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TransEuropean Paths

Marina Camboni (ed.): *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Re-Writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939*, Rome 2004 (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 519 pp., 64,00 €).

The idea of establishing an interactive, polyvocal and transnational project mapping the intellectual contribution of women who were active in the early decades of the twentieth century is a fascinating one which deserves ongoing support on all fronts. One of the results of this endeavour is a bulky volume containing the proceedings of the International Conference *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Re-Writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939* held at the University of Macerata, Italy, in March 2002. This publication, which is entirely in English, is combined with a bilingual online hypertextual database and website (<http://reti.unimc.it>) translating the *relational model of the cultural sphere* underpinning the project into a usable and practical tool, creating links among documents and highlighting unsuspected or previously ignored intellectual affinities among a variety of committed writers, artists and art patrons. Indeed, one of the fundamental aims of this enterprise is to reveal the „personal, emotional and cultural affiliations“ at the heart of their activities while recouping previously silenced or forgotten voices. The editor makes this goal very explicit on the opening page of her preface when stressing the need to highlight interlinking „fields of theory and practice in the universes of aesthetic creation as well as in political engagement, economics and social activism“. The main focus overarching these concerns remains, however, the ongoing debate on the culture that generated modernist and avant-garde forms of expression. This culture emanated from a realm of experience explored as a complex and dynamic system of relations along the lines set by Raymond Williams, Juri M. Lotman and Pierre Bourdieu, yet moving beyond the binary opposition of art and social praxis or culture and nature. It is within these theoretical premises that the *relational model of the cultural sphere* has to be understood.

The resulting volume bulges with energy and a wealth of material mapping the work of a number of highly diverse intellectuals – from Dora Marsden and H.D. to Bryher and Catherine Carswell, from Una Marson, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap to Elsa Asenjeff, Irma von Troll-Borostyáni, Leonor Fini and Anita Pittoni, to mention only a few among them. Despite their richly diversified experiences, all of these figures were united in their strive for an autonomous female subjectivity in the open space of modernity which only started to become available to them through journals, salons and other public localities. Challenging deeply rooted social roles and political barriers, they worked for the emergence of a fertile supranational culture encompassing the redefinition of sexual relationships. Among them were combative teachers and intellectuals animated by political passion and ethical commitment, creators of salons and cultural groups as well as publishers challenging the male cultural market.

Often their work was obscured by prevailing cultural practices of the male protagonists of Modernism. An interesting case exemplifying conflicting aims and significant transformations in the cultural history of the early twentieth century is that of Dora Marsden, presented in three subsequent but separate contributions to the volume (by Marina Camboni, Valerio Massimo De Angelis and Silvana Colella respectively). Dora Marsden, who had dared to interrupt Winston Churchill's election speech at an open forum in the Northwestern English town of Southport in 1909, protesting against women's lack of representation in Parliament, was the founder of a short-lived journal with a troubled history, documented by the paradigmatic changes of its title – *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, *The Egoist*. These are significant changes not only because they signal Dora Marsden's transition from her distinct brand of feminism and subsequent attacks on the politics of the Women Social and Political Union, to a more implosive egotism whose ultimate beneficiaries were the men who inherited the journal and its editorship (notably Ezra Pound and his friends), but also because the rise and fall of Dora Marsden's enterprise interlinking with the individualist concerns of the Modernists mark a divide between extreme liberalism and „the collectivist discourse of suffragists, socialists and communists“ (p. 185), as Camboni well observes.

Other contributions to the volume focussing on different women intellectuals across the Atlantic, draw a similar trajectory albeit in the opposite direction. Laura Coltelli, for example, examines the case of Meridel LeSueur, a former student of the American Academy of Dramatic Art who had lived in the anarchist community of Emma Goldman and subsequently became a writer and a member of the Communist Party. Coltelli teases out in her analysis the complexities of an existence verging between the needs of communal participation and the sensibility of a writer who eschewed the exhortative and militant rhetorics of party politics. We learn that LeSueur was capable of blending both the female and gendered concerns of her existence with a subtle search for connections in the outer world – „from fragmentation to union between people and places“ (p. 445), that motherhood, nature and land all intertwined in her distinctly circular and experimental mode of writing underpinned by the fertility myth of Demetra and Persephone. Coltelli illustrates in detail how LeSueur's quest for a personal mode of writing that may describe the growing awareness of her characters, places her at the intersection between modernist experimental forms and the existing school of proletarian realism stressing alienating working conditions. The new emphasis placed by her on solidarity among women involves, however, a revision of this tradition in the American literary context.

Such a revision is further illustrated by Cinzia Biagiotti who discusses the case of Tillie Olsen. Like LeSueur, Olsen was also receptive to ideas and ideologies deriving from Europe while combining the observation of historical occurrences with a keen concern for women's problems and their inner condition.

Further studies highlight the historical affinity between the campaign for the abolition of slavery prior to the American Civil War and the Suffrage movement, whose imaginative strategies to increase representation in the social sphere included effective masquerades interlocking with new forms of communication and the diffusion of advertisements.

On the Continent, significant exchanges took place among the members of the *Verein der Schriftstellerinnen und Künstlerinnen* in Vienna or among the women of the culturally and ethnically turbulent city of Trieste, as Rita Svandriik and Ernesta Pellegrini explain in their papers, while Daniela Rossini examines the impact of the American ‚New Woman‘ – a concept emerging in the U.S. at the turn of the century for someone who sought independence and rejected convention, promptly translated by illustrators and photographers into a popular image – and the ensuing iconography advertised during World War I on Italian society.

It is virtually impossible to offer an adequate description of the work presented in this volume which is also equipped with a wealth of fine illustrations documenting the crosscultural and fertile dynamism of this new cultural history. Its contributors have opted for a „sheaf of intertwined historical possibilities“ (p. 6) that may highlight the emergence of a new subjectivity, both prismatic and relational, across a richly diversified cultural field. What can be said, however, is that such a project is worthwhile and deserves to be translated into further interlinking exchanges so as to widen the scope and effectiveness of its aims in a truly transnational context.

Stefanie Duttweiler

Wissen über Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit – Eine historische Rekonstruktion

Catherine Bosshart-Pfluger/Dominique Grisard/Christina Späti (Hrsg.): *Geschlecht und Wissen – Genre et Savoir – Gender and Knowledge. Beiträge der 10. Schweizerischen Historikerinnentagung, Zürich 2005* (Chronos, 432 S., 32,00 €).

Dieser von Catherine Bosshart-Pfluger, Dominique Grisard und Christina Späti herausgegebene Sammelband dokumentiert in 31 Beiträgen die 10. Schweizerische Historikerinnentagung 2002 in Freiburg/Schweiz. Diese Tagung hatte es sich zur Aufgabe gemacht, die komplexen historischen Prozesse, in denen Wissen über Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit hergestellt werden, zu rekonstruieren.

Um es gleich vorweg zu nehmen: Ein großer Verdienst dieses Buches ist es, aktuelle Forschungskonzepte materialreich unterfüttert und dabei die politischen Implikationen der (Geschlechter-)Forschung nicht aus den Augen gelassen zu haben. Aus soziologischer Sicht wäre allerdings eine pointiertere theoretische Klärung wünschenswert gewesen.

Das Buch ist in drei Abschnitte unterteilt, die alle den Zusammenhang von Geschlecht, Wissen und Wissenschaft ausloten und dabei jeweils ein aktuelles Paradigma der Forschung adressieren. Diese Paradigmen werden nach einem Gang durch die feministische Wissenschaftskritik in der Einleitung kurz vorgestellt. Doch gerade hier offenbart sich die Schwäche des Buches: Die Einführung in die theoretischen Konzepte bleibt zu kursorisch und wird nur sehr oberflächlich mit den jeweiligen Beiträgen ins Verhältnis gesetzt.