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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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Reviews of C. Beenfeldt, The Philosophical Background and Scientific Legacy of E. B. Titchener's Psychology. Understanding Introspectionism, Springer 2013; Hyden-Hanscho, Pieper, Stangl (eds.), Cultural exchange and consumption patterns in the Age of Enlightenment: Europe and the Atlantic world, Winkler, 2013; Conforti, Carlino Clericuzio (eds.), Interpretare e curare. Medicina e salute nel Rinascimento, Carocci, 2013.



1 CHRISTIAN BEENFELDT, *The Philosophical Background and Scientific Legacy of E. B. Titchener's Psychology. Understanding Introspectionism*, Berlin: Springer, 2013, XI+74 pp.; e-book: ISBN 978-3-319-00242-2, € 41,64; Softcover: ISBN 978-3-319-00241-5, € 51,99.

To think in an *interdisciplinary* way means to call into question the disciplinary boundaries that have been codified by intellectual traditions that we usually take for granted. In the field of historical research, to carry out investigations in an interdisciplinary spirit amounts to performing an exercise of memory: by going against the grain of contemporary academic specialization, an interdisciplinary approach provides an alternative view of the conceptual frameworks now in vogue, thus bringing to light constellations of concepts and problems that have been almost completely forgotten.

In his *The Philosophical Background and Scientific Legacy of E. B. Titchener's Psychology. Understanding Introspectionism* Beenfeldt undertakes a similar task

concerning the origins of scientific psychology. It is commonly believed, Beenfeldt observes, that psychology became a science when psychologists abandoned armchair reflections on the nature of mind in favor of empirical research. The “well-trodden story about the coming-to-be of modern psychology”—to use Beenfeldt’s expression— identifies 1879 as the year in which scientific psychology eventually succeeded in defining both its subject-matter and its method of inquiry. In that year Wundt founded at the University of Leipzig the world’s first laboratory of psychology, and inaugurated a new way of doing psychological research. From that moment on, psychological investigations were conducted almost exclusively on the basis of the method of introspection.

The most influential defender of that approach was Titchener (1867-1927), a British-born psychologist who, after having studied at Oxford and at Leipzig, moved in 1892 to Cornell University, where he spent the rest of his life training generations of psychology in the new experimental method. However—so the “well-trodden story” goes on – because of the “blatant unreliability of introspective method” introspectionism began to fail, and was rapidly replaced by a new methodology of inquiry centered around the assumption that psychology should confine itself to the study of the behavior of human beings (p. ix). The bankruptcy of introspectionism thus not only marked the end of an important period of the history of American psychology; contextually, it also brought a large disrepute upon the very idea of introspection as a reliable method of psychological research.

Beenfeldt’s aim in *The Philosophical Background and Scientific Legacy of E. B. Titchener’s Psychology* is to show that the standard reconstruction of the history of American psychology—from introspectionism to the cognitive revolution in the ’50s via behaviorism—is a myth. By focusing his attention on the work of Titchener, he attempts—as he explicitly claims—to “reopen and rewrite [...] the first chapter of this history of psychology” (p. x). In order to do that, Beenfeldt warns us not to conflate historical facts and theoretical reasons. The fact that introspectionism had been sharply criticized and eventually abandoned by American psychologists at the outburst of the First World War should not be taken as an evidence of the theoretical unviability of introspection. In reality, what was criticized and eventually abandoned was just Titchener’s version of introspectionism—a particular psychological theory whose proponents (interestingly enough!) never referred to as “introspectionism”.



If the underlying thesis of the book should be condensed in few words, it could be done by saying that it amounts to these two assertions: a) introspectionism and introspection are two different concepts that should be kept separate; and b) the standard category of introspectionism is misleading and, consequently, in need of a substantial revision. Starting with the latter, Beenfeldt is very clear in stressing the historiographical inadequacy of this concept. He points out that introspectionism is not useful as a general interpretative category since it was not elaborated for descriptive and explanatory purposes, but rather to serve polemical ends. The term “introspectionism” was created by behaviorists in order to identify a target against which to direct their criticisms. However, the term had success, and it started to be used as a neutral concept. From such uncritical use many difficulties arise. “The real problem lies in the supposition, widely held today, that introspectionism is the preeminent example in the history of science of a psychological system built on a fundamental commitment to introspection” (p. x).

This estimation—and thus we come to the second point—is confused and inaccurate. What is to be noticed is that introspection is a broader concept than introspectionism since it generally refers to every possible approach to the study of human mind that does not limit itself to the analysis of overt behavior. More precisely, what Beenfeldt wants to suggest is that far from coinciding with introspection, Titchener’s introspectionism was a way of articulating the idea of a direct knowledge of one’s own mental states that did *not* rely, properly speaking, on the idea of introspection.

This is the crux of the matter. The goal of Beenfeldt’s argument is to show that the grounding principle of Titchener’s introspectionism was not the idea of introspection but, rather, the doctrine of the association of ideas. In doing so, Beenfeldt takes a stand against the traditional account of the development of Titchener’s thought. Usually, interpreters have stressed the importance of the influence exerted by Wundt on Titchener. As is well known, Titchener’s was a pupil of Wundt, with whom he worked at the University of Leipzig. According

to the classical view, therefore, Titchener's introspectionism should be traced back to, and put in connection with, Wundt's insistence on introspection as the primary method of psychological research. Beenfeldt does not challenge the importance of what he calls the Wundt-Titchener intellectual relationship. More modestly, he rests content with suggesting that Titchener's original source of inspiration was not Wundt but James Mill and the tradition of British associationism. Beenfeldt put great emphasis on Titchener's own remark that it was Mill's *Analysis of The Phenomena of Human Mind*—which he read in 1888—that made him understand the heuristic fecundity of the analytic method of psychological investigation (p. 43). So, Beenfeldt concludes, Wundt was undoubtedly important for Titchener intellectual formation, but it should always be remembered that the psychological training that he had at Leipzig inserted itself in, and was therefore deeply mediated by, the ideas and principles of British associationism to which he had been exposed while studying at Oxford. Titchener's introspectionism prospered on the soil of British associationism.

As a consequence of the shift of attention from Wundt to Mill, Beenfeldt is allowed to present a different picture of Titchener's work. First of all, contrary to Boring's characterization of Titchener as an Englishman who represented the *German* psychological tradition in America, Beenfeldt argues that he should be better described as an Englishman who represented the genuine *British* tradition (p. 42). From Titchener's theoretical commitment to the central tenets of *British* associationism Beenfeldt draws a momentous conclusion. He formulates it as follows: "it will here be argued that the major philosophical flaw of introspectionism was its utter reliance on key theoretical assumptions inherited from the intellectual tradition of British associationism, assumptions that were upheld in defiance of introspection"(p. x).

The three parts of book articulate this insight. In the first part Beenfeldt sketches very briefly the history of British associationism from its origin (Hobbes, Locke and Hume) to its mature phase (James and John Stuart Mill). He lists four tenets that are distinctive to that tradition of thought: "(1) a reductive decomposition of human mental life into (2) elements that ultimately are (3) sensationistic in nature, and the aim of enquiry was (4) the discovery of the laws of association for human psychology" (p. 20).

In the second part of the book Beenfeldt focuses the attention on the system of introspectionism formulated by Titchener. In these chapters it is shown

in detail the central role that the notion of the association of ideas plays in the economy of Titchener's thought. First of all, Beenfeldt highlights that Titchener rather uncritically held a theory of science according to which the analysis of phenomena was the only true and reliable scientific method. "All science begins with analysis", Titchener wrote, and was therefore led to shape a methodology for psychological research that could be made consistent with the principle of analysis. In the light of these remarks, it is easy for Beenfeldt to point out that Titchener's search for a chemistry of mind was a natural consequence of his philosophical assumptions on the nature of science and scientific enterprise. It is also easy for him to highlight the sensationalistic and reductionist bias of that approach. "Just as the chemist decomposes an apparent simple substance, such as a ice cube, into the elements of hydrogen and oxygen", Beenfeldt remarks, "so too the experimental psychologist seeks to reduce or decompose our complex mental life to its ultimate elementary constituents" (p. 41). This is an issue that deserves particular attention. According to Beenfeldt Titchener met several difficulties in providing a clear definition of what a sensation is, and did not eventually succeed in formulating a sound theory of the nature of mental elements. Indeed, Titchener did not rest satisfied with the classical explanation of sensations as things, static elements that make up the realm of mind. He tried to advance an alternative account based upon the idea of sensations as processes, but he did not seem to go beyond the mere statement that the basic elements of mental life must be dynamic in order to account for the constant process of change that we experience in every moment of our life. All this problems notwithstanding, however, Titchener remained faithful to the associationist program and to the idea that, within an atomistic and sensationalist context, the laws of association are the best theory to explain the mechanism through which conscious states are formed.

In the third part of the book, significantly entitled "The Preeminence of Analysis, Not Introspection", Beenfeldt turns from exposition to criticism. The goal of this final section is to show that the failure of Titchener's introspectionism was not due to external causes, but to its internal contradictions. It is true—Beenfeldt does not mean to deny that—that different paradigms of research were perceived as more "appealing" not simply and not only because of their being less problematic from a theoretical point of view, but also because of the social advantages that they promised to bring about. However, it is also

important to realize the limits of introspectionism, and to acknowledge that many criticisms directed against it were substantially correct. In order to clarify this point Beenfeldt calls the attention to the controversy over the existence of imageless thought. Leaving aside all the technicalities, that debate is relevant (both historically and theoretically) because different psychologists trained in the very same school—the Würzburg psychologists, on one side, and Titchener and his students, on the other—arrived at two opposite conclusions. In both cases, however, the investigations were not vitiated by methodological errors: in both cases, indeed, the results arose “from a *correct employment* of Titchenerian methodology” (p. 60). Beenfeldt takes this theoretical impasse as a sign of a more radical difficulty. His hypothesis is that that controversy revealed the speculative nature of Titchenerian introspectionism. “Like associationism”, he writes, “Titchenerian experimental psychology was, at heart, a speculative rather than an observational endeavor” (p. 70). And then he adds: “Countless ‘observations’ of sorts were made, of course, but these were furnished by experimentalists trained to find only what was, on a priori, theoretical grounds, already assumed to exist” (p. 70).

Far from being an experimental approach to the study of human mind, Titchener’s introspectionism turns out therefore to be a speculative and half-hearted scientific psychology which relies on a set of dogmatic assumptions that were never discussed or critically evaluated. Titchener’s argument can be reconstructed as follows: science is analysis; the goal of psychology is to discover the basic elements of psychological life; introspection is the only method that can reveal the psychological atoms and their laws of association. It should now be evident why Beenfeldt insists on the importance of distinguishing introspection from introspectionism, and why he maintains that the historical decline of the latter does not entail the rejection of the former. The type of introspection that Titchener advocated has little to do with what is commonly referred to with that term. Beenfeldt expresses very clearly this point when he says “[t]he terms ‘experimental introspection,’ ‘scientific introspection,’ and sometimes just plain ‘introspection’ were actually used to denote a Byzantine and heavily theory-laden procedure of ‘psychological analysis’ or regimented ‘analytic attention’ designed to generate data confirming a set of assumptions regarding mental ontology taken over from British associationism, while at the same time shielding those assumptions from disconfirming evidence” (p. 67).

To recapitulate, the ultimate aim of Beenfeldt's *The Philosophical Background and Scientific Legacy of E. B. Titchener's Psychology. Understanding Introspectionism* is to show that the fate of introspection is not intertwined with the fate of introspectionism. In order to achieve this goal—which is, strictly speaking, a theoretical rather than a historiographical goal—Beenfeldt provides an account of Titchener's system of psychology that challenges the traditional interpretations centered around the emphasis on the influence exerted on him by Wundt. The distinctive feature of this new account is the insistence on the philosophical roots of Titchener's introspectionism: according to Beenfeldt, the latter is nothing but a refined form of associationism, and it is from the uncritical adhesion to the principles of British associationism that all its contradictions and shortcomings derive.

Beenfeldt's critical reconstruction of the first period of the history of American psychology is convincing. He actually succeeds in disentangling the various strands that constitute Titchener's introspectionism. He also succeeds in providing a set of criteria in the light of which to identify the problematic aspects that were responsible of its ultimate failure. What is particularly interesting from our point of view is the "provocative" use that Beenfeldt makes of the principle of interdisciplinarity. Usually, the recourse to interdisciplinarity as a principle of historiographical explanation is functional to shed light on neglected or underestimated sources that had a *positive* influence on the particular philosophical or scientific thought under consideration. On the contrary, Beenfeldt's recourse to interdisciplinarity is meant to show that Titchener's early exposure to the philosophical tradition of British associationism was the burden that hindered the development of a truly scientific introspective psychology. In the case of Titchener's introspectionism, Beenfeldt seems to suggest, it would have been better if he had been less interdisciplinary.

Unfortunately, Beenfeldt is not clear on this point. Not only he does not deal with the problems connected to the idea of interdisciplinarity; even more radically, he does not seem to be much interested in the very fact of interdisciplinarity. So, for instance, he does not pay any attention to the intellectual debates that accompanied the process of development of psychology as an experimental science. Yet, a closer analysis of those debate would have revealed a) that the associationist account of mind had an impressive influence on a whole generation of psychologists and philosophers; and b) that that explanatory model exerted

a widespread influence, notwithstanding the fact that, even at *that* time, there was no agreement on the nature of a sensation. In a sense, Titchener's problems were the problems of his generation. So, even though the overall argument is convincing, Beenfeldt's criticism of Titchener's introspectionism seems too harsh. It is simplistic to charge Titchener with relying on an outmoded philosophy of science since in doing so it becomes difficult to appreciate the efforts that were needed to overcome that conception and to formulate a modern and more reliable methodology of psychological research. That achievement was reached by philosophers and psychologists working together in a truly interdisciplinary spirit. So, even if Beenfeldt has shown beyond any reasonable doubt that in some particular cases interdisciplinarity acted as a factor of regress rather than progress, I still believe that the fact of interdisciplinarity should be conceived of as productive of new and original knowledge. Consequently, a mature historiographical approach is to be sensitive to all the different forms of interdisciplinarity with which we can be confronted, without yet abandoning the pretense of discovering the fundamental traits of the underlying constellation of thought that makes the very fact of interdisciplinarity possible, and in the light of which the particular instances of interdisciplinary reflection acquire their meaning.

Roberto Gronda



2 VERONIKA HYDEN-HANSCHO, Renate Pieper, Werner Stangl (eds.), *Cultural exchange and consumption patterns in the Age of Enlightenment: Europe and the Atlantic world*, Bochum: Winkler, 2013, 246 pp.; paperback: ISBN 978-3-89911-195-8, € 36,90; hardback: ISBN 978-3-89911-210-8, € 54,90.

The essays that make up *Cultural Exchange and Consumption Patterns in the Age of Enlightenment: Europe and the Atlantic World* form an attempt to fuse the

concept of cultural transfer to the history of consumption in the Atlantic world of the eighteenth century. By looking at a diverse range of cultural exchanges that took place during that period, the book helps to integrate those processes into an overview of the emerging Atlantic consumer society and the consolidation of a common European cultural space. Thus, the Atlantic is considered to be not only a space of contact and exchange, but also a center of cultural diffusion. Atlantic Europe, the Americas and Africa are dealt with in this book as immediate spaces where the impact of material exchanges leads to cultural adaptations and new forms of social interaction. From this perspective, the aim of the volume is to understand how the increasingly interconnected realities of the Atlantic world influenced one another, paying attention to the impacts and effects of the transfer of culture and consumption patterns on both sides of the Atlantic.

The book, which focuses on the European countries that had the most direct transatlantic connections—such as Spain, France and the Netherlands—but also pays close attention to changes in the material culture of central Europe, has four distinct parts. The first, which has the most markedly methodological approach, aims to explore in greater detail the observations summarised in the *Introduction*, providing a theoretical frame of reference. The essay by Wolfgang Schmale, *Theory and Practices of Cultural Exchange within Europe*, seeks to clarify the theoretical foundations of the concept of 'cultural exchange', highlighting the role played by certain groups, such as Enlightenment thinkers and the Physiocrats (p.22) and identifying in the religious institutions, in the universities, in the academies and in the cities the privileged places of cultural exchange (p. 23). Nevertheless, also because of the brevity of his contribution, the author does not fully achieve his objectives. The article by Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla—*The History of Consumption of Early Modern Europe in a Trans-Atlantic Perspective: Some New Challenges in European Social History*—uses a refined methodological reflection to fill in some of the important gaps left by the *Introduction* regarding the link between cultural transfer and the history of consumption, making more direct use of current historiography on the rise of the consumer society. The author explains convincingly how the exportation of consumption models from Europe to the American colonies is a prime example of a complex process of transfer, reception and adoption, as well as of rejection, hybridisation and cultural opposition. At the same time he shows how in Europe and

the Atlantic world during the eighteenth century it was not so much the laws of the market that imposed particular patterns of consumption or determined demand; rather, the decisive factors were moral, religious, cultural and political interests (pp. 37-38).

The three essays that form the second part deal with the circulation of books and ideas in the Spanish Atlantic world, and thus the book becomes a lens through which to study the material basis of cultural exchange. However, in this section the methodological approach which the *Introduction* spoke of is barely noticeable. In his essay, *New Spain's Imports of Culture from the Southern Netherlands. The Case of Books*, César Manrique Figueiroa, through a solid work on the catalogues of eighteenth-century Mexican libraries, demonstrates how, contrary to what has long been hypothesised, books in Latin, Spanish and French printed in the southern Netherlands were in fact circulated widely in Spain and in the Spanish American colonies throughout the eighteenth century. *Media Control Between Spain and Colonial Mexico at the End of the 18th Century* by Ludolf Pelzaeus examines the impact of the Spanish Inquisition on books and their distribution in the New World—in particular, Mexico—to show how the system of censorship failed utterly to staunch the spread of new European political ideas in the American colonies, especially after the political changes that swept through Spain from 1808 onwards. The essay by José Enrique Covarrubias, *Alexander von Humboldt on Luxury, Consumption and Economic Prosperity: A Contribution to the Study of Cultural Exchange*, focuses on the *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* by the naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt. Through an interdisciplinary approach which studies the history of economic ideas in relation to the socio-economic contexts in which they have arisen, he compares this work to Smith's *Wealth of Nations* to draw attention to how the two authors deemed consumption to be a significant factor in the transformation of societies and economies.

In the third part interest is concentrated on non-Spanish areas of Atlantic exchange of material culture, and not, as in the preceding section, of ideas. Through a study of changes in domestic interiors in Europe, Asia and North America, *Towards a Global Material Culture: Domestic Interiors in the Atlantic and Other Worlds* by Michael North investigates how a 'global' material culture took shape between the seventeenth and eighteenth century. While his claim to having demonstrated a 'global cultural transfer' (p. 88) on this basis seems ex-

cessive, the author carries out interdisciplinary research into a combination of many different sources—from probate inventories to iconography—and thereby provides a greater understanding of the channels used for circulating goods in the Atlantic sphere. *African Plant and Animal Species in 18th-Century Tropical America* by Judith A. Carney enquires into the presence of African crops and plants in eighteenth-century America, giving fresh insight into plantation society by bypassing traditional research on the export of goods produced by slaves to centre attention on how the slaves transferred a part of their material culture to the New World by cultivating crops for their own needs.

In his contribution, *Africans in European and Asian clothes. Dutch Textile Trade in West Africa, 1600–1800*, Henk del Heijer examines the importance of the European textile trade in West Africa. This well-constructed article sheds light on the routes plied in this trade, highlighting important changes introduced between the seventeenth century and the early and late eighteenth. All that is missing is a study of how this exchange impacted on European and African culture at a deeper level and of how the goods were perceived and conceptualised. More cogent from this perspective is the stimulating essay entitled *Material Exchange as Cultural Exchange: The Example of West African Products in Late 17th and Early 18th-Century France* by Jutta Wimpler, who examines the presence of West African products in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By looking at various activities involving transfers—from the use of ostrich feathers in hat manufacture to Arabic rubber used in textile production—Wimpler demonstrates how phenomena long perceived as purely European should in fact be seen as the result of a complicated process of Atlantic cultural assimilation.

The fourth part of the book evaluates the impact of the Atlantic world on the consumption patterns of central Europe. *Beaver Hats, Drugs and Sugar Consumption in Vienna around 1700: France as an Intermediary for Atlantic Products* by Veronika Hyden-Hanscho describes the key intermediary role played by France in the assimilation of Atlantic products in Vienna, explaining in particular how this process, which took place between the American colonies and continental Europe, did not result solely in the formation of new consumption patterns, but also involved the absorption of knowledge and the adoption of technologies used in manufacturing. Irene Fattaciu, shifting the focus from central Europe to Spain, tackles the specific subject of chocolate consumption in

Madrid. Her essay (*Exotic Products, Luxury and New Forms of Sociability: Changing Patterns of Consumption in 18th-Century Madrid*) traces the slow but steady popularisation of this colonial commodity, which, as prices fell, also undermined the hierarchical patterns of consumption imposed by sumptuary laws. Through a truly interdisciplinary approach that spans socio-economic history, the history of mentalities and intellectual history, she also traces the development of a new mindset that increasingly valued a general standard of wellbeing. In her essay, *Chocolate Consumption in Westphalia and Styria during the 18th Century*, Benita Wister analyses the consumption of chocolate in two distinct regional zones of Central Europe: Westphalia and Styria. The comparison of these two carefully selected regions allows a clearer understanding of how localised economic, social and cultural factors had a significant impact on the consumption habits of this particular food. The final contribution is *From Cultural Exchange to Cultural Memory: Spanish American Objects in Spanish and Austrian Households of the Early 18th Century* by Renate Pieper, who, in carrying out a careful study of probate inventories, focuses on the presence of objects from the Spanish American colonies in the households of eighteenth-century Spanish and Austrian noble families.

This collection of essays on the crossroads between Atlantic history, cultural history and the history of consumption, displays an approach that is not only interdisciplinary—or rather one that accommodates an overlap of interests and perspectives from different disciplines—but also trans-disciplinary, in the sense that it entails the sharing of certain theoretical principles. The different contributors to the volume in fact aim to adhere to cultural transfer theory, a concept first brought into focus during the 1980s by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Espagne—Werner, 1987). Criticising the tendency of traditional historiography to conceive national cultures as closed and self-sufficient systems, the two scholars proposed a shift in attention towards moments of transcultural exchange and dialogue. According to the theory of cultural transfer—a concept which the editors of this volume have substituted with that of ‘cultural exchange’ to denote greater interaction and reciprocity—a distinctive constituent of culture is transferred from one cultural context to another, after which a variety of reception and adaptation processes bring about a new interpretation of the original phenomenon. In this way, foreign influences combine to define cultural identity according to a series of actions that goes beyond mere imitation

and foresees a more complex course of cultural transfer, decontextualisation and integration.

This notion of cultural transfer, which sprang from within the sphere of German studies and initially made the European nation states its starting point, requires a determined effort and precipitates not a few problems when applied to the Atlantic world. The authors of this collection have sought to overcome them by adopting an approach—proposed by scholars of cultural history in the wake of the rise of post-colonial studies within historical disciplines and the humanities—that can be defined either as post-colonial history or, as Shalini Randeria put it, as ‘shared histories’ or ‘entangled histories’ (Randeria, 2002). Such an approach emphasises the profound and irreversible structural consequences of the encounter between European and non-European societies caused by colonialism and imperialism. It also highlights the creation of a highly stratified colonial and post-colonial world, identifying the interconnectedness of society and culture as its nucleus. It must be stressed that, compared to now well-established line of enquiry, hitherto focused mainly on the colonies, this book moves the spotlight of research so that attention is placed on the transfers from the colonies to their mother countries, which previously have been less investigated than those moving in the opposite direction. This work thus offers new points to ponder and helps to fill a gap in current historiography.

The backdrop of the book is the point of transition from ‘Atlantic history’ to a ‘new Atlantic history’. This transformation—recorded by such authors as David Armitage (2002), Bernard Bailyn (2011), and Philip Morgan and Nicolas Canny (2011)—indicates a move from a reconstruction tied to the established history of empires and a view of the Atlantic world as an arena for European political and economic competition, to a vision of the Atlantic as a system of ‘negotiated’ and intercultural power relations (Daniels–Kennedy, 2002). This is the theme of one of the most important contributions of this book, which plays down the institutional exercise of power in order to give prominence to the network of contacts between social groups on both sides of the ocean for which political boundaries had less relevance, thus underscoring the importance of the circulation of people, ideas and products and the transmission of patterns of consumption. As a result of this, the Atlantic became a truly intercultural space. Especially problematic is the task of integrating material exchanges with the theories of cultural transfer, which have their roots in the study of the circu-

lation of ideas. Although many definitions of cultural exchange do in fact make reference to material exchanges, at the level of practical research few studies have subjected the question to close examination. The reference in the *Introduction* to the words of Martin Mulsow (Mulsow, 2003), who speculated that cultural transfer necessarily implies a cultural presence mediated through material objects, is not enough to explain why cultural transfer theory was chosen as the vehicle for investigating the material changes that swept through eighteenth-century Europe and the Atlantic world. Moreover, with the exception of the essays by Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla and Jutta Wimpler, it is not made clear which methodology serves as the means of integrating cultural transfer theory with studies of consumption, which anyway are identified almost entirely with the works by Maxine Berg on eighteenth-century Britain. Because of this we lose the richness of stimulating ideas that have come from current historical studies of consumption, in steady growth in recent decades. These are not at all exhausted by devoting attention to how foreign goods influenced the development of technological innovations (Berg, 2004).

Despite the absence of many vital references to existing studies on consumption in the modern age, which would have given the work greater theoretical weight and justified more cogently its methodological approach, on the whole this collection of essays nevertheless constitutes an important contribution to the historiography on the subject. There are two main reasons for this. First, the book presents an essentially comparative approach to the study of transformations in consumption and its intellectual implications in the early modern age. The attention paid to realities thus far insufficiently investigated, like Spain and the Austrian territories, allows us to deepen our understanding of the material changes that impacted on Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But regrettably, in this context, it is necessary to point out the absence of essays on other important countries. As the essay by Benita Wister recognizes (p. 192), one such reality, Italy, played a key role in the circulation within Europe of colonial and Atlantic goods. At the same time, the marginal space reserved for Britain is inadequately justified in the *Introduction*.

The second fundamental merit of the book is its interdisciplinary approach to the study of consumption. Although this approach does not characterise all the essays, it emerges forcefully when the contributions are taken as a whole. By holding together the history of economic and political thought, socio-economic

history, the history of book and the history of mentalities, this collection constitutes a worthy effort to adopt a truly interdisciplinary approach in order to tackle the complex theme of consumption within the Atlantic world.

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3 MARIA CONFORTI, Andrea Carlino, Antonio Clericuzio (eds.), *Interpretare e curare. Medicina e salute nel Rinascimento*, Carocci, Roma, 2013, p. 436; ISBN 978-88-430-6950-7, € 34.

As the editors of this volume recall in their preface, over the past forty years the history of medicine has undergone a process of “professionalization” that has triggered a truly “disciplinary reconfiguration”, matured “also thanks to the contribution of social history and cultural history” (p. 14). One of the main consequences of this reorganization appears to have been, on the one hand, the abandonment of a hagiographic approach focused almost exclusively on a few isolated “heroic” figures of physicians or biologists who brought some innovations in the field of anatomy or physiology; on the other, and together, the expansion of the horizon of interest to contexts and sources previously neglected precisely because they were considered unrelated to the progression of a story teleologically oriented to the emergence of modern and contemporary medicine. This is a dynamic well known to the Anglo-Saxon culture and to those who are careful about his advancements, but which does not seem to have collected due attention in our country, both at the editorial and at the academic level (though contributions of many Italian scholars in this sector of studies are not lacking). As a consequence in Italy, “even today, it is worth remembering, there is still a vision of the history of medicine, written by physicians and aimed at an audience mostly of physicians, which has little or nothing to do with the historical method, and much less with this renewal of the studies” (p. 15). Hence, not without a subtle polemic, the idea of giving to the Italian public a collection of studies that, for the contents and the authors involved, has the breath of the most advanced international researches, but actually, for the reasons mentioned just now, it is quite unusual for our domestic market (indeed some of the texts collected here are translations or adaptations of essays already published in foreign journals or volumes).

However, just because the main purpose of this book is to promote an update of the Italian history of medicine according to disciplinary canons in force beyond the Alps, it is, so to speak, an excellent summary of the most interesting tendencies of contemporary studies, useful for readers of all countries. This is especially true if those readers, like us, are filled with a deep curiosity for works that show a strong interdisciplinary vocation and that therefore develop original methods of investigation. In fact, in selecting the topics covered in the book, the editors consciously did not favor so much the more traditional plan of medical theories, but that of the actual therapeutic activity—i. e. the sphere of the practices, places and health professions, where scholastic medicine very often “contaminates” itself with “low” cultural traditions, in the context of a therapeutic market that, in the early modern age, has become more complicated, together with the constantly changing society that hosts it. This choice is also reflected in the distribution of essays, divided into four sections, two of which are specifically focused on “Places” (Part Two) and “Professions” (Part Three), while the other two, respectively the first and the last, are dedicated to “Traditions” and “Metamorphosis”, to emphasize right from the summary the adoption of a horizontal and synchronic approach to cultural history, willing to discover connections and relationships, sometimes hidden, between the actors of a story often much more intertwined than one can imagine.

The positive effects of this method are not lacking. With regards to the object which is discussed here, an approach of this kind has the advantage of putting clearly into evidence a result that the history of early modern medicine seems to have acquired by now and that gives to historians of science and philosophy: the need of rethinking a category such as “scientific revolution”, “much abused as ill-defined” (p. 12). The essentially homogeneous context within which the events which are discussed in this volume take place presents in fact the contours of a “long Renaissance” (p. 11), approximately ranging from Pietro d’Abano (beginning of 14th century) to Sydenham (end of 17th century). In this period obviously there is no shortage of significant transformations: however, they are not depicted here as dramatic and extraordinary turns, but rather as “the emergence of theoretical and practical alternatives, which are developed in different contexts and conditions that may determine their success as well as their defeat” (p. 11). More than embracing an abstract or ideological “continuistic” thesis by studies focused on phenomena by their nature perhaps more conservative than

others, it seems to us that the more clever essays here collected expound this assumption trying to point out the intricate relations, intellectual and material, within which ideas were forged, circulated and took root or dispersed, in a “topographic” and “reticular” way of investigation of which we emphasized the effectiveness already in a previous review¹. In this way you do not run the risk of flattening the characters on a background that would explain everything by itself, but – on the contrary—you can grasp more accurately the historical and cultural significance also of the main innovations of the Renaissance as an expression of practical projects immersed in time, and not as “immaculate” rootless conceptions (this is for exemple the case of Vesalius, as we shall see shortly).

To avoid being too vague, let us illustrate some articles relevant to our discussion. In his essay “The pharmacy as a place of culture: the ‘spezierie’ of medicine in Italy” (p. 129-142), Filippo de Vivo masterfully portrays the multifunctional nature of the early modern pharmacies, which for this reason were examined not only by historians of medicine, but also by art historians and social historians (not to mention that a couple of cases), according to different perspectives, each of which essential, but none sufficient by itself to render the complex vitality of these places. Everyday (intendi oggiigiorno? Se sì è Nowadays, se intendi in continuazione metterei Day by day o day after day), in effect, in the pharmaceutical operations theoretical knowledge and practical experience hybridize in ways that often escape official medical literature: “in the pharmacies the physical proximity and the collective experimentation allowed the creative encounter between skills and disciplines traditionally divided but related” (p. 136). Moreover, since the apothecaries were holders of a competence that went well beyond the simple production and distribution of medicines, their shops were becoming real places of socialization, which often constituted the perfect environment for the spread of religious heterodoxy (in Venice apothecaries were the professional group most involved in the processes of heresy between 1547 and 1586), as well as of political debate, to an extent no less significant than what happened with the most studied and well known coffeehouses and salons. The major attention paid to these last places is perhaps conditioned by “a vision of

¹ See S. Mammola, Review of M. Bucciattini, M. Camerota, F. Giudice, *Il telescopio di Galileo. Una storia europea*, “Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas”, vol. 1, n. 2 (2012), p. 5 : 9-15.

public opinion as an exclusively bourgeois” (p. 141). But the pharmacies—this is the point made by De Vivo—welcomed customers that represented a much wider and more differentiated social range than that admitted to the more advanced intellectual circles. In this way, their inescapable centrality in the cities of early modern age highlights “the importance of the material reasons for the circulation of ideas and information: aspects that are usually neglected in the works inspired by the Habermasian notion of the public sphere as abstract from the concrete interests of the individual” (p. 141). Such original presentation of the pharmacy “as a place of cultural contamination between different fields and for the benefit of a diverse audience, with varying levels of access to education and institutions” reminds us that disciplines such as medicine, theology, politics, that for a long time we used to distinguish with excessive rigor, “before they result in treatises written or printed that today remain for us, interpenetrate each other in concrete physical places and there animated a dense orality made of discussions and conversations” (p. 142), of which perhaps too often we tend to underestimate the importance.

Something similar also applies to another strategical place in the modern age cities which is the hospital, studied by Maria Conforti (“Theatres of charity. Myths, narratives and political metaphors in Italian hospitals: the cases of Rome and Naples”, p. 111-27). Since hospitals were places of education for the surgeons—who were excluded from the academic world and who here conquered their social and intellectual advancement—they were particularly opened to innovations and trials, sometimes opposed, but not infrequently supported by graduate physicians. As in pharmacies, even in hospitals, in fact, “professions and categories, whose relations were often strained and difficult, were forced to live together and cooperate, to learn from each other, sharing observations and interventions, practices, and institutional pride”(p. 127). This concrete situation also favored the emergence of models that could be spent in the political arena: the hospital, being a stable, well-adjusted institution, opened to multiple functions (therapeutic, scientific, artistic...), could in fact become an emblem for a “well-regulated republic” in the context of the confrontation between the States, who tried to bring under their control those who were often autonomous centers of power, and classes wishing to gain public recognition and that in the hospitals had been able to develop a kind of political self-consciousness, as the case of “Annunziata” hospital in Naples illustrates in a fascinating way, ruled by

an authority of the “popular” party that made it a symbol of good governance against a central power judged inefficient and corrupt, so that at the times of Masaniello “*fare come all’Annunziata*” (“do as in the *Annunziata*”) became one of the slogans of the riots.

About the relationship between medicine and politics, science of physical bodies and science of social bodies, the essay “Political uses of medicine in the early modern period”, in which Silvana D’Alessio explores the use of medical metaphor particularly in the “Tacitists” of the first half of 17th century, is also very interesting. Texts such as the commentary of Pietro Andrea Canoniero to the *Aphorisms* of Hippocrates (1618), structured according to a sequence of propositions in which a teaching at the same time medical and political was condensed in a comparative way (“*Sicut medicus... sic politici*”), do not only reveal the pervasiveness of medicine as an epistemological and ethical model for other fields of knowledge in the early modern age, but require a supplementary effort to interpreters, because nobody can think of dealing with it in an intelligent way according to a one-dimensional view (in this case, only as medical historian or only as historian of political thought). From this view follows an opening of horizons to unusual but stimulating directions of research. Some examples: the expressly historical inquiry of a literary text such as the “Voyages” of Ambroise Paré (Alessandro Pastore, “Storytelling and experience in the autobiography of a Surgeon: The *Voyages* of Ambroise Paré”, p. 211-31), which retrieves the underlying epistemological value of the autobiographical representation of one of the most famous 16th century surgeons; the study of the collections of medical *observationes* as a cognitive tool through which in the European medical culture “a new tendency (...) for the limited, the temporary, the transient” (p. 251) spread, which goes well with other similar processes typical of the early modern period, but also as the “main vehicle for circulation of information within the medical *res publica*” (p. 264) and place of germination of a primitive scientific community and the embryonic idea of shared authorship, phenomena that can not be limited solely to the medical culture (Gianna Pomata, “An archive of cases: *observationes* in early modern medicine”, pp. 249-68).

Perhaps the most interesting and challenging contribution, from a methodological point of view, is that of Andrea Carlino, “Humanistic Anatomy: Andreas Vesalius, the *Inflammati* and the arts of discourse” (p. 77-94), in which the author seeks to overturn the claim of Walter Pagel, according to which,

in terms of scientific development, Humanism would play only the role of a “historical necessity”, by the recovery of unknown texts and their emendation, to emphasize—on the contrary—the close intertwining between humanistic and technical-scientific knowledge in Renaissance Italian culture¹. For this purpose, in the wake of a pioneering study of Ludwig Edelstein², Carlino offers a comprehensive interpretation of the work of Andreas Vesalius, which highlights his strong humanistic imprinting, without which it would not have been conceivable. “Fabrica”—first of all—is a term that Vesalius did not borrow from the medical tradition, but from Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, where it is used only to celebrate the work of nature which operates as a “faber”, that is, as expression of a project. In this sense, this term pertains to the technical language of Architecture, but it is also used by rhetoric teacher Giulio Camillo, who throughout his life tried to formulate the criteria to build a “theater of knowledge” in which the whole knowledge just finds its “architectonic” position. Camillo also established an analogy between eloquence and anatomy as a discipline centered on objects (respectively, the speech and the body) which can be described as systems organized in complex structures that can give rise to multiple variants (not too unlike Sperone Speroni would compare the rules of grammar and syntax to a body private of each individual specificity). On the basis of a documented closeness among these authors (and others, such as Sebastiano Serlio, author of a treatise on architecture), Carlino conjectures a kind of “connivance that is expressed in terms of the intersection and the comparison between different disciplines, justified in the light of the formulation—typical of a culture forged by the *studia humanitatis*—of relationships, whether overt or hidden, between different types of knowledge” (p. 86). This project seems to find expression in the Padua Academy of *Inflammati*, best known for its ambitious program of translating philosophical and scientific works in vernacular. Carlino skillfully illustrates the research for a philosophical tool (*instrumentum*, they say) “common to all disciplines” (p. 91) as a leitmotif of the *Inflammati* (for instance, Benedetto Varchi or Daniele Barbaro), an “euristic model” (p. 91) that could

¹ See Walter Pagel, “Medical humanism: a historical necessity in the era of the Renaissance”, *Essays on the Life and Work of Thomas Linacre*, eds. Francis Maddison, Margaret Pelling, Charles Webster (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977), 375-86.

² Cfr. Ludwig Edelstein, “Andreas Vesalius, the Humanist”, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 14 (1943): 547-561.

unify the different fields of intellectual production. Also Vesalius was member of this group, when he lived in Padua, and shared its mental horizon. Therefore, for him the *Fabrica* is not only an anatomical work but also a methodological text, which is influenced by these discussions, and in which he practices a divisive method expendable even in other fields (it is no coincidence that in the preface of his translation of *Academica* Daniele Barbaro claims to have followed the anatomical method to dissect, analyze and reconstruct the text as if it were a body). This common humanistic heritage can not be dismissed as generic love for the classics. Instead, there is here a conscious epistemological reflection that, not without visionary tones, takes a programmatic interdisciplinary vocation and enriches the picture of a depth almost entirely ignored before. All of this is a stimulating invitation to the historians to identify these hidden connections, refusing to bring their authors to one “closed” tradition (in the case of Vesalius, only to history of anatomy or medicine). But it is also a useful food for thought concerning the problem, not yet resolved, of a productive interaction between humanistic knowledge and scientific knowledge in our times, whose connections were instead identified by these sixteenth-century humanists, teachers of a genuine interdisciplinarity that has little to do with physicians who act as naif historians or with philosophers who sermonize on medicine without any competence.

Simone Mammola



*Andreas Vesalius, De humani corporis fabrica, 1543, l. II,
Quarta musculorum tabula.*