

## Book Reviews

medical texts. It is one of the major resources in measuring the shifts in perception present within systems that claim to represent the “realities” of the world. It is thus not merely of interest to parallel one world of aesthetic objects to another (as Glandien does in his work on Messerschmidt and his influence in contemporary art) or to draw the internal history of the function of photography in medicine (as does Taureck). What one must do is to use this material to reconstruct (as far as is possible) the world seen through these visual paradigms, to lay out the ideology inherent in the visual structures employed, to see with the eyes and the mind of the present the limitations of the past’s perception of its world. All of this is missing from these dissertations. But what is present is the raw material for such work. To be blunt – these students have done the spadework for a much more complicated history of medical iconography which remains to be written.

A model for this new history of medical iconography has appeared recently. Going well beyond the art-internal work of art historians such as Heckscher, William Schupbach has presented a study of one painting, Rembrandt’s anatomy, and has shown how a series of discourses must be unravelled before the painting makes any real sense. First, he explores the formalistic structure of the medical iconography, illustrating on this mechanical level the iconographic nature of the painting. He then asks the basic question of the iconography – what is the underlying ideology which the formalistic presentation wishes to reflect? He finds this ideology in the public nature of medical education and its heavily religious overlay. To do this, he must present a third discourse, that of the “idea” of the body and of anatomy. He shows, in a tour-de-force, that these discourses are not separate, not isolated one from the other; that the aesthetic object has a function in social history, in the public sphere, in the world of ideas, and that each in turn illuminates and is illuminated by the work of art. This does not vitiate the work of art as aesthetic object, but it does destroy the oldest fallacy of both art history and the history of medical iconography – that there is a special and unique place for the aesthetic object in any history of perception. If this special place does exist, it is as a focus for more integrated presentations of the world of art and medicine as part of a social and intellectual history of perception (“images”).

We can see a not-too-subtle movement from the older description studies in the history of medical iconography to a new function for this area in the books under review. On the one hand, one must encourage Prof. Putscher to keep on producing such wonderful, heavily illustrated monographs. They will serve as a major resource for the new histories of medical iconography. On the other hand, one does hope that these dissertations fall into the hands of subtle investigators such as William Schupbach, who will be writing this history.

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THOMAS HAENEL, *Zur Geschichte der Psychiatrie*, Basle, Birkhauser Verlag, 1982, 8vo, pp. 249, illus., SFr. 32.00.

This history of psychiatry is nowadays an over-crowded territory. Sociologists and historians are the most frequent visitors. Whether involved in an anti-psychiatry campaign, or endeavouring to show that social control theory works, or simply looking for an empty academic niche, they all have a different tale to tell. Few, however, care much for psychiatry itself.

The sight of a practising psychiatrist trying his hand at history-writing might be, according to one’s viewpoint, either a welcome change or a cause for consternation. Clinicians, as the rumour goes, are supposed not to write very good history. There is no reason, however, to worry about Dr Haenel’s book, which is clear and uncomplicated. In fact, it is two shorter books put together. The first section deals with the general history of psychiatry; the second with the history of this speciality in Basle. In spite of the fact that Dr Haenel has included a bridging chapter on Swiss psychiatry, the two sections do not mix well together, because the first section is not very good. Its style and brevity are reminiscent of the historical inventories often included in clinical textbooks. The usual string of names is trotted out and the entire tour, from the Greeks to the present, lasts no more than thirty-five pages. Apart from identifying obvious errors, there is not much meat in it for any reviewer to get his teeth into. For example, the date

## Book Reviews

of publication of *Psychopathia sexualis* is 1886 (and not 1866; see p. 27); William Battie had nothing to do with Bethlem Hospital (p. 25); etc. The chapter on Swiss psychiatry that follows finds the author on safer ground and his thumbnail sketch is lively and adequate. Some important references on this topic are missing, however, particularly Lunier's classical paper on 'De l'alienation mentale en Suisse' (1867). The third chapter (on treatments) is again weak, occasionally unfair (e.g., against ECT; p. 54), and sometimes controversial (e.g. on the usefulness of intravenous antidepressants, p. 54).

The second section totally justifies the publication of this book. It offers an original and well-documented account of the contributions of many important figures of Basle psychiatry. The material is organized biographically and the attempts by the author to identify links between his heroes and the ongoing intellectual scene in the rest of Europe are very successful. Some of the psychiatrists discussed (e.g. Wille and Rüdin) are better known to non-Swiss historians than others (e.g. Brunner, Wolff, Staehling, and a constellation of minor figures). Wille was presented in detail by Meyer (1973) but still remains an intriguing figure. Surprisingly, Dr Haenel does not mention Wille's superb paper on *Verwirrtheit* (1888), which is a crucial contribution to the development of the concept of delirium.

Dr Haenel writes in a terse and elegant German, and his book is a pleasure to read. Well-known and less well-known photographs have been interleaved, and misprints have been kept to a minimum. With this work, Haenel has rendered a great service to the psychiatry of his country, and the book should find a rightful place in all specialized libraries.

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DONALD B. TOWER, *Hensing, 1719. An account of the first chemical examination of the brain and the discovery of phosphorus therein*, New York, Raven Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. xvi, 407, illus., \$47.50.

As the author disarmingly admits in his preface, Hensing's name will mean nothing to most historians, while anatomists who identify him with the left superior colic ligament will discover that their eponym belongs to *this* Hensing's son. Johann Thomas Hensing (1683–1726) was, in fact, an Extraordinary Professor of Medicine at the Lutheran University of Giessen from 1717 until 1723, and from then till his early death, Professor of Chemical Philosophy. However, although he practised medicine, being Landphysicus for the Giessen region before taking his academic appointments, his writings were chiefly concerned with chemical, albeit iatrochemical, matters: the preparation of vitriols (sulphates), an investigation of Schwalbach water, and essays rejecting the claims of alchemy. (The *Bibliotheca Chemica* of John Ferguson, whose library is now at the University of Glasgow, is overlooked by Tower as a source of essays he has not been able to examine.) Professor Tower, as an eminent neurochemist himself, probably rightly sees Hensing's chemical examination of the brain as his most remarkable achievement. Presented as a Latin dissertation to the Giessen Medical Faculty in 1719, with Hensing as Chairman and his obscure Swedish student, Daniel Kellander, as silent Respondent, the essay begins with a long historical account of opinions concerning the "fatty" substance of the brain. This is followed by an interesting account of the brain's "analysis by fire", a procedure which Hensing emphasizes was done at his own expense "without spending public funds questionably" and undaunted by the odiferous consequences. Although Boyle is cited frequently, Hensing seems not to have read *The sceptical chymist*, for he concluded that the analysis demonstrated the fourfold elementary nature of matter.

After heating cattle brains with alum in closed vessels for several hours, Hensing found that small portions of the resulting mass spontaneously ignited in air – a phenomenon that Homberg had previously used to identify phosphorus in animal dung. For Hensing, phosphorus constituted the essential "light", "ether", or "fire" stored in the brain's reservoirs. Although both Homberg's and Hensing's alum technique probably released pyrophores rather than elementary phosphorus, Hensing's elegant and clear account stands as a remarkable example of early eighteenth-century analysis. The dissertation closes with a learned account of the discovery of phosphorus by Brand, Kunckel, and their successors.