to conclude that "to overthrow Platonism means: to raise up simulacra, to assert their rights over icons or copies" (p.52), where "the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance" and "simulacrum is not simply a false copy, but that it calls into question the very notions of the copy" (p.48).

And although perhaps the topic of hierarchy and new terminology, which Deleuze proposed to use in his concept is not the topic of current research, nevertheless, it is worth noting the complexity of the transitions of terms from one concept to another. After all, even the word ***simulacrum***, which is associated with the ideas of postmodernism, was borrowed from the writings of the same Plato. Whereas the Latin word ***simulacrum*** denotes likeness and semblance, in Deleuze this term describes the principle of the equality of all

interpretations among themselves, where "There is no possible hierarchy: neither second, nor third" (p.53). This completely subverts Plato's theory, and even more so the appropriateness of using such categories as origin and copy. In the theoretical world of Deleuze, there are no copies or originals—all are simulacra. Similarly, one can treat the question of the legitimacy of using the term illusion in relation to Gombrich, and even more so to Bottici's theoretical research. If Gombrich opposes the concept of the Platonic higher idea, then why does he resort to using the word illusion? In the same way, one can criticize Bottici's concept, where she uses the terms of the imagination and the imaginary, rooted in the same ancient tradition, to describe modern political phenomena. Would it not be more reasonable and accurate to operate with a new term than to use archaic ones, but endow it with such properties and qualities that are not originally inherent in them? In this regard, perhaps it would be more logical to have a structure where Gombrich's illusions are replaced by Deleuze's simulacra. Indeed, neuroscience studies have shown that our perception, vision, and other feelings are largely articulated by the structural features of our bodies, and we perceive the world far from being the way it really is. For example, we do not see infrared radiation, and many other natural phenomena are hidden from our naked eye. Moreover, our vision as such functions as a result of rather complex procedures. As we know, the visual world is perceived by our two eyes, where, passing through the lenses of our eyeballs, the images are flipped, and getting on the retina in inverted form, are flipped again and combined into a single image already in our brain. Are we not then simulacra ourselves, since we are also, to some extent, the same product of this reality? But nevertheless, without going too deep into discussions about what terminology it is better to use and how to update it, it should be noted that while considering Gombrich's ideas in today's context of post-computational world, one should also be aware that recontextualization of the term is also required. In this sense, Deleuze is much closer to Bottici and to our modernity than Gombrich with the term illusion when it comes to those processes that take place in the modern post-information

society. But, even taking into account the fact that Bottici speaks of a certain kind of illusory nature in relation to the formation of the collective imaginary—we could equate this with the idea of Deleuze's simulacrum—nevertheless, for her, this is just a starting point, from where the centers of some social gravity and a picture of reality is formed. Even if we allow the term simulacrum to be used when we talk about Bottici's political theory, it does not fully reflect the system that the author is building. Various manifestations of the social imaginary have different meanings and connection points which go against Deleuze's principle of sameness and equality of all among all, eliminating any hierarchy. For Bottici, simulacrum is the condition of the world, but not the world itself. So we can say that yes, the postmodern idea of the simulacrum can be applied to Bottici's theory, but only to a certain extent. The same can be said about Gombrich's theory. We could use Deleuze's term simulacrum and say that works of art, paintings, and other artifacts exist as endless copies without originals, but this too would not fully reflect the complex structure that Gombrich builds in his reasoning and negates such base elements of his theory as schemata, artistic tradition or artistic style.

In sum, my intention here was not to highlight the weaknesses of the choice of terminology each author adheres to, but to reveal that going against Plato's logic helped to establish the territory for new conceptualizations of old terms and definitions. Thus, Deleuze's ideas were utilized here as perhaps the most extreme example of the antithesis to Plato's theory, which bridges Bottici and further Gombrich. Hence, Bottici updated and endowed her terms imaginal and imaginary with new meanings more adapted to the realities of modern times. Likewise, Gombrich's illusion that arises from philosophical significations can be viewed in the context of the modern high-tech world, populated by endless copies, simulacra, and deepfakes. Of course the question of terminology is very extensive and debatable; nevertheless, it was necessary to indicate here the difficulties of its choice, especially when, on the one hand, those archaic words used, for example, by Gombrich, Deleuze, and Bottici, are rooted in

the philosophical tradition of ancient Greece and in particular in Plato's writings and at the same time these same authors oppose their concepts with the terminology within which they operate. But let us return to the outline of our narrative, to the thinkers of antiquity.

Taking this discussion further and projecting the concept of Gombrich's illusion onto Aristotle, one may notice slight differences, although still finding oneself in a similar ontological doctrine and theoretical environment. We witness the great influence of Aristotle's master on the idea of *phantasia,* which is equivalently rooted in sensation. But if for Plato the sensual appearance of the world is just one of the sides through which elevated ideas descend to the tangible world and to human thinking, for Aristotle pure ideas are not strictly derived from a super-sensible realm. They arrive either by direct intuition or through the soul's reminiscence of ideas it knew before its incarnation (Cocking, 1991, p.18). Hence, for Aristotle, the sensible world plays an important role in obtaining ideas (Aristotle & Hett, 2000). Thus, images in the wide sense, whether actual pictures or mental representations, are an intermediary between perception and conception. For good reason, Bottici (2019) states that, "Certainly for Aristotle, as for Plato, the best thinking rises above images, as it were, but, in contrast to him, can only do so by rising through them" (p.17). It is clearly seen from the passage from Aristotle's *De Anima* that materiality, images, perception and thoughts all belong to the same entity:

> Since it seems that there is nothing outside and separate in existence from sensible spatial magnitudes, the objects of thought are in the sensible forms, viz. both the abstract objects and all the states and affections of sensible things. Hence, no one can learn or understand anything in the absence of sense, and when the mind is actively aware of anything it is necessarily aware of it along with an image (*phantasma*); for images (*phantasmata*) are like sensuous contents except in that they contain no matter (432a).

Thus, from the standpoint of Aristotle, which seems to be equivalent to Plato, pictures, images, or paintings can serve as a base for further advancement toward the essence embedded

in the domain of ideas. In this regard, it is also pointless to draw a distinctive line between illusion and non-illusion, since the domain of its definition does not define a relationship toward true reasoning and pure ideas. In such a way, looking through the lens of Aristotle's thinking, presenting the history of art through its relation to illusion is rather unnecessary and irrelevant. If we take Gombrich's main thesis and relocate it according to Aristotle's perspective in regard to appearance and "sensuous contents," perhaps we could see some ontology of pure ideas of art and manifestations of it in the forms of painting which in varying degrees correspond with this absolute "pure idea" of a certain art. Nevertheless, addressing other entries for *phantasia* within the body of Aristotle's writings, one may notice that it may also serve as a means for demonstrating the truth against opponents. For instance, in two passages of *De Caelo* he uses the term *phantasia* to mean the actual vision that we have of the stars [297b, 31] or referencing the true appearance of the Earth [294a, 7] in order to dissipate the doubts of his adversaries about its circular shape. In this juxtaposition of *phantasia* as an instance of "actual vision" of objective facts, one may notice a place where the distance between our fantasy and the Greek *phantasia* begins to emerge, making its way toward the scientific formation of philosophy. Thus, here we may acknowledge a departure toward territory more relevant for Gombrich being correlated to scientific treatment of illusion and art.

Briefly put, by probing to relate Gombrich's depiction of illusion to Plato and Aristotle we have seen that illusion and reality, the true and false, objectivity and subjectivity may be largely adjoined into entities whereby only in relation to the formation of pure ideas can one detect true or false notions in a complex medley of perceptual interpretations. Thus, the priority of the sublime notion of ideas makes it insignificant to distinguish or separate illusion and its ontological antipodes. Moreover, if we go further along the path of historical development and relate Gombrich's illusion to medieval Scholastic philosophy, we will find that this concept has continued to work in a similar manner as in the case of testing Plato's and Aristotle's concepts. Here, too, reality

corresponds not with the predicate in any form, but rather in the same fashion as Greek philosophy with an unreachable entity of the elevated ideal of God. Thus, identification of reality (*realitas*) is ascribed to the essence (*essentia*) of each *res*, where the term *realitas* was used as a synonym for perfection (Courtine 1992a, 1992b; Hoffmann et al.,1992). So illusion, as much as reality, unless positioned to God, conceptually does not obtain any credit for reliability; there comes only a question of belief. Consequently, on the whole, the conceptual prospect of seeing illusion as false or real in its medieval inclination with its theological components seems inconsequential. Moreover, this explains why God could be said to be the most real being or *ens realissimu.* And even though this view is very remote from us, still, it explains why God and the angels were conceived as being as real as any palpable object, if not as even more real. To this end, the illusionistic art of *trompe-l'oeil* or Op art, for example, cannot be regarded from a position of whether it is reality or illusion. All that matters here is the connection to a divine entity. To put it differently, from the standpoint of Scholastic philosophy, as much as from the Greeks' perception of pure ideas, what subject or what kind of art it is is rather insignificant—the connection to divine defines the relationship to the truth or reality of the given artistic source.

After regarding conceptual potency in relation of Gombrich's illusion to ancient Greek philosophy as much as touching slightly upon the medieval conception of reality as a matter of perfection and God, I propose to look for a moment at the concept of reality as such and its origin in historical and linguistic perspectives in a more particular way, since we usually address this very fundamental notion. Thus, we could better detect the comprehension of these in the premodern world and transition then into the modern. In addition, this observation will also help us to understand, as we also showed earlier, why Gombrich's idea of opposing illusion to reality in relation to ancient philosophy and the doctrines of the medieval period may seem unjustified in its construction and unattainable for comprehension. As a matter of fact, for example, the Greeks did not have a word to designate what we would now call reality. In their terminology, there was only *ta*

onta, the things that are, or *to on*, the being as expressed by the nominalized participle of the verb "to be" (*einai*). Hence, all these words come from the verb *einai*. The word *reality*, in its turn, comes from a different root: *res*, meaning the thing itself. Bottici [2019, p.28] underscores here the fact that the difference in terminology signals a different approach to the definition of reality as such. In this way, *ta onta* refers to the things that are, so to say, conceptually clear, whereas individual things that are given in experience are *ta pragmata*. The things that may be seen through the category of *ta onta* include the things that expose themselves for what they are: in this sense, *to be* (*einai*) does not simply mean to be or exist, but to assign a certain mode of existence. Consequently, this notion does not make automatically *ta pragmata* not "real"; it rather suggests that this formation may be a little less connected with this "real" or true and require interpretation. In other words, objects, formations, obtained and probed though the experience (*ta pragmata*), realize its implication to be "real" through evaluation in relation to the things given as a concept and pure ideas.

As Vlastos [1965] notes, the ancient Greeks conceived of what we would call the real as constituted by different degrees of being related to the *eidos*—idea. In this way, in contrast to modern thinking, the ancient Greeks did not oppose the "real" to the "ideal." It went, as we have already seen, very much in a similar vein with the medieval Scholastic philosophy conception of *realitas*, which in this context was used as a synonym for perfection and thus for God [Courtine 1992a, 1992b; Hoffmann et al., 1992]. In this theological philosophy, Bottici sees the explanation of the reasons why in medieval figurative art painters depicted bodies and objects as not quite "real," as we may perceive them through our sensual apparatus. The style of depiction revealed some other *realitas* than that commonly seen. It is doubtful that the reason for such depiction lay particularly in the immaturity of the painters' mastership; more likely, they had little interest in depicting bodies and objects from the point of view of how they appear to our senses. Painters of the medieval period rather suggested some other reality than that of appealing to our visual perception, even though that greater real reality carried an increased degree of

similarity with our tangible world. Perhaps for a contemporary mind it is rather hard to digest the position of *perfection* in regard to *reality*. But we can relate this understanding of the premodern world to the hierarchically ordered system which conceptually manifests itself in sharp contrast to the mechanically uniformed contemporary world made of matter and movement depicted by modern science. With all this definition of reality in mind, we can return to Gombrich and assert that from a premodern standpoint, it is rather irrelevant what kind of image a painter creates. Figurative art, even brought into its extremes of perfection, is not that different from abstract or interpreted art: all of them might or might not have a connection to elevated ideas and divine categories. It turns out that the theme or subject of depiction cannot be a marker of definition of whether a certain type of art belongs to reality or the illusion of false guesses. In this way, there is no room in Greek or Scholastic philosophy to separate illusion and non-illusionary art by the visual qualities of the artworks.

Thus, after observing this sensitive notion, let us therefore continue our philosophical investigation and go further to probe Gombrich's concept relating more to the modern world. Here in effect we regard another transitional period and evaluate philosophical discourse aligned with scientific thinking. As Bottici has underlined, the great rupture and the gap separating the Greek *phantasia* from our modern imagination occurred particularly in the writings of those philosophers who were engaged in defining the new scientific method. So, a split was established between knowledge, on the one hand, which is guaranteed by the enlightenment of pure reason, and imagination, on the other hand, presented as a misconception of the true scientific approach. This conceptualization of pure science can be found in a multitude of philosophical doctrines from Francis Bacon and Blaise Pascal to Kant and other philosophers of the Enlightenment. Hence, the adherence to seeing the scientific approach as non-interventionist and neutral to the object of research still exercises a significant influence in current contemporary debate (Daston & Galison, 1992). Even taking into account possible ambiguities in research results with regard to objectivity, the

positioning of researchers as a central reference point speaks in favor of considerable alterations in philosophical thinking. It is not surprising that Bottici (2019, p.22) reminds us of the Italian philosopher Galileo Galilei, who defined the new scientific method by juxtaposing it with wrong guesses and what he called "mere fantasies" (*mere fantasie*). In other words, the facts became allied against the fantasies of the theologians and old formations in the perceiving of reality. Indeed, it appears that during this period there is a relegation of fantasy, imagination and illusion to the unreal. For instance, by the 18th century the term fantasy had already been associated with unreality (Cocking 1991; Friese 2001; Vattimo 1999). Bottici (2007, pp.20–70) also argues that the Enlightenment precisely legitimized this new view of reality that became hegemonic. To put it differently, Bottici asserts that in this exact period, the concept of reality, as we understand it today, evolved. Through these shifts in our comprehension of reality, we find ourselves at a point where things start to look quite different, where the real has begun to be seen as something that can be experienced, that exists outside of our minds, and is thus opposed to the fictitious (Courtine 1992a, 1992b). In this regard, she raises a defense of the view that Kant (1781/1998) is paradigmatic, since he defines the "real" as "that which is connected (*zusammenhängt*) with the material conditions of our experience" (p.321). Making the link between the Enlightenment's understanding of imagination with regard to the notion of reality and German Idealism or Romanticism, Bottici notes that perhaps only Johann Gottlieb Fichte inverted this relationship. As she relays, "Imagination produces reality; but there is no reality therein; only through apprehension and conception in the understanding does its product become something real" (Fichte, 1982, p.207). Thus, by introducing a different understanding of reality, Fichte states that the latter finds all its sources in the ego and has no autonomy of its own. In this way, "The source of all reality is the self, for this is what is immediately and absolutely posited. The concept of reality is first given with and by way of the self" (p.129). Invoking Romantic aesthetics, Bottici also recalls Novalis's ideas, who stated that the creative function of imagination liberates us from the structures of the senses and understanding:

whereas the latter are mechanical and imagination is a source of freedom. Here, we can acknowledge a counter movement of the definition of what reality is with regard to the typical Enlightenment, expressed in a juxtaposition of reason, material, and a non-interventional approach to the study of reality. Hence, for Novalis [(1965)], as a representative of early German Romanticism in philosophy, imagination is seen as not even tied to the presence and touch of external stimuli. Therefore, art, as the domain of freedom and imagination, can solve the problem of the ontological separation of the subject and the object of knowledge ascribed to the Enlightenment. Thus, starting from this moment, Bottici, in referencing Abbagnano [(1961, p.369)], attributes the notion of the capricious nature of imagination to inferior forms of knowledge during the 18th century and into the later period, when it became a cornerstone for its positive revaluation in the Romantic philosophy of the 19th century. And thus, finally, addressing Hegel, we find that he saw artistic genius in the imaginal faculty of the individual and in the creative power of fantasy. As he states in his **Aesthetics**,

> **First, when we come to the general capacity for artistic production, then, as soon as there is talk of 'capacity,' 'fancy' (*Phantasie*) is said to be the most prominent artistic ability. Yet in that case, we must immediately take care not to confuse fancy with the purely passive imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). Fancy is creative.** [(Hegel, 1875, p.281)]

In sum, it turns out that, despite its critique by Romanticism, the Enlightenment's specific attitude toward imagination that evolved in regard to the new comprehension of reality proved to be particularly resilient within Western philosophy. Thus, probing Gombrich's conception in regard to Enlightenment ideas, one may notice that the relation of illusion and art can be interpreted in the direction of such a vision that the real can be comprehended only through its attribution to scientific knowledge. Well-entrenched in the ideas of the Enlightenment, we can stipulate either a strict separation of the subject and the object of knowledge in art, or recognize, in line with Romanticism, that the creation of art is the prerogative of genius and its power of imagination, fantasy,

illusion, and fancy. In the first case, we can classify art on the basis of its relation to scientific research, such as art created from thorough observation, whether it be a *camera obscura*, optical equipment, or any other scientific device. Here it does not matter what kind of art we are talking about, whether it is realism or abstractionism; the only thing that matters is belonging to a scientific approach in work. And in the second case, we can call all other types of art illusions in the sense that they do not correspond to scientific thinking and experiment, relying instead on artistic spontaneity and freedom of taste. Like this, it seems that only in Romanticism and in the voices of Fichte and Novalis can one find a place for artistic creativity and free interpretation in this strictly articulated, resilient movement of thought ignited by the Enlightenment.

Finally, in order to further explore Gombrich's position and complete this long analysis of ontological categories, I turn to the territory of psychoanalysis and more recent debates we have analyzed in the writings of Bottici. As we remember, Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, like Kant, interpreted reality as a substance that exists in accordance with the material conditions of our experience. Yet, this did not deny for the theorists of psychoanalysis the existence of such intangible phenomena as consciousness and, more importantly, the subconscious mind. In the course of this distinction, Bottici (2019, p.28) notices that Freud is confronted with the problem of "originary phantasies," which have no actual real source in life, thus psychoanalytic theory needs to seek a "real" source for them in phylogenesis. In other words, this real in Freudian thinking may be directed to actual material conditions of being, concrete individuals, and even tied to a phantom, as paradoxical as it may sound. As a result, it is not compulsory that the real is the actual world that we face in front of our sensory media, but rather such a real which has the potency to cause reaction and an alteration of the psychic state. In this direction, for Jung, reality is bound with the collective unconscious, where a personal unconscious has gradually come to be common knowledge and thus forms a certain reality, present not in the material form but as a shared space between the psyches of individuals.

Further, for Lacan, as we remember, reality is formed through the process of the so-called mirror phase, which relates to the stages when a child acknowledges themselves as an individual and can recognize their reflection in a mirror. It also leads to the comprehension of the individual and society in a wider scope as when through images people in effect look at themselves. This precise concept justifies the proposition of Lacan [(1999, p 64, p.86)], saying that the image possesses a surplus: it adds something that is not in reality itself. For instance, this surplus of the form gives the infant the feeling of unity and also explains the power of the imaginary domain on a larger scale with regard to society. According to Lacan, our identification with the image forms us as a psychological being where the symbolic and real find complex interactions. Consequently, the real enters our comprehension after image identification and a symbolizing of incoming visual and imaginal information. In other words, the real is imposed onto our relation with image reading and symbol assignment. Here we notice a complete detachment of the real from materiality, which as we have seen was only partial in the Freudian concept. Furthermore, addressing Castoriadis, we may see that this detachment from material factors becomes even more significant. If Freud devoted a large part of his work trying to root psychology predominantly in real factors such as the biological, the infantile seduction, the primal scene, phylogenesis, and others, he did also stipulate the existence of some kind of phantom reality, Castoriadis sees reality as an interaction between the individual and public domains, where both entities are intertwined, interdependent, and build on one another. Following this, for Castoriadis reality is formed through a complex of instituting the social imaginary, which is at the same time instituted by the latter. Thus, reality being present as social institutions, individual beings, history, and cultural artifacts cannot exist without society and each individual is an interactive constitutive unity. So, referencing ancient Athenian society, Castoriadis [(1991, p.145)] observes that without this relationship between an instituted society and the totality of individuals, "this city" is only the remnants of a transformed landscape, the debris of marble and vases, indecipherable inscriptions, and worn-out

statues fished out of the Mediterranean. Thus, according to Castoriadis, the definition of real is the result of dialectics between the instituted and the instituting side of the social imaginary. Hence, in this proposition, reality is inserted into the interaction of the relationship and thus there is no necessity to define the latter in contrast to any ontological categories. This is the reason why Bottici considers that since the relationship between imagination and reality has been inverted, Castoriadis overcame the tension of the necessity to define reality in relation to other ontological matters. For Castoriadis, the social-historical constitutes reality, and not vice versa.

But what does all this debate on theories of psychoanalysis give us in terms of application of these ideas to Gombrich's **Art and Illusion**? First, Gombrich [1984] also operates terms borrowed from psychoanalysis, such as "cognitive processes, whether they take the form of perceiving, thinking, or recalling" [p.22]. Second, he does not distinguish reality as some matter attributed to the area of elevated ideas, symbolic concepts, divine perfection, or purity of scientific non-intrusive research of objectivity. Similarly to the psychoanalytical approach, Gombrich sees the category of reality as a relative unity, taking place in the minds of both viewers and painters, as much as in matter as such, being embodied in the forms of artworks, architecture, or design objects. We may notice here some Freudian principles where an understanding of the perception of paintings with its illusory qualities becomes a prerogative for the interaction of the real tangible material world "out there" with a complex notion of our ego, constituted through cognitive schemata adopted through the evolution of art. Further, Gombrich's artistic schemata correlate with Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. For Jung as much as for Gombrich, this invisible domain of a collective intellectual field forms a quite tangible reality where the language of communication is established and grants the beholder to read artworks and the artist to create ones, relying on the deciphering capacity of the beholder. Thus, exactly this shared invisible entity, according to Gombrich, allowed art to develop into sophisticated forms and laid the foundation for the artistic evolution of European art.

Finally, in regard to Castoriadis's notions, we may find a similar approach in Gombrich's proposition. In particular, he considers artistic schemata as working both ways as much as we may notice in Castoriadis's social domain, which is instituted by individual activity and each individual itself is instituted by the social register in return. We may clearly see this similarity in the example of the sway of schemata presented by scientific illustrations, maps of muscles in anatomies, prints, and plaster casts, which, themselves composed by artistic practice, have shaped the collective discourse and language for future generations of artists and beholders. So, similarly to Castoriadis, the concept of schemata works for Gombrich in both directions: artists constitute artistic knowledge and artistic knowledge constitutes the artist, and in following also the beholder. It is not a surprise, then, that Gombrich [1984, p.132] compares the richness of artistic material collected throughout the centuries to vocabularies which have grown through the ages by absorbing the wisdom and the errors of older dictionaries. And of course, as a result of this circumstance, when a discrepancy arises between new and old experience, these contradictions in the artistic vocabulary do not work for progress but hinder development. Therefore, Gombrich notes that such limitations of schemata, imprisoned in itself, become quite often in art history a stimulus to overcome and create other, more advanced schemata, or schemata offering a wider interpretation of the already apprehended style or genre.

To sum up the comparison of the ideas of the key figures that Bottici discusses in her analysis in connection to Gombrich's concept of illusion, it is worth saying that perhaps the only conceptual limitation still inherent in the psychoanalysis writings to the same extent as for their predecessors, is the necessity to allocate reality to some domain. If Plato and Aristotle allotted it to a heavenly metaphysical sphere of ideas, medieval scholastics attributed it strictly to God and his perfection, the advocates of the Enlightenment made it a prerogative of scientific thinking and pure experiment, then the adherents of psychoanalysis placed it in the conscious and subconscious human mind. Indeed, in the case of metaphysical and theological concepts, there was not enough material

evidence of reality for psychoanalysis, and in relation to the ideas of the Enlightenment, with their reliance on materialism and science armed with facts, it lacked an explanation of some psychological states that were caused by other reasons than material conditions. One might get the impression that psychoanalysis took all the best that could be gleaned from the concepts that preceded it, and created, in turn, a kind of synthesized image. All this makes the psychoanalytic direction more flexible and adaptive in relation to the historical experience provided by the evolution of ontology. But returning to the general description of this lengthy evolution of probing to identify reality and, thus, at the same time, illusions, too, we may arrive at a point where, through the centuries of debates, the border between reality and illusion became significantly blurred. It turns out that by the 20th century, reality had become a much wider term, which absorbed both our tangible world around us and the invisible life of our imagination, memory, mental states, and other formations of the conscious and subconscious. Consequently, it seems that the necessity to identify reality and its opposites has perceptibly passed into the background, as if it has become rather irrelevant what is real and what is not. But still, notwithstanding the fact that psychoanalysis dives into the depths of the subconscious and explores the invisible world, how can we treat this very objectivity in front of our eyes?

Perhaps to good reason, Bottici states that only in Castoriadis's writing may we see a solution to suspend the tension caused by defining reality as such. Referencing his social-historical construction of reality, she notices that the latter in his concept functions as a formation embedded into interaction between individuals and social institutions. In this way, Castoriadis solves the first important tension caused by a necessity to define reality as a starting point for other ontological constructions. By inverting the logic of building reality, according to Bottici, he suggests a clear way to comprehend the latter as a result of the complex interaction of social and individual structures. In support of Bottici's claims, we may notice, while regarding the evolution of thought, that the doctrine of psychoanalysis from Freud evolved in a departure from a materialistically oriented conception

toward a more socially determined one, where the state of our consciousness, imagination, thinking and perception is defined by the complex interaction of many internal and external factors. Thus, from the territory of Freudian discourse, where one may hear the notes of materialistic doctrines that were so popular at the end of the 19th century, we have arrived in a world where Jung's collective unconscious constitutes some other parallel invisible reality that manifests itself in various forms of social activities and global world movements. As a result, here we may acknowledge the transformation of a comprehension of reality and thus of illusion. Of course, the mixing of reality as a prerogative of the tangible world, if we put it in the Enlightenment's terms, with the invisible world of the conscious and subconscious we seriously complicate the distinction of what is illusion and what is reality; nevertheless, the ideas of psychoanalysis opened up possibilities to evaluate various notions by detaching them as much as possible from the philosophical debate of metaphysics, as from scientific experimentation. Hence, by taking into account the conceptual step that was undertaken by Castoriadis in his vision of reality, we may follow to other more contemporary ways to treat Gombrich's notions of reality and the illusions in art.

CHAPTER 3 Deepfakes

S INCE WE WENT through the several stages of analyzing illusions as a phenomenon through the close reading of Gombrich's book, *Art and Illusion* and its comparison with Bottici's work, *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*, dedicated to the questions of critical social theory, it is rather natural to pose the question of where we have arrived now. If we traced the way how illusion was used as a functional tool for creating artworks and common language for reading them and went through the ontological trajectory that describes

alterations in comprehension of imagination as an imaginal and imaginary domain that restructured our social environment, which role do illusions and imagination in its conceptual perspective play in today's reality? Can we find relevance of Gombrich's ideas in our digital age, in a time of "fake realities," "deepfakes," and even "fake news"? Take Artificial Intelligence (AI), which sparked a heated debate and raised public awareness [Paez, 2019] about this new phenomenon thanks to some controversial projects, such as the www.thispersondoesnotexist.com website, which creates pictures of people that do not exist: fake, yet plausible faces [FIG.7]. What kind of illusion is this? Is it what Gombrich suggested while writing his book? Did it all go in the direction Gombrich predicted or was he wrong in some aspects? What are the similarities and differences that these new phenomena bring in regard to Gombrich's comprehension of illusion? As a computational visual art form of illusion, how does it relate to what has been discussed historically? How might this type of illusion have been covered by Gombrich in *Art and Illusion*? Are these kinds of developments a continuation of the predictions offered by Gombrich, or are they tangential to his thoughts? What similarities or differences do these new phenomena bring with regard to Gombrich's comprehension of illusion? What shortcomings or gaps are we now left with? Did he get it right or wrong? We might, perhaps, say that the current situation concerning illusions, imagination, the imaginal, and the imaginary is

somewhat more complicated than in Gombrich's time, since these entire phenomena evolved through an unprecedented development of technology. This, in turn, has had a great impact not only on high art but on the art and media of the everyday, extending to social interactions and even into the political spectrum, where similar algorithms drive social media platforms in the sharing and shaping of social interactions, news, information, and in some cases misinformation. We can name, for example, the controversies witnessed during the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Fraga-Lamas & Fernandez-Carames, 2020, p.54) caused by targeted social media campaigning and the proliferation of often false information (Bayer et al., 2021; Shae et al., 2019). Here I mean not to dwell on the political or media aspects of the issue but rather give regard to the sociotechnical complexities this brings, to reveal how these technologies impact life when they run through societal, institutional, political domains, and art practice, and more generally, how these can manipulate our understanding of the world and place within it.

Indeed, since the time of Gombrich, illusions have undergone many transformations compared to how we see and understand them now, whether we are discussing the art, social, or political fields. Is it possible, as such, to still speak of a connection with Gombrich's original theorizing of illusion in the present situation? Is Gombrich's text still relevant, or do we leave his writings and comprehension as a relic of art history? Can Gombrich's theory of illusion find a further place in this modern technological

FIGURE 7.
Generator of fake portraits.
www.thispersondoesnotexist.com

setting? Where is it relevant or in need of greater articulation and clarity? How do Gombrich's illusions relate to imagination, the imaginal, and the imaginary in this contemporary environment that continually raises questions of the real versus the fake? Can we find an articulation between what Gombrich was saying and current disputes? In order to answer these multiple questions, I will strive to adhere to comparative principles in addressing various writings, encompassing not only books and studies but also specialist commentators on contemporary discourse. Thus, by moving back to the origins of the illusion as a conceptual construct and then forward on to contemporary writings and issues modern technologies such as "new machine learning" bring, I will try to outline the relationships between the historical predecessors and their modern incarnations. The expertise on Gombrich's writings will provide us with a model for comprehending illusion through the many transformations in history, critically reexamining the debate on illusion theory from a historical and modern perspective. Thus, by exploring the context of illusion, its social and ontological dimensions over time, and its prominent place in art, we will try to bridge contemporary image theory and its predecessors in order to better position the phenomenon in today's reality.

      The contemporary world is changing dramatically, modernizing with unprecedented speed. Modern means of communication and the sharing of information restructure life in

every possible aspect. A development-oriented information society creates new challenges for the comprehension of reality, the world, and the individual's place in it. In order to relate this tectonic process shift to the state of the art and to the notion of illusion, I suggest revealing layer by layer the various aspects that this process involves. Firstly, one needs to accept that current technological developments are creating a new framework for understanding the world. It feels like this is potentially restructuring and perhaps even destroying the usual order of things. It is, indeed, no wonder why, when regarding the explosion of new technologies, so many criticisms and concerns are discussed both publicly and academically. There are many writings that dedicate themselves to the danger that digital deception may cause (Fraga-Lamas & Fernandez-Carames, 2020; Fallis, 2020; Wagner & Blewer, 2019). We are witnessing a call to protect our world from interventions of the unknown, the previously unseen, and the unexperienced. Here one can create a lengthy list of new phenomena such as Digital Deception, Cyber Fraud, Online Misinformation, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Variational Autoencoders (VAEs) (Kingma & Welling, 2013), Generative Adversarial Networks (Goodfellow et al., 2014), and others. For example, Fraga-Lamas and Fernandez-Carames (2020) state that:

> The rise of ubiquitous deep fakes, misinform-ation, disinformation, and post-truth, often referred to as fake news, raise concerns over the role of the Internet and social media in modern democratic

societies. Due to its rapid and widespread diffusion, digital deception has not only an individual or societal cost, but it can lead to significant economic losses or to risks to national security. (p. 53)

In addition to considering these phenomena as a potential security threat, whether it is the safety of personal data, the use of online platforms, social networks, paying bills through electronic banking systems, or purchasing products through online stores, we can also recognize a big shift in the perception of art, its social function and, as a result, its value in this digitalized world. It seems we are far beyond the materialistic mode of creating illusions by utilizing knowledge of perspective, color mixture, and shading, if we adhere to Gombrich's vocabulary and look into the depths of art history. Now we are immersed and perhaps even a little lost in a matrix of information, digits, the immaterial, and the virtual. Art can indeed be fully ephemeral, detaching itself from any material form and hence existing somewhere in codes and scripts invisible to the naked eye. Artistic practice has passed beyond mere video, light, or sound installation art, which seem already almost classical genres of art in the context of playful new technology-driven artworks such as, for example, the ***Next Rembrandt Project*** (Schweibenz, 2018), where the goal was to let creative AI dream up new paintings that Rembrandt could have made. Now we do not need even an artist to do work or decide the direction of further machine actions or processing—AI acts itself as a creator

not needing a human guide, let alone a hand. But does the new painting created by an artificial mind without any intrusion of an artist make us think it is really a Rembrandt? Although, of course, one must keep in mind the fact that the programmer, despite the independence of AI, sets certain limits for the actions of the computer. But nevertheless, this and many other questions give rise to the way we discuss the challenges that new technologies bring, exposing structural, ontological, social, political, and cultural issues. How can we treat these new phenomena? Where can we position them in the realm of our conceptual comprehension of being? How do these new features of technology reshape the essence of our existence? Can the historical guide of Gombrich's ideas or Bottici's conceptual structuring help us to orient ourselves within today's reality, complicated by the multitude of deceptions and fakes? These questions need thorough study and attentive analysis, despite the fact that this is an extensive area for research. In some ways, this is overarching, but, nevertheless in this limited section, I will strive to sketch and draw out some conclusion to such vast and global themes of the modern world.

In today's digital environment, the phenomenon of deepfakes seems to be one of the most cutting-edge technologies, questioning and restructuring all possible aspects of our life—from the utilitarian level right up to the artistic, social, political, and even ontological domains. This is why I suggest taking deepfakes as an explicit example

and frame through which to study the related issues brought about by this new phenomenon. As a very current and somewhat loaded theme which touches a wide spectrum of issues, it is worth interrogating it in some detail, trying to comprehend its potential, as well as its threat, from a technical, artistic, and philosophical perspective. Maybe, more importantly, could we see this phenomenon as Gombrich [1984] might; as another "successful experiment [of] the real discovery of appearances" [p.262]? Is it conceptually another anthological rupture if we read it as Bottici might? I believe that even if they are not fully answered, just posing these two conceptual questions may help cast light on the predicament of this technological era, our understanding of reality, illusions, fakes, imagination, and artistic practice. Therefore, in order to unfold this discussion, I propose first to get acquainted with deepfakes as, perhaps, the most advanced technology to date, and then to consider the many qualities and features that they contain. Comprehending their structure and functionality will allow an understanding of where they might be used, and how they may reshape and restructure the ways we perceive art, reality, and illusions. Finally, at the end of this section, we will evaluate these technologically driven phenomena in the same way Gombrich or Bottici might, based on the theories described in the previous chapters.

In essence, deepfakes relate to a new form of media which consists of part deep learning and part fake content. In most cases the term refers to

realistic videos or in some cases realistic still images that are fully generated by computer software. It is necessary to start by explaining that from 2015 on, technological advances gave AI a new capacity: being able to create [de Vries, 2020]. So what does AI in its process of "deep learning" actually do? According to Wagner and Blewer [2019]:

> **Deep learning is the process of a computer system rapidly repeating procedures, identifying patterns of success within those procedures, and being able to generate new meanings from those patterns. In essence, it is a prototype of Artificial Intelligence. It is significant to note that a deepfake is more than just two videos that have been merged together to form one video by a person or group using advanced image-editing software (such as Adobe Premiere). Instead, the creation of deepfakes results from feeding information into a computer and allowing that computer to learn from this corpus over time and generate new content.** [p. 36]

This technology is very similar to how visual effects are applied in Hollywood films, but already with the help of AI. Now it can function without such human intervention as it had just a decade ago. It is enough to simply set the gradation of parameters, and the computer itself will perform the routine work. Originally, visual effects, with which we are familiar through film or television production, referred to virtual or media computer-generated imagery (CGI). Thus, CGI is commonly used to refer to three-dimensional computer graphics for the creation

of characters, scenes, and special effects, where preprogrammed computers assist in manual tasks that the special effects designer performs. AI and Machine Learning (ML) are more advanced technology in this respect. They have introduced the capability to act without significant human input. The computer learns, directs itself, and acts accordingly. Following de Vries [2020, p.2113], in 2013 and 2014, two important inventions gave generative ML the power of creation: Variational Autoencoders (VAEs) [Kingma & Welling, 2013] and Generative Adversarial Networks [Goodfellow et al., 2014]. There is perhaps no need to dive into details of specific functionalities, but in short the breakthrough de Vries references gives an AI model a technological environment and capability to create through constrained variability. This technology is not completely infallible, but nonetheless, the initial outcomes are quite revolutionary, with broad debate over its potential applications, both positive and negative.

Among the most successful examples of such technology is the aforementioned www.thispersondoesnotexist.com website, which presents a random, computer-generated photo of a fictional person each time one enters the web page. The lifelike resemblance to real people is so astonishing, it seems these are just ordinary photographs. Generating this entirety demonstrates the incredible capability of the algorithms and artificial intellect to observe, learn, respond, and create new. It is important to know that these are not copy and paste digital pastiches but newly

created, like these non-existing people, arriving from some parallel universe with unlimited quantities. Visitors can refresh the page each time for a new face, each original and indistinguishable from real ordinary people—the deception is however extraordinary. You cannot help but think they are real; you only know they are not real because the creators of the website say so. Another bright example of the same technology is video applications. A series of videos created by Belgian visual effects specialist Chris Ume are circulating on another social media platform, TikTok. It features Tom Cruise showing off his golf swing and doing magic tricks (NBC2 News, 2021). At first sight, the short videos look legitimate, except that the star of *Mission Impossible* is not real but a deepfake. NBC2 (2021) reports, "The mannerisms, the facial expressions, the famous gleaming smile—it all looks like the Hollywood icon." Initially, the videos fooled people because they look so realistic and superimposing one person's face over another is extremely hard to detect. Only later did the author of these videos share his LinkedIn page and a YouTube video illustrating how the face of a Cruise impersonator was merged with Cruise's real face (FIG.8). Here, it is important to note that a deepfakes is more than just two merged videos forming one.

It should also be distinguished from another technology that is used in most modern visual effects or animation, when it comes to creating a natural-looking animated image, whether an animal, a person, or any moving creature with

FIGURE 8.
UME, C. (2021). Creator of Tom Cruise
deepfakes shares how he made those
viral TikTok videos.

FIGURE 9.
CAMERON, J. (2010). The making of movie *Avatar*
    [HD Video].

facial expressions and anthropomorphic properties. So, for example, to really bring the mythical creatures to life in James Cameron's famous film *Avatar*, first three-dimensional models of these characters were created and then they were animated with the help of actors with their real movements and facial expressions on whom special sensors were installed (FIG.9). Instead, deepfakes can replace one image with another without the need to build the digital model mentioned above and use actors equipped with special devices. Thus, the creation of deepfakes results from feeding information into a computer, allowing that computer to learn from the body of data over time and itself generate new content. This is a crucial difference that significantly reduces, and to some extent almost completely eliminates, the human manual element. So, according to Wagner and Blewer (2019):

> **The information required for deepfakes consists of low-quality cropped images of the faces of two people, processed separately. The computer then creates a comprehensive 3D model of these two people, as well as a mapping of characteristics between the two people's faces. The more time and the more processing speed a computer can utilize to learn from this data, the more developed and realistic the deepfake will be.** (p.36)

Summarizing, we can say that this technology, unlike the already mentioned CGI, avoids the laborious monotony of a human user going through each frame of an individual's face from a variety

of data sources. Instead, specially coded scripts and programs make this kind of work relatively automatic. Hence, upon gathering this data, the computer then begins to work on understanding and recognizing these images without significant human involvement. Over time, by repeatedly running these simple tasks, a model of each person's likeness is created. This allows the production of new images that have never existed but can with surprising validity appear to accurately depict an entity. This complicated process results in an outcome where a computer can take individual frames from a video of a person's face and generate a model corresponding to each facial expression, and then transfer it, using the same analytical technique to a video of another person, making this "face transplant" surprisingly inconspicuous. Talking about the quality of produced synthesized data in the form of deepfake videos, Wagner and Blewer [2019] note that "With a high-quality corpus of data and provided that the object and subject faces are similar (neither or both have facial hair, for example), this 'face swap' transition can appear seamless." [p.36].

The technology of deepfakes or ML is known mostly through image or video editing applications, although it can also be found in various other spheres; for example, it is worth mentioning here a peculiar installation, *Archive Dreaming.* This work created by artist Refik Anadol uses an online library of 1.7 million images, drawings, and other archival content related to

Turkey to train a Creative AI to dream up new archival content as if from "a parallel history" (Miller, 2019, pp. 93–93). Nevertheless, in most cases, deepfakes are inherently associated with video manipulation. For instance, Fraga-Lamas and Fernandez-Carames (2020) insist that "The term 'deepfakes' referred originally to manipulated videos with face-swapping techniques" (p. 54), or Fallis, referencing Floridi (2018), suggests that "Deepfakes are realistic videos created using new machine learning (specifically, deep learning) techniques" (Fallis, 2020, p. 623). All in all, it seems that even though the technology itself does not imply the idea of fraud or deception, it is often associated with negative attitudes in public discourse. For example, according to Cole (2018), deepfakes tend to depict people saying and doing things that they did not actually say or do, which opens up wide possibilities for manipulation and disinformation. To this end, these techniques can be used to create fake videos that are extremely difficult to distinguish from genuine ones. So, Fallis, referencing Chesney and Citron (2019), and Toews (2020), notes that some statements or even actions of politicians, such as former President of the United States Barack Obama, can be and perhaps have been fabricated. Further, he cites Professor of the Digital Ethics Lab at Oxford University, Luciano Floridi, who appeared on France's Tech 24 in 2018 and posed the question, "do we really know what we're watching is real?... Is that really the President of the United States saying what he's saying?" (Fallis,

2020, p.624). Indeed, the concern has been raised that as a result of deepfakes we are heading toward an "infopocalypse" where we cannot tell what is real from what is not (Rothman, 2018; Schwartz, 2018; Warzel, 2018; Toews, 2020). These incredible technical abilities can be used for political deception (fake news), identity scams (Ghahramani, 2019; Harwell, 2019), and cyberbullying (for example by using pornographic deepfakes for revenge or extortion) (Simonite, 2019). For instance, Fraga-Lamas and Fernandez-Carames (2020) warn that deepfakes in the context of digital deception can touch upon matters of public interest such as politics, health, and the environment. Moreover, fake content may manipulate, mislead, or be utilized as unethical persuasion techniques in the form of propaganda or ideology. Concern also comes from the philosophical community; philosophers such as Deborah Johnson, Luciano Floridi, and Regina Rini (2019) have expressed similar concerns to their colleagues' in the social and political spheres.

This exactly raises the question of why this new technology, which is perhaps just another routine improvement occurring time after time in various industries, caused such a stir, strongly shaking public opinion and causing many concerns from multiple sides? How does this automation basically aimed at helping to ease the load of video editorial work face such resistance? In this regard it is worth mentioning here bans on deepfakes in Facebook (Edelman, 2020) or the removal of some apps for creating deepfakes from the Internet due to public

outcry ^(Cole, 2019). How then, to this end, can such an application as Google's AutoAwesome (now simply known as **Assistant**), designed for entertainment purposes, manage to create, according to Wagner and Blewer ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁾, a "***real* photograph**" or, better say, a reality that had never existed "without the knowledge and consent of the author or persons depicted" ^(p.32)? So, technologist James Bridle ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ explains how this new reality emerges by example of a person Smith who:

> **uploaded two** [**photographs**], **to see which his wife preferred. In one, he was smiling, but his wife was not**; **in the other, his wife was smiling, but he was not. From these two images, taken seconds apart, Google's photo-sorting algorithms had conjured a third: a composite in which both subjects were smiling their 'best' ... But in this case, the result was a photograph of a moment that had never happened: a false memory, a rewriting of history.** ^(p.152)

How could we find ourselves even without notice in another "real" that consists of "a false memory" and "a rewriting of history"? It seems that this new phenomenon evolving around deepfakes somehow tears apart our common reality, our unified comprehension of it, and its ontological foundation. It seems to alter some basis of everything we have steadily relied on through the ages and centuries before. Almost paradoxically, the scientific approach and science in general, for a long time the most trustable sphere of human

activity, is perhaps becoming unstable ground, shaking our fragile world. But what exactly does this debated phenomenon do to our comprehension of reality and illusions, especially in regard to art and its social dimensions? What are the important and essential questions it poses? What elemental factors does it undermine? What are the areas of weakness it might reveal?

In order to debate these questions in our context, I suggest, firstly, considering the subject from the position of Gombrich's theoretical findings. As we remember, in his research, he relied on the thesis that illusion served as a method that facilitated the evolution of art in its entirety, starting from the Greeks with their revolutionary approach to naturalism, known as *mimesis*, up to the artistic experiments of the beginning of the 20th century. The most significant functional element of this process of trial and error is artistic schemata, which act as storage of knowledge, being enshrined into the form of a pictorial language of art, which Gombrich attributes to artistic styles. Thus, these artistic schemata, being themselves a common language between the artist and the beholder, educate both parties, allowing a consistent transferal of artistic knowledge through history. In this way, precisely due to the norms of pictorial language, artistic tradition provides a succession and evolution of the styles and art in general. Also, with all the positive qualities with which an artistic schema is endowed, it also functions to a certain extent as a mechanism of the oppression

of creativity. So, it turns out that at some point in art history, satisfactory and undoubted expressive norms through the evolution and progression of the time became outdated, rigid, and regressive. Instead of facilitating new artistic practices, they start to define strict limits of pictorial representation, so that further movement of artistic expression comes to an impasse. As a result, this artistic impasse stimulates an overcoming of the existing schemata and the building of a new one, based on a reaction to the previous, which, as a whole, provides the possibility for the consistent development of art, at least in its European formation. As cited in the first chapter, this sustainable development of art from ancient Greece up to the time of the Impressionists, alluding to the words of Roger Fry, Gombrich [1984] calls "the history of a most successful experiment, the real discovery of appearances" [p.262].

Unfortunately, he does not name any other "successful experiments" which were conducted throughout art evolution; nevertheless, he notes that similar experiments may be different from realistic types of art and operate within other coordinates and depicting language. Exactly here, by describing the disruption of the naturalistic, photographic kind of depiction during the development of the Impressionists, Gombrich sees the transition of one expressive language into another. When one language has been assimilated and learned, it may allow a new language to evolve. Thus, Gombrich perceives the transition from a realistic type of art to an abstract as taking visual

language to a new level, where to comprehend new artistic meaning embedded in the piece of art neither the artist nor beholder needs to rely heavily upon a realistic and photographic kind of appearance. With these capabilities of communicating on a new level of abstraction, both parties do not need to operate within the older visual language. It is exactly in this communicative leap that Gombrich sees the reason for a decline in the academic arts and tradition by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

To sum up, we may note that, with regard to Gombrich's thesis, he did not assume that a realistic type of art or an idea of illusion of the photographic kind would reestablish itself again in art history at a later date. As we now know, although during the 20th century abstract art was widely popular and significantly developed, a realistic type of art also took its part, regardless of the newly learned abstract visual language which would seem to have made the realistic art forms unnecessary. Of course, the debate about the transition of the language of realism to the language of abstraction is not the object of this study, but nevertheless it may be appropriate to mention here Gombrich's rather cool attitude toward abstract art. He saw a dangerous trend in it and believed that experiments are not always justified and the rampant fashion for abstract art does not mean that it is very valuable for the history of art as a whole. In particular, in his essay "The Vogue of Abstract Art" [1978], he points

out that the experiments of the abstract in the context of a historical perspective are too small to fully appreciate their achievements. Apparently, therefore, Gombrich was treated more as a relater of art history than as an analyst of contemporary trends. After all, indeed, the years of his active work just fell on the heyday of abstractionism and expressionism, and it was difficult to evaluate the real contribution of these new trends in view of the inability to consider them from a historical distance.

But let us return to the schemata issue. If we look attentively at the reasons why schemata were needed for so long and why an illusionistic type of art, meaning a photographic kind of depiction of reality "out there," prevailed through the centuries, we will see, according to Gombrich, that it served as an exercise for analyzing reality. Artists tied their canvas, sculpture, or any other artistic medium to the reality "out there," in front of one's eyes, which in turn allowed humans to build a comprehensive functioning connection with it. In this regard, it becomes clear why Gombrich (1984) calls illusion a game "Artistic or not, this is a game which could emerge only as a result of countless trials and errors" (p.22). And here this rather competitive character of entertainment activity results in rather scientific and serious findings, whether we talk about anatomy, geometry, or a theory of perspective.

So, if at first the primitive schematic drawings of antique mosaics, for example, suggested basic relationships or even symbolic

imagery of objects that sometimes even needed a description or caption, which is explicitly illustrated by Gombrich by the example of the same woodcut of a medieval city recurring with different captions as Damascus, Ferrara, Milan, and Mantua in the so-called *Nuremberg Chronicle* as early as in the Renaissance and later, artists could tackle challenging art subjects, freely addressing any motive, such as the genius of Raphael or Rembrandt. Following Gombrich's logic, since the mission of realistic painting, which served to comprehend how the world works, is now completed, the need for this art form is significantly eliminated. Consequently, later forms of art, dealing with inner vision, feelings, and the subconscious require a different language with no need for knowledge of an already learned artistic vocabulary. At some point, it seemed that according to Hegel's prophecy, art, indeed, had "lost genuine truth and life" **(Harries, 1974, p.678)**. This was especially evident in the light of new manifestos that were brought about by multiple new art movements in the early 20th century. In this fashion, Kandinsky **(1912/1968)**, in his theoretical work *On the Problem of Form*, revolutionarily claimed that:

> **The spirit has already absorbed the content of accustomed beauty and finds no new nourishment in it. The form of this accustomed beauty gives the usual delights to the lazy physical eye. The effect of the work gets stuck in the realm of the physical. The spiritual experience becomes impossible. Thus, this beauty often creates a force which does not lead to the spirit, but away from the spirit.** (p.161)

Thus, as one of the representatives of a new type of art, artist and theorist Kandinsky opposed realism for a new abstraction (Harries, 1974, p.691). But the phenomenon of deepfakes might tell us something different. Not only have we not actually refused naturalistic types of visual language but, on the contrary, we brought these even closer and to a higher extreme. The widespread use of new forms of visual deception speaks in favor of the resiliency of the realistic type of visual language rather than its rejection and the use of mystical abstractions for the sake of the new contemporary art. It seems here that Gombrich, perhaps, got it wrong and was mistaken. Instead of a significant decline or even full dissolution of naturalism as an operational medium, it came back even stronger, in a formation where the incredible illusionistic achievements of the past, such as, for example, in the works of *trompe-l'oeil* or *quadrature* seem now to be a basic exercise compared to the realities created by AI in the forms of the visual misinformation of modern days. I would go somewhat further by saying that deepfakes challenge the naturalistic language in the representation of reality even harder than ever. Naturalism or the nature of a realistic type of representation has become not the experience of the past, the road we have traveled along with no need to look back, but a necessary tool for detecting a reality "out there," a place where we can not always trust our naked eyes or our fickle inner senses.

Indeed, even if to sideline the onto-logical dispute on reality and connections with it,

the problem of visual objectivity becomes even more pronounced. We must notice that every time a new form of transfer of information with its "non-interventionist" or "mechanical" objectivity (Daston & Galison, 1992) enters into force, it soon becomes commonplace, open to interpretation and possible manipulation. For example, Kendall Walton (1984, p.251) famously claims that photographs are epistemically superior to handmade drawings because they are "transparent. We see the world through them." A similar opinion has been adhered to by such philosophers as Walton (1984), Cohen and Meskin (2004), Walden (2012), and Cavedon-Taylor (2013). Although Gombrich (1984) himself notes that the "emergence of an art of scientific illustration that sometimes succeeds in packing more correct visual information into the image than even a photograph contains" (p.22), still, we often perceived, and perhaps still perceive to a certain extent, photography as a form of an unadulterated objectivity. As technology advances, our vision is mediated in ever more complicated ways; we see things through telescopes, microscopes, corrective lenses, thermographic cameras, etc. Here photography usually serves as evidence of scientific fact and objective reality, at least in its visual form. In this regard, Walton argues that, "we also literally see the objects and events depicted in photographs" (Fallis, 2020, p.636). If this is correct, the same would seem to apply to videos (Cohen & Meskin 2004, p.207). But it might be suggested that, as a result of deepfakes, we will no longer be able to see through photographs or videos as much as through

any other "less objective" forms of representation. In other words, with every evolutionary step, the instrument that seemingly has the properties of objectivity becomes discriminated against and loses its "non-interventionist" purity—it becomes not so "transparent" anymore; that is, if one adheres to Walton's terminology. Contemporary deception techniques perfectly execute the illusional motive, leaving no place for mistakes or imperfection. This is why the photographs of people from the website www.thispersondoesnotexist.com scare us. We see no imperfections, no mistakes—it is "transparent". Fiction and reality become indistinguishable.

But let us look back to the functionality of illusions in art through its evolution and connect it with the illusional phenomenon of deepfakes. Was illusion indistinguishable from its source then? Can we think of rupture in visual representation in our digital era? Are we speaking about completely different technological and artistic levels of illusion as such, when regarding deepfakes? To put it differently, if some contemporary critics of Gombrich's writings such as Ziska, Wollheim, Hopkins, Lopes, Veldeman, and Tullmann ascribed Gombrich's writings exclusively to the idea of illusion in art as a form of indistinguishability between the object and its depiction—although Gombrich himself did not claim so—were they right in imposing this postulate? Indeed, although many theorists perceived Gombrich's work as an illusion theory of depiction, as we remember, Gombrich himself did not particularly regard his "Story of Art" as such. After all, if we

carefully look at his work, we could acknowledge that the idea of indistinguishability is not as clearly visible in his texts as we would like. But still, we might find some logic here. For instance, Dam Ziska (2018) notes that "According to that theory, what it is for a picture to depict an object is for it to cause its viewer to have an illusion as of seeing the depicted object face-to-face" (p.226). So, it appears that this idea can be exemplified in the equalization, where seeing a depicted object equals seeing an actual object. Consequently, this approximation or amount to an equal sign is a form or manifestation of illusion. Indeed, it appears that many theorists perceived Gombrich's interpretation of illusion in such a way. For instance, the Gombrich's colleague, Ernst Wollheim (1963), holds in regard to his friend's work that "the more naturalistic a painting is, the more closely it approximates to a successful and sustained illusion". Or when we look at truly naturalistic paintings, we are "taking them to be, or seeing them as [...] the objects themselves" (p.26). It seems that this explanation of Gombrich's work is very typical, especially when we list other writers who studied this subject, for example, Wollheim's follower Robert Hopkins (2003), who suggests that:

> **Illusionism is the view that both the content and phenomenology of pictorial experience exactly matches that of a face-to-face visual experience of whatever is depicted. For example, to see a certain kind of dog in a picture is to have an experience with precisely the content and phenomenology of seeing such a dog face-to-face.** (p. 657)

Another of Wollheim's followers, Dominic Lopes [2005], also theoretically proposes that illusion occurs only when "…one sees O in a picture when and only when one's experience as of O when looking at the picture is phenomenally indistinguishable from a face-to-face experience of O" [p.30]. Further, Johan Veldeman [2008] attributes the same view to Gombrich but inclines toward figurative or naturalistic pictures, which follows Wollheim's logic more. In his opinion, Gombrich insists that realistic pictures "deceive" the eye, as it were, and give rise to illusionistic experiences of their subjects. To say that seeing-in is illusionistic is to say that seeing an object in a picture is phenomenally indistinguishable from seeing that object face to face [Veldeman, 2008, p.493]. Finally, addressing a more current account, Katherine Tullmann [2016] also asserts that "According to Gombrich, seeing-in is illusionist in the sense that seeing O in a picture and seeing O face to face are phenomenally indistinguishable" [p.272]. To this end, it seems that all of these entries speak about the phenomenon of viewing the image as experiencing a depicted object, as if face to face. But can we really equate even the most brilliantly painted canvas with the source it depicts? Did and can art create at least to some degree the illusion that deepfakes do?

Perhaps here we can talk only of very limited ranges of art types and, more remarkably, even those equipped with such complex deception techniques that are used in order to fool a beholder and create an illusion. Even in doing so, this effect may vanish into thin air very quickly and a

readjustment of the beholder's sensual apparatus toward unknown objects can take a very small moment of time, so the reality of a painted canvas starts to be present again. We know that the genre of *trompe-l'oeil* was used as a great arsenal of methods to deceive a beholder. It addressed such a multitude of motives and subjects to create an illusion that they are rather lengthy and not worth recalling. It is more important to illustrate the circumstances in which even with such skillful genres aimed to deceive the beholder, illusion as a sustained element was not possible. A good illustration of this notion can be found in the story of *Eidophusikon*—one of the earliest examples of a technology-driven visual entertainment, created by Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg and dating from the early 18th century **(FIG.10)**. At the time it caused great interest and admiration for technology-driven representations of nature: "man was an extraordinary creature, who could create a copy of Nature, to be taken for Nature's self" **(Pyne, 2009, p.298)**. In this project, the stage was used to present a series of illusions designed to mimic natural phenomena, these illusions employing changing light effects to simulate different times of day and various atmospheric conditions. The changing scenes were accompanied by sound effects and by music by Johann Christian Bach, Michael Arne, and Charles Burney, performed on the harpsichord and occasionally accompanied by singing. Although highly valued at the time by prominent painters such as Thomas Gainsborough and Joshua Reynolds,

FIGURE 10.
BURNEY, E. F. (c. 1782). The Eidophusikon showing Satan
arraying his troops on the banks of a fiery lake with
the rising of the Palace of Pandemonium from Milton
[Watercolour on paper, 19.7×27.3 cm].
London: British Museum.

Drawn by P. Bonny

Eidophusikon and its progeny somewhat lost their validity in later decades, replaced by more neutral attitudes. According to Bermingham [(2016)], in 1823 the artist Constable wrote to his friend John Fisher, "It is very pleasing & has great illusion, however, it is without the pale of Art because its object is deception." [(Constable, 1968, IV, p.134)]. Bermingham [(2016)] continues by saying that "by the time Constable was writing, the thrill that eighteenth-century artists had experienced in the presence of illusionistic technologies had diminished. Such illusions were no longer new" [(p.396)]. In the description of this work we can perhaps sense more admiration of a human's creative mind and skillfulness of sophisticated machinery than admiration of the illusion itself, especially when it became worn-out and commonplace.

There is also another example which brightly reveals the fact that illusory moments in artworks last, effectively, for very small moments of time. For this phenomenon to occur, the owners of such deceptive artworks needed special settings for its demonstration. For instance, the elaborate ***View Down a Corridor*** painted by Samuel Van Hoogstraten in 1662 [(FIG.11)] and owned by Thomas Povey, Secretary to the Duke of York and a member of the Royal Society, whose high social position indirectly speaks of the high rank of illusionistic art at that time, offers a particularly revealing illustration of the ironic ways in which such false views might add to the credit of both their makers and their owners. This perspective hidden from sight gave its owner

the opportunity to delight his guests by rapidly opening the door and conjuring up active space where none existed; the quick impression was rather strong. Samuel Pepys, a visitor to Povey's lavishly appointed London home, was so particularly impressed with his picture that he mentioned it twice in his diary, noting, "But above all things I do the most admire his piece of perspective especially, he opening me the closet door and there I saw that there is nothing but only a plain picture hung upon the wall." Thus, Koester et al. **(1999, p.55)** referencing Pepys, assert that in displaying an admirable piece the owner of an illusionistically painted work inevitably conflated his own self-defining performance with that of the artist. Thus, the timing for the demonstration of an illusion is critical. If it lasts a long time, it evaporates. Perhaps, for the purpose of keeping the illusional effect active, the work should be demonstrated quickly; otherwise, the effect is swiftly deconstructed. As we have seen, the author of *Eidophusikon* also adhered to this strategy, by actively changing the scenes of nature, as much as the owner of Samuel Van Hoogstraten's illusionistically painted interior, who revealed the view in a fast motion, so that the painting suggested the real space of "a Corridor."

It seems that illusion, as a phenomenon, can be sustained only if the viewpoint aimed at *trompe-l'oeil* painting is fixed and not revealed for too long a time. Thus, any significant shifting from the designated observation point or too long observation results in the deconstruction

of the effect. These drawbacks of the illusional sensation are clearly seen in the painted ceilings known as **quadrature or di sotto in sù** (meaning "seen from below" or "from below, upward" in Italian). Popular in the Renaissance and later, such visual deception paintings suggested an optically "open" ceiling or dome. Here a significant shift in the observation point causes a spatial distortion and the visual trick becomes weaker. One of the best examples of such deconstruction of an image is the **Dome at Sant'Ignazio** in Rome, created by the Italian Baroque painter Andrea Pozzo in 1685 (FIG.12). When viewed from the correct point, the painted ceiling suggests a great space of richly detailed architectural construction in the form of a dome, but when not occupying the appropriate standpoint the whole illusion collapses, and we are left only with a weird skewed image not aligned with the rest of the interior of the church. Another example of the illusionistic genre in art that is even more sensitive to the position of the viewpoint is **anamorphosis**. If **quadrature** does not require any equipment or device to perceive illusionistic images, then **anamorphosis**, on the contrary, employs a polished metal cylinder, sphere, or other object of complex geometry, which helps to transform a distorted image from a flat picture plane into a readable one on its own volumetric surface (FIG.13). Thus, this specific technique makes **anamorphosis** very sensitive to the shifting of its observation point, because a small offset leads to large errors in the image. Potentially the only way to protect the

phenomenon of illusion and make the standpoint fixed is, in some ways, photography. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the series of works by the Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets, the so-called *Perspective Corrections* (1967–1969) which are examples of "linear" *anamorphoses* (Dibbets, 2004) (FIG.14). He positions incorrectly arranged white lines on the ground of a meadow so that from one fixed point, from where the photograph is taken, all of them become perfect geometrical forms.

By returning to the theoretical entries regarding Gombrich's theory of illusion, or better to say the theory ascribed to him, and taking into account the above viewed examples, one can hardly say that seeing 'O' in a picture or 'O' face to face is indistinguishable for the illusionary mode as Lopes and Tullmann suggest. Moreover, a similar proposition offered by Flint Schier (1986) went even further in complicating the formula, introducing another variable by saying that "One can put the illusion theory in a hypothetical form that goes: S depicts O only if there are circumstances under which the perceiver would mistake S for O" (p.10). It rather seems that these and all the other abovementioned accounts ascribed to Gombrich's theory of illusion suggest eliminating any border between the real object and its depiction. In other words, it is proposed that, hypothetically speaking, for illusion there is no difference between a real object and a depicted one—we perceive both absolutely similarly. But this thesis does not coincide with the examples of illusionistic genres of art provided above. We

FIGURE 11.
VAN HOOCHSTRATEN, S. (1662). *View down a corridor*
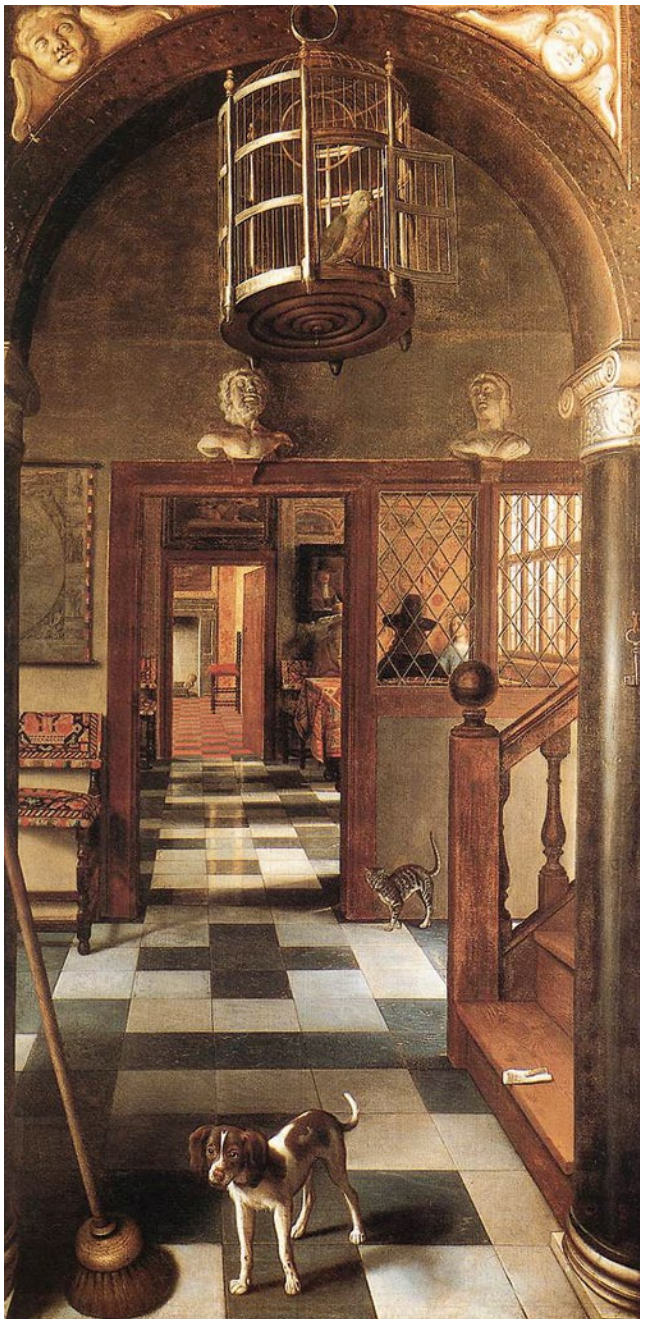[**Oil on panel, 260×140 cm**].
Dyrham: Gloucestershire.

FIGURE 12.
POZZO, A. (1685). The illusionistic
perspective dome at Sant'Ignazio
    [Fresco].
        Rome: Church of Sant'Ignazio.
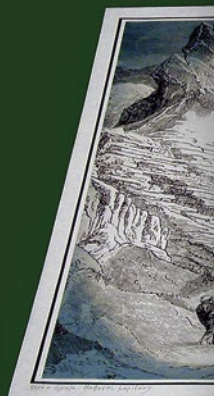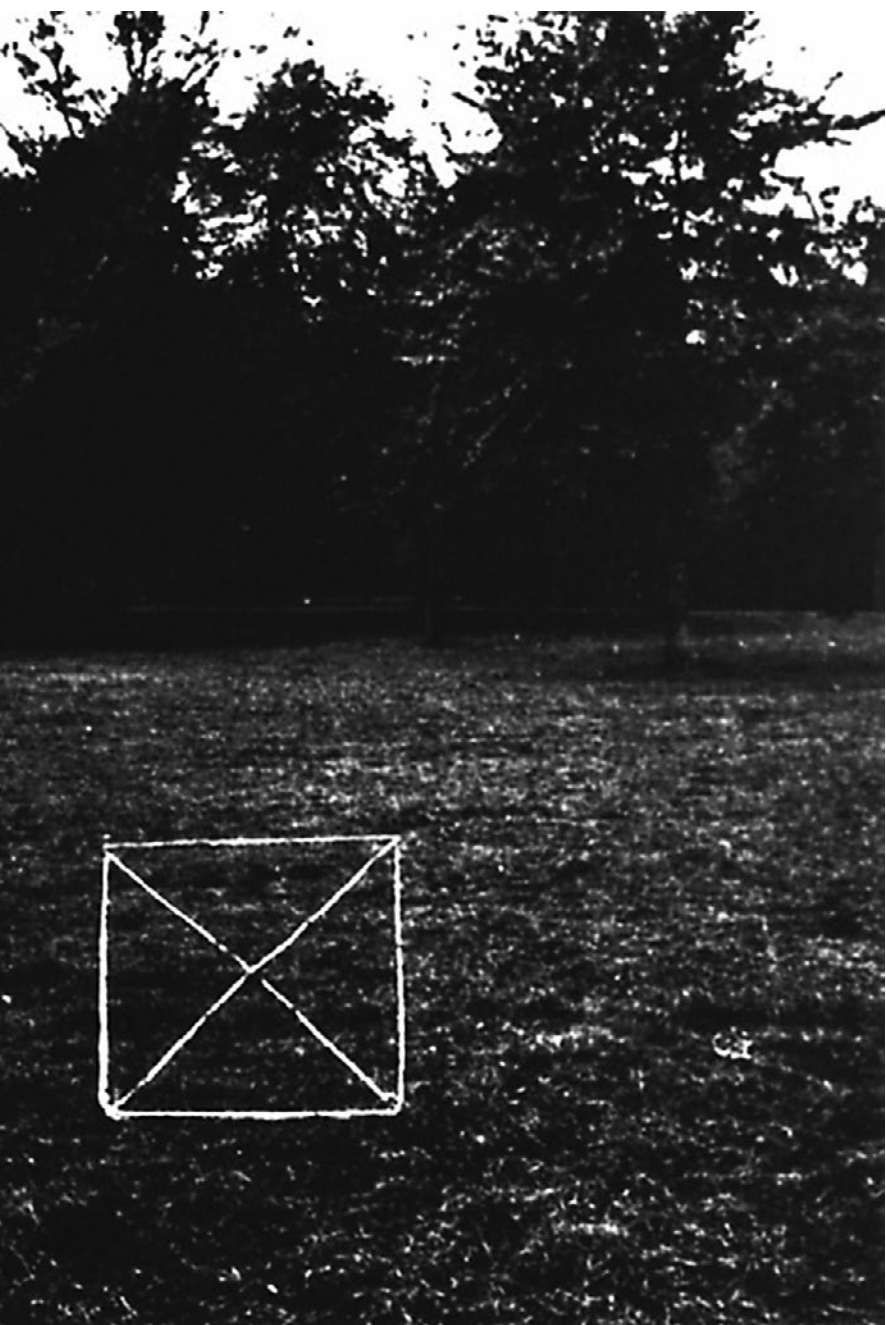
FIGURE 13.
Mirror anamorphosis
    [Photograph].

FIGURE 14.
DIBBETS, J. (1967–1969).
Perspective correction
[Photograph].

have seen that even the most advanced deception technologies fail to sustain the illusion even for the smallest amount of time. The medium or matter from which the work of art is implemented resists a binding together of the depiction and the object depicted. Perhaps we can presume that technically it is possible in very exclusive cases to merge the visual appearance of an object with its duplicate in the form of an artwork. Take for example the hyperrealistic sculptural works of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century employing advanced contemporary technologies such as serigraphy, photomontage, computers, high-resolution photography, special casting techniques, imitating human skin with various materials (including human hair), textures, and colors. Compared to *Eidophusikon*, the technological component is indeed remarkably enriched and strikingly frightening when we view Ronald Mueck's, John De Andrea's, or Carole Feuerman's sculptural works. But can we equal the works of such masters of deceiving the eyes with actual reality itself? Perhaps we cannot, at least in the degree that there is no difference in a comparison between the first and the second.

As noted, assigning the term "illusion" to a corpus or segment of art based on an assessment that one art form is more illusory than another is rather questionable. Otherwise, one would have to accept that any art is an illusion because, to a greater or lesser degree, it depicts objects that can be mistaken for real ones. So, for example, in contrast to the types of art that seek full similarity

with real appearance of the world through the use of sophisticated technologies and artistic craftsmanship, one may also find very modest ways to achieve the effect of illusion in art. In referencing the minimalism of Chinese art, Gombrich [(1984)] suggests that "There are things which ten hundred brushstrokes cannot depict but which can be captured by a few simple strokes if they are right. That is truly giving expression to the invisible." [(pp.165–166)]. Thus, following this logic there is little sense in calling art illusionary or dividing it into subcategories such as mini-illusional, semi-illusional or fully illusional arts. In the majority of cases, any depiction of art aims to build a certain sort of correlation with its source, be it a naturalistic, abstract, or imagined subject. Thus, to equate illusion with any representational manifestation inevitably negates the necessity to introduce the term illusion at all, since we may call any act of perception an illusion, whether we are viewing a depicted object or a real one. Or the other way round, any act of seeing is not an illusion—it is mostly the condition of perception of the object whether it be painted, printed, projected, or present itself. Thus, I want to underscore here that equating illusion with the process of viewing, in effect, leads to an impasse in the discussion of illusionism. In simple terms: following the logic in this direction of thought, which Ziska names "The Indistinguishability Thesis," simply means that everything can be illusion and nothing is, since there is no difference between the first and the second, which suspends any further

debate and leaves us running in circles. Perhaps in such a discussion it is more productive to name an illusion as the moment that creates the sensation already formed in the mind, which occurs before perception of the real source. Gombrich [1984] himself clearly describes the nature of such a phenomenon while talking about the analysis of vision in art:

> **We have frequently seen that these expectations can become so strong that our experience runs ahead of the stimulus situation. Perception, in other words, is a process in which the next phase of what will appear when we test our interpretation is all but anticipated.** [p.243]

It is not a surprise that a direction toward "The Indistinguishability Thesis" unfolded, since Gombrich [1984] himself triggered such an comprehension of illusion as "indistinguishability" by saying that:

> **What Alain's Egyptian boys had to learn before they could create an illusion of reality was not to 'copy what they saw' but to manipulate those ambiguous cues on which we have to rely in stationary vision till their image was indistinguishable from reality. In other words, instead of playing 'rabbit or duck' they had to invent the game of 'canvas or nature', played with a configuration of coloured earth which—at a distance at least—might result in illusion.** [p.22]

It appears, therefore, that it is from here that the understanding of Gombrich's writing as introduction to illusion theory presented itself,

where the merging of instance and depiction occurs. Moreover, by pointing toward "nature" in illusion, this in turn became widely associated with naturalism. This is why Wollheim [1963] claimed that "Gombrich's considered view that, within certain limitations, naturalism is illusion, and that a painting is to be regarded as more naturalistic the more effective it is in creating its illusion" [p.25]. But what I think Gombrich tried to highlight in his passage is that illusion is not the object of artistic activity but rather an instrument of "a secular experiment in the theory of perception," and thus, "illusionist art perhaps deserves attention, even in a period which has discarded it for other modes of expression" [Gombrich, 1984, p.22]. In this way, illusion is seen as a tool for a wider "theory of perception" that goes beyond just an equaling instant and its derivatives, especially in realistic or naturalistic forms. Therefore, the idea of exclusively creating illusions as such can scarcely be seen as the basis of the theory of illusion, since it does not reflect the essence of art in relation to reality or to objectivity.

In this way, the proposition by various theorists to equal instances and depicted objects on the artwork plane is rather questionable. Ziska, who names these suggestions from Wollheim, Hopkins, Lopes, Veldeman, and Tullmann for illusion theory "The Indistinguishability Thesis," also admits the weakness of such thinking. He notes, "After all, we are almost always in a position to tell the difference between seeing an object in a picture and seeing it in real life" [Ziska, 2018, p.226]. Ziska supports this

assumption by reciting the passage from Gombrich where he looks at Jastrow's duck-rabbit, stating that "clearly we do not have the illusion that we are confronted with a 'real' duck or rabbit. The shape on the paper resembles neither animal very closely" (Gombrich, 1984, p.4). From this point, Ziska sees the only possibility for a recovery of such a version of illusion theory in the introduction of the epistemic concept of indistinguishability, which counts the two experiences as indistinguishable if "for all one knows" they are not distinct. According to this version of the illusion theory, a picture depicts an object if it causes one to have an experience which "for all one knows" is not distinct from seeing the depicted object face-to-face." If so, perhaps this is exactly the way it is attributed in the principle of schemata, as suggested by Gombrich, where in the space of representational models artists address a certain visual standard that can be understood and deciphered by both the artist and the beholder. But if this is just a way for Ziska to avoid the conceptual impasse in the idea of indistinguishability as such, then switching this to another discourse seems somewhat unfounded.

What is striking here, in returning to the main question of whether we can separate illusion from reality or not in its artistic and theoretical context, is that a striving to connect the object of art with its source is noted throughout art history. In some cases, the knowledge and experience to implement the desired effect of illusion was lacking, but it was still possible through reliance on the

capacity of the mind to be able to complete the illusion. Take, for example, the Roman frescoes in Pompeii, which suggest perspective effects and elements of *trompe-l'oeil* still life, although not quite as elaborate but still enough to suggest a three-dimensional effect of expanding the space of ancient villas [McKay, 1998]. Or another example from Gombrich's writing, where he alludes to Chinese tradition where "rigid vocabulary ... acts as a selective screen which admits only the features for which schemata exist" [Gombrich, 1984, p.69]. In other words, even a few ink brush strokes or selective features (perhaps sometimes not very correct in the modern understanding of perspective or space relations) was still enough to suggest the direction for thought to develop further and create the sensation of illusion. Of course, with time, the technology of precise depiction improved distinctively, but still, as we have seen with the examples of *Eidophusikon*, or modern illusionistic sculpture, the effect of deception could not be sustained for long. It is exactly at this point that the phenomenon of the deepfakes enters the arena; here this distinction between reality and its interpretation is overcome. We can sustain the illusion for as long as we want. Take for example the web site www.thispersondoesnotexist.com. We literally may regard these people for an extremely long time, and we doubly can detect that what is present in front of our eyes is fiction, illusion, deception. To put it differently, the contemporary world sets an even higher, superior standard of

visual correctness than any other previously known form of artistic illusion. If for the depiction of suggested deception it sufficed to give a direction for the thought, now an illusion can occupy the whole territory of our mind, leaving no place for doubt. It is indeed no wonder that such innovation causes so much anxiety and concern. As Fallis warns in reference to Rothman (2018), Schwartz (2018), Warzel (2018), and Toews (2020), "we are heading toward an 'infopocalypse' where we cannot tell what is real from what is not" (Fallis, 2020, p.624).

To this end, it does not matter if an image is illusion or reality: there becomes no borderline between the two. Thus, as we can see, Ziska, Wollheim, Hopkins, Lopes, Veldeman, and Tullmann misunderstood the Gombrichian form of art interpretation by introducing the "Indistinguishability Thesis", but now it seems that they were inadvertently pointing to a new phenomenon of deepfakes, which has indeed eliminated the distinction between the two polarities. Certainly, we can name multiple features that are still not perfect in the technology of AI and "deep learning" that manipulate images, video, and other forms of data. These are the lack of autonomy of ML and its dependence on the examples and rules configured by the programmer which, in turn, may result in unexpected outputs. A good example to illustrate this notion is the project of *The Library of Babel* (Borges, 1998) where AI generated a gigantic library containing each possible book made out of 25 characters (22 letters, period, comma and space) and containing 410 pages. The library holds an

enormous amount of gibberish and only rarely is any sensible sentence found. (de Vries, 2020, p.2113). Nevertheless, even with the drawbacks of deepfake technology, its illusionistic potency is tremendous. By looking closely at a painting, we may realize the error of perceiving an object as real, but this is not the case with a deepfake photo or video. The fact that deepfake images are not only significantly detached from our reality, as they are non-existent (for example, in the case of fake people), but also disconnected from the artist as the creator of a visual product (the latter only sets the framework for completing the task)—all this makes this phenomenon so jeopardizing in so many ways. It undermines the foundation of a basic sensitive instrument of perception to operate in the world— the eyes. If, to adhere to Gombrich's concept, we were training ourselves to create an illusion, and we were in control of it, now the deepfake has the potential to control its influence on us and indeed its impact on our lives. As Fallis (2020, p.624) states in regard to deepfakes, in some cases potential videos recorded by smartphones have led to politicians losing elections (Konstantinides, 2013), to police officers being fired and even prosecuted (Almukhtar et al., 2018), and, most recently, to mass protests around the world (Stern, 2020).

Moreover, in taking the opposite road and touching slightly upon the ontological perspective of the deepfake, we might admit that only in the frames of phenomenological method suggested and elaborated by Edmund Husserl can one imagine a phenomenon that acts regardless of its origin. As Bottici (2019) puts it with regard to this method:

> **since we do not have the means to determine whether our representations of the world correspond to the world as it is 'in itself' ... , phenomenology chooses to leave this question aside and to examine instead the way in which our consciousness relates to the phenomenological world—independently of whether the latter corresponds to a supposed world in itself or not.** (p. 41)

If this whole idea of the phenomenological method is "to put the question of realism in parentheses" and is applied for the purpose of research in order to ease the tension of ontological ties with other philosophical domains, then with deepfakes this detachment occurs literally. In a similar vein, in Castoriadis's view, every act, both individual and collective, without which society could not survive is impossible outside the social imaginary, where the role of the human faculty is vital. In the case of the deepfake, it acts relatively independently of humans (probably the only involvement of a person will be the very fact of creating frameworks within which the computer will work on its own). Accordingly, this property of deepfakes to function on their own questions the whole structure of the human social, the unique ability of a person to imagine, and, more generally, the degree of control we have over things. As we remember, Bottici described major transformations in the ontological comprehension of imagination by the transition from ancient forms of belief in the transcendent or supernatural to ideas of scientific thinking during

the Enlightenment period. In deepfakes, we witness an unpredictable detachment of phenomena from any ontological ties. They separate the creation from the creator, or at least keep the creator so far removed from the creation that the outputs are not controlled as such, or in the same way. In this world, work of art, news, videos, images, and almost anything may generate themselves. There is no human to whom to appeal, there is no direct authorship of one's creation, only an authorship of the initial start point of the software development, not its output. In other words, the ontological revolt is coming from an unexpected side—from science itself, which was always opposed to transcendental religious territories, because they were the source of initial misinterpretations, lacking argumentation and the characteristics of objectivity. So, developmentally, just when we started believing in digits, scientific facts and mathematics, in the case of the AI and ML that produce the deepfakes, we see a potential under-cutting of this empirical base point. It seems that we ourselves have the potential to destroy the world we are living in, not only through an external nuclear threat, but also from the inside, where we vulnerably expose ourselves to the potential threats of despotism, corruption, and false beliefs formed by digital deception or cyber fraud communicated within the same digital sphere: a sphere where personal information can be stolen and used as a weapon, where manipulation through visual and information deception might start from the

personal level up to communities, countries, and, indeed, globally. It might be that the slow response to the challenges new technology brings causes stalling or disbelief; we are frightened by a lack of understanding and of losing control. Algorithms may suggest, influence, and, more crucially, manipulate us into what to eat, where to work, whom to date, where to go on holidays, etc. We are at a point where our very existence is dependent on technology. Moreover, the global pandemic situation in the 2020s revealed that we are living in a world significantly different from the one we are used to, in which democracy, liberalism, and human freedom have traditionally been postulated. All of a sudden, people have been restricted with "lock-downs" or even "locked in" to countries, towns, apartments, prescribed to behave in certain ways.

Of course one might argue that all this is for the good of the human race as a whole, but what price must we pay for this security? To this end, the pandemic has perhaps shown that previously we were living in rather imaginal, deceptive world that at one moment could turn into some futuristic cyber existence. It is in this regard that I would like to finish my notions by citing the passage from Bottici [(2019)]:

> **Virtual images are not only commodities that can be reproduced on an industrial scale. They have become ongoing processes requiring perpetual maintenance. As a consequence, not only has their authenticity been lost, but the very possibility of determining their status as real or unreal has**

vanished. In the contemporary society of the spectacle, the virtual risks becoming the paradigm for what is most real. (p.118)

In other words, all in all it seems that Gombrich's experiment of the "real discovery of appearances" continues, although he thought otherwise.

CONCLUSION

T HIS STUDY WAS INTENDED to reevaluate the ideas of Ernst Gombrich, expressed in his famous work, *Art and Illusion*, in relation to modernity. As we recall, the author undertook an ambitious and daring idea to present the "The Story of Art" afresh by reading it through the relation of art to illusion. His theoretical proposal allowed him to reveal the evolution of art through an explanatory theory, the so-called "theory of illusion," with which the author is often associated. As indicated at the beginning of the dissertation, the theme of illusionism in the visual arts was indeed popular in

the academic circles of the 1960s to 1980s, but as if revealing the secrets of perception, the riddle of styles, the artistic "mental set" and others, it lost its ground in later debates. However paradoxical it may seem, on the one hand, Gombrich's ideas were not supported by subsequent generations of theorists, and on the other hand, his works are still popular and continue to be republished. Modern writers usually address Gombrich's ideas as a relic of the time and perceive his theory as a static form in need of only minor amendments and refinements, and not as a versatile structure that has a great theoretical potential for illustrating the processes taking place in art today (Hopkins, 2003; Lopes, 2005; Veldeman, 2008; Tullmann, 2016). This raises the question of this gap between the theory, which may seem outdated, and its value for the analysis of modern phenomena. It is this inconsistency that largely motivated this work. Indeed, how could one fill this gap and revisit his ideas as a framework for considering contemporary understandings of illusion? To put it bluntly, could we see, for example, a connection between initial forms of art and the perfection of illusion in deepfakes? Indeed, we have witnessed a great alteration in art as a practice, with more and more new forms of art developing, such as digital installations, virtual reality, interactive sound and video performances, and many others. But is it still possible to draw a line along this transition from a labor art form, involving the skillful craftsmanship of a painter, sculptor, or architect, to an intellectual one, where one must operate not only within the

scale of human capabilities but also go far beyond physical boundaries and build a new reality using technological tools? It seems that this establishment of a relationship is necessary if we are to avoid the risk of losing the understanding of the connection between illusion and reality.

In order to effectively implement the goal of the study to fill this gap, the first part was devoted to gaining an insight into the work of Ernst Gombrich, **Art and Illusion**. Through a close reading of this book, we familiarized ourselves with the major principles and key elements on which the theory of illusion in relation to art is built. We came to the conclusion that Gombrich sees the whole artistic evolution, the main segment of which he dates between ancient Greece and the evolving of the Impressionists, as a permanent process of trial and error, leading to the creation of an understandable language or comprehensible information that unites a beholder and a painter. Thus, the concept of striving to translate reality "out there" into the form of pictorial representation, initially manifested in the Greeks' *mimesis*, led to the emergence of such a complex phenomenon as an artistic schemata. This serves two purposes: firstly, it fulfills the requirement to collect the experience of preceding masters in the form of art education (for example, the study of prints and casts of outstanding classics), and, secondly, it provides a framework for overcoming these preceding visual models by conducting new experiments and trials. To this end, artistic schemata both strengthened

artistic knowledge by preserving it throughout history and at the same time limited artistic experimentation, which in turn stimulated expansion beyond the established canons. Thus, dialectical schemata at each stage of the development of art gave life to new forms of art and its visual language. Therefore, Gombrich [1984] emphasizes the role of the ambiguities of vision, where he states "the paradox that the world can never quite look like a picture, but a picture can look like the world" [p.315]. So, a thorough analysis of Gombrich's texts allowed us to see artistic practices through the prism of the game of 'rabbit or duck?' where one has to construct the visual language in order to bind the visual and objective. Consequently, the notions explored in depth in this chapter informed us why Gombrich calls the history of naturalism in art from the Greeks to the Impressionists perhaps "a most successful experiment [and] the real discovery of appearances" [p.262].

Considering the detailed analysis of Gombrich's thesis, this study continued its work to investigate ontological issues of the question of illusion and reality. In order to establish links between the ideas of Gombrich and the development of philosophical tradition, in the second chapter we analyzed the notions of images, imagination, the imaginal, and the imaginary, proposed in the theoretical work *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* by a representative of new directions in critical theory, Chiara Bottici. Being a modern thinker, Bottici

utilizes current vocabulary, which helps to better understand the place of Gombrich's theorizing in the space of philosophical thought. Besides, she provided us with a constructive analysis of fundamental terms such as reality and objectivity in relation to the paradigm alterations taking place in the history of thought. As a result, we explored the similarities and connections between variations of artistic styles, traditions, and genres of art described by Gombrich, and ontological ruptures in philosophical discourse detected by Bottici. This comparison allowed us to position Gombrich's theory of illusion better in the landscape of ontology and understand the relevance of the connection between such categories as imagination and reality, the tangible and ephemeral. Moreover, through careful reading of Bottici's writings, we became more aware of the reasons why, at some points in history, basic terms have changed so dramatically that they have begun to mean the exact opposite of their original meaning. If, for example, in the scholastic tradition, the term imaginal was associated with God and was used as a synonym for perfection as the most real being, then already during the Enlightenment it was nearly eliminated from the domain of knowledge, as it was perceived as a source of potential disturbance to scientific thinking and research. Thus, considering historical and modern philosophical accounts, we came at the end of the chapter to a point where the question of what is objective and what is illusory seemed indeed relative and debatable.

In the last chapter, the analysis was expanded in order to find a place for Gombrich's ideas in the contemporary setting with regard to modern art that challenges our comprehension of reality and illusion. I strove to find the points where Gombrich was right and foresaw the processes occurring in arts today, and where he was wrong. For this purpose, I used the latest technology known as deepfakes to frame the discussion. Through the description and analysis of AI and ML, which allow the creation of various types of illusory videos and images in the art and social spheres, it has been evidenced that Gombrich's assumption that art from the time of Impressionists would further elaborate a new language, which would not need a realistic type of appearance to communicate visual information, was not fully justified. Despite this, Gombrich was partly right, and indeed, the 20th and 21st centuries became the site of two concepts coexisting simultaneously on the same continuum: the first, dependent on the appearance of the world "out there," which can be attributed to realistic or naturalistic art, and the second, based on the inner essence of the world around us, for example, abstract or non-figurative art, sufficiently freed from the realistic burden. But still, taking a step forward, we found that new forms of art practices, no matter how naturalistic or abstract the latter might be, only further complicated the issue of artistic schemata and visual language. Thus, throughout the third chapter, we saw how even modern forms of art are pushing the boundaries of comprehension of our

already confusing world, where it is difficult to tell what is an objective reality and what is an illusion. In addition, we found that although deepfakes create a complete illusion, they still operate within naturalistic appearances, which led us to suggest that Gombrich's experiment in "real discovery of appearances" has not stopped, but continues in contemporary art. So the artistic language has not completely turned into an abstraction with a play of blank colors inside a non-naturalistic narrative, but, on the contrary, has brought the illusion to an even more realistic perfection than *trompe-l'oeil* or *quadrature*: take, for example, the thispersondoesnotexist.com site, where we can see computer-generated photographs of fictitious people. Indeed, one can hardly vouch for the veracity or falsity of what one actually sees. In this way, the analysis of the phenomenon of deepfakes in relation to all the theoretical work implemented in the previous chapters of this study gave us the opportunity to unite different standpoints in relation to art, reality, and illusion, and perceive contemporary art, not as an "infopocalypse" (Fallis, 2020) or a threat, but rather as a complex territory, offering various opportunities and experiments, which can sometimes be too challenging and jeopardizing.

To summarize, Gombrich indeed offered an interesting system or framework to assess art evolution with regard to illusion. Unlike the traditional approach hinged upon the descriptive method with its categories bound within certain historical periods, geographical locations, and the hierarchy of art genres, the author proposed to

examine it through the prism of illusion, where constant trial and error forms the language of visual communication. Thus liberated from the gravity of evolutionary pattern, Gombrich succeeded to formulate the principles by which one may regard any phenomenon in art, and to give an answer to the "riddle of [artistic] style." Many years have passed since Gombrich's **Art and Illusion** was first published in 1960. The new reality of the world came with the latest discoveries in science and the rapid spread of modern technologies. It seemed that there is no more room for Gombrich's theory, which is now perceived predominantly as a product of its time, and not as a universal apparatus for regarding new phenomena that arise in contemporary art. But with a closer look, we saw through the course of current writing that one may find multiple examples of the viability of "the theory of illusion." Through such a line of thought as the critical theory of Chiara Bottici, we saw that the author speaks of a similar relationship and comparison of the objective and the fictitious as Gombrich does. This has led us to recognize that it is possible to build a bridge between Gombrich's original concept and the current scientific debate. According to this, we may summarize here that Gombrich's ideas have not lost their meaning and relevance but rather have changed their operating terminology and context of application. Then, using the phenomenon known as deepfakes as an example, we tried to consider the concepts of reality and illusion where the distinction between these two notions can be heavily

complicated by technology and the complexity of modern society. Also, utilizing writings of contemporary thinkers with regard to the idea of indistinguishability, we found that Gombrich's idea that visual language with time turns into abstraction deprived of realistic features has not been fully realized. In fact, the example of deepfakes has demonstrated the importance of naturalism as a basis of visual communication and creating a trustable notion of objectivity. Consequently, the question of naturalism and realism was not set aside just because it had fulfilled its historical role in creating a comprehensive language of visual communication. On the contrary, the advancement of technology allowed the creation of impressive visual experiences and started to complicate and deepen the question of reality and illusion. Therefore, one more conclusion can be stated that we have witnessed a collapse between the virtual, the imaginary, and the real, as evidenced by the way images are increasingly crowding out those foundations that were previously considered the prerogative of humankind. It seems that today's reality is constructed by another reality that goes beyond our common comprehension.

Finally, it should be said that the variety of concepts associated with the question of illusion have raised many other questions. How can a person still operate in this world loaded with images, disinformation, and self-generated videos? How can one find steady ground? Where are the lines separating truth from deception, the

objective from the subjective, the essence from the superficial? Perhaps this work was not designed to provide answers to such ultimate questions: however, they inevitably arose by themselves during the course of this thesis. Perhaps these questions may look insignificant and hover somewhere in the transcendental skies of ideas and abstract concepts; still, factual material and historical accounts have revealed to us the seriousness of the problem of visual language. Moreover, the current research has shown us that over the course of the evolution of art, we created visual "circuits" that, in turn, created and continue to create us. Indeed, we have touched a sensitive nerve of knowledge-building and its complicated evolution, where from the first primitive attempts of historic people to depict on canvas an image of the world "out there," we have come to the world of articulated reality, formed by images, videos, and deepfakes, operating almost on their own. It now seems that in order to relate the notion of the visual to reality or illusion, one has to pose a larger question than how we create and perceive works of art. It follows, then, that we are stepping into a wider debate of how we see the world and how this constituted vision influences us in return. Further, this may lead us to agree with Haftmann et al. [1965, p.203] in that imperceptibly we are transforming ourselves from humans of skill (and therefore of limited scale) into humans of concepts and expansion, where self-acting technologies work for our good or bad. Thus, scrutinizing Gombrich's work and its comparison

with the ideas of new directions in critical theory and the controversial phenomenon of deepfakes has helped us to better reevaluate this broad complex process of transition and evolution. In this way, we can conclude here that revisiting Gombrich's ideas in the context of modern debate has brought the question of objectivity and reality to a new level, complicated today by computer-generated images, a manipulated imaginary, and credible illusions, whether this is the territory of social discourse, philosophical debate, or artistic practice. This is why a reevaluation of the theory of illusion is necessary if we are to avoid the risk of losing the understanding of the difference between the illusory and the real. Thus, this work was supposed to be a contribution in this direction.

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240

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List of figures

FIGURE 5. VAN GOGH, V. (1890). *Snow-covered field with a harrow* (after Millet) [Oil on canvas, 72.1×92 cm]. Amsterdam: Vincent van Gogh Foundation. Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c1/Ondergesneeuwd_veld_met_een_eg_%28naar_Millet%29_-_s0175V1962_-_Van_Gogh_Museum.jpg

FIGURE 6. DÜRER, A. (N.D.). *The draughtsman of the lute* [Woodcut, 13×18.2 cm]. New York: The Met Museum. Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9a/Tekenaar_tekent_een_luit%2C_RP-P-OB-1491.jpg

FIGURE 7. GENERATOR OF FAKE PORTRAITS. Retrieved from www.thispersondoesnotexist.com

FIGURE 8. UME, C. (2021). Creator of Tom Cruise deepfakes shares how he made those viral TikTok videos. Retrieved from https://www.cnet.com/news/creator-of-tom-cruise-deepfakes-shares-how-he-made-those-viral-tiktok-videos/

FIGURE 9. CAMERON, J. (2010). The making of movie *Avatar* [HD Video]. Retrieved from https://i.ytimg.com/vi/uW_fBsZ6DZ8/maxresdefault.jpg

FIGURE 10. BURNEY, E. F. (c. 1782). The Eidophusikon showing Satan arraying his troops on the banks of a fiery lake with the rising of the Palace of Pandemonium from Milton [Watercolor on paper, 19.7×27.3 cm]. London: British Museum. Retrieved from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/43c16df8-4349-4a67-981f-efd42ee69f87/ahis12243-fig-0001-m.jpg

FIGURE 11. VAN HOOCHSTRATEN, S. (1662). *View down a corridor* [Oil on panel, 260×140 cm]. Dyrham: Gloucestershire. Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/63/View_of_a_Corridor_1662_Samuel_van_Hoogstraten.jpg/1280px-View_of_a_Corridor_1662_Samuel_van_Hoogstraten.jpg

FIGURE 12. POZZO, A. (1685). The illusionistic perspective dome at Sant'Ignazio [Fresco]. Rome: Church of Sant'Ignazio. Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Andrea_Pozzo_Rome-SantIgnazio-DomeTrompeOeil_Kuppel_1688-94.jpg

FIGURE 13. MIRROR ANAMORPHOSIS [Photograph]. Retrieved from https://the8percent.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Orosz-JulesVerne.jpg

FIGURE 14. DIBBETS, J. (1967-1969). *Perspective correction* [Photograph]. Retrieved from http://socks-studio.com/2016/04/25/perspective-corrections-by-jan-dibbets-1967-1969/

ERNST GOMBRICH is
the author of the famous
work, *Art and Illusion,* which became widely
known in the early 1960s and continues to be reprinted to this day. On the one
hand, readers and modern thinkers are interested in the story of art, told through
its relation with illusion, and on the other hand, they do not use its concepts to
assess the processes occurring in today's social, ontological, and artistic spheres,
especially when the question of artistic skill has been relegated significantly to
the background in the modern debate.

This research re-evaluates Gombrich's **theory
of illusion in relation to the techno-social and political
environment** of today's image-making. It is hoped that detecting
and building connections between the ideas of Gombrich and contemporary
philosophers of mind will allow us to be better equipped to attend to the novel
features of the art world and its practices in a post-computational society.

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