

Michele Di Monte

*Art as second nature. Gombrich in search of the Homo pictor*

One of the aims of Gombrich's work is to accomplish a kind of «natural history of representational arts», rejecting the fallacies and historical relativism of *Kunstwissenschaft* practised by historians of art like Alois Riegl and his followers. Instead, Gombrich's naturalistic project specially draws on the evolutionary epistemology developed by Karl Popper, in order to manage a unified model accounting human picture-making and perception, on the one hand, and the progression of their historic evolution on the other hand. From this point of view, image-making is a functional specialization of our primitive faculties aimed at interacting with the affordances of our environment, and representational artefacts are above all a kind of functional (and fictional) substitute for the objects of a variety of natural and cultural needs. The refinement of richer and richer substitutes is the result of the fundamental, endless process of conjectures and refutations which guides both our knowledge of the real world and artistic representations of the world itself. Nonetheless, an unresolved tension remains in Gombrich's work about the relationship between the aprioristic and inborn endowment of our sensory-perceptual system and the realistic claims of human representational performances.