# GATHERED EMOTIONS. THE MEDICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF PAOLO MANTEGAZZA AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ABY WARBURG

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In the nineteenth century the study of man's emotional nature passed from the domain of theology to that of science.[1] The emerging disciplines of Anthropology, Physiology, Psychology, Anthropometry, and Ethnography concerned themselves with collecting data, measurements, images, and artefacts so as to develop models and instruments for the analysis of emotions. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the term 'emotion' began to circulate in the history of Western thought and immediately became popular, subsuming two distinct notions: affects and passions. The study of the passions, conducted from the classical era to the Age of Enlightenment by philosophers, artists, and doctors, was presented as a theoretical prerequisite to a creationist vision of the world and of human beings, and was linked to a constellation of terms that oriented its intentions, objectives, and epistemic cornerstones. Conscience, sin, grace, spirit, will, appetites: these are just some of the terms used to discuss affective and emotional states. Emotion on the other hand links its history to a range of completely different notions: laws, observation, evolution, organism, brain, expressions. Its investigation presupposes a progressive mistrust in the Christian explanation of the world and accords with a conception of the human being in which the body is understood as a product of nature, which therefore follows the functioning of natural laws, mechanisms and rules. The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*[2] joined a brief series of texts that looked at mimic expression in scientific terms: authors such as Charles Bell, Theodor Piderit and Guillaume B.A. Duchenne were no longer interested in the social or communicative function of the face and body, a legacy of physiognomic pseudoscience. Rather, they looked at the physical processes and physiological changes that govern the emergence of expression. Part of this panorama of studies was the research of the physician-anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910), whose analyses of mimicry and gesturality made as much use of anthropological measurements, experiments in physiology and the collection of ethnographic data as of a collection of images, artefacts and photographs, now conserved in the archive of the Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia at the University of Florence. Mantegazza's studies reflect the cultural milieu of the Tuscan capital at that particular historical moment. It was a city engaged in safeguarding and enhancing its art-historical patrimony, and which from 1865 to 1895 underwent the so-called *Risanamento di Firenze* (Urban Renewal of Florence):[3] a period of drastic modifications of the city's urban fabric, carried out in parallel with the patient work of documentation and collecting remnants of the past, which then ended up in the various city museums.


**Fig. 1.** Raffaele Re, 'Mimic Alphabet,' n. 1338, 'La stoltezza' (Stupidity), terracotta, 14.5 × 7.2 × 5.7 cm. Florence, Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, Archivio Mantegazza (mag. 1, 28, scatola 2,1).

The correspondence between Charles Darwin and Paolo Mantegazza[4] documents the authors' common approach to the theme of emotional expression. In this context, the British naturalist sent his 1872 book to Florence, having already familiarised himself with the research conducted by the Italian physician-anthropologist through his work on physiology and his photographic documentation. In Cambridge there is a copy of one of Mantegazza's works on mimicry that appeared most promising when it was published, *L'Atlante del dolore* (The Atlas of Pain),[5] an iconographic compendium on the study of the physiology of pain.[6] In this project of Mantegazza's – composed of 27 plates with photographs of works of art and of experiments on the mimicry of pain – we find the double register in which the entire investigation of emotions and their expression would be articulated: the medical gaze, interested in systematising and classifying as much data as possible on the physiology of pain, intersecting with the anthropological gaze, sensitive to the socio-cultural differences that affect the variability of mimicry. In this type of research visual evidence assumes a central role, becoming a heuristic instrument capable not only of revealing new perspectives but also of corroborating or discrediting the hypotheses that emerged from scientific experiments. Photographic reproduction of the major works in the Florentine museum collections made available to Mantegazza a vast repertory of images, which thus became part of a body of studies focussed on photographs of scientific experiments – one thinks of the work of Duchenne – or on anatomical drawings – such as those collected in the treatises of Bell and Piderit. The cultural substrate of Florence would thus play a role in orienting instruments and investigative methods relating to mimicry, allowing Mantegazza to make use of a rich corpus of photographs, mostly reproductions of works of art conserved in the Florentine museums, and mostly from the celebrated photographic studio of Brogi.


**Fig. 2.** Paolo Mantegazza, *Atlante dell'espressione del dolore*. Florence: Giacomo Brogi fotografo editore, 1876, plate IX.

The theoretical hypothesis underpinning Mantegazza's studies developed from the idea that mimic expressions are culturally determined and manifested through specific vectors: the influence of the environment on the organism, variation in imitation based on the age and gender of the individual, the reiteration of habitual gestures such as those dictated by one's profession. These parameters articulate the variability of expression and determine how it is made manifest. His book *Fisionomia e mimica* (Physiognomy and Facial Expression)[7] presents this theory. The volume was acquired by Aby Warburg during his stay in Florence. Thus the book became part of the collection of the Warburg Institute,[8] alongside texts by Darwin and Piderit, in accordance with the rule of the 'good neighbour' by which Warburg organised his famous library.

The study of the emotional dimension of human beings enabled Mantegazza to investigate the possibilities inherent in visual instruments: photography, museum collections and the artefacts gathered during numerous ethnographic expeditions would become, in the hands of the author, means to study, describe and construct analytical models for the study of the human condition, capable of embracing the complexity of the emerging scientific disciplines.

With this in mind we should interpret one of Mantegazza's most interesting and least known projects: the Psychological Museum.[9] Opened in 1890, it was active for twenty years within the anthropological museum he founded. This peculiar collection highlighted the need "to see a whole museum of ethnography arranged in psychic order [...] since the same things arranged in a different way would speak differently to our thoughts."[10]

With the aim of providing as homogeneous and unified a vision as possible of the whole human being, the nucleus of the museum collection was not subdivided according to geographic or ethnographic criteria, but according to the polarities of human 'vices and virtues.' Lust, hatred, love, vanity, cruelty – subjects dear to Mantegazza and the objects of numerous publications – found their concrete material expression in this space. The project was shunned from the beginning by the Florentine academic community, so much so that it came to an end when its creator died in 1910. The artefacts were sold, confined in the display cases of the anthropological museum or locked up in the archives, where they remain today.

Among the materials that made up the collection, an interesting forgotten project emerged from the archive boxes. It documents a series of small plastic works called 'Mimic Alphabet,' conceived by Mantegazza and executed by the Pavia sculptor Raffaele Re. Seventy small terracotta busts, 14cm high, were intended to represent the variability of mimic expression according to the parameters identified by Mantegazza: the mimicry of the professions (greengrocer, peasant, scientist, beguine); mimicry according to age (infancy, youth, middle age, old age); according to emotion (amusement, anger, sorrow); and lastly according to sensory perception (heat, cold, foul taste, looking at the sun). Of the seventy busts in the original collection, only 23 have survived; the whereabouts of the rest are unknown. It is therefore difficult to draw firm conclusions about the final intended use of these small sculptures, their possible placement inside the museum or the author's purpose. However, thanks to the archival material it is possible to reach some conclusions about this part of Mantegazza's studies.

In the *Atlante del dolore* the focus seems to be on the presentation of a series of schemata, precise iconographic formulas capable of conveying behaviours, feelings, virtues and manners of social living; in the 'Mimic Alphabet' project, on the other hand, we discern the desire to compose a sculptural atlas capable of showing how habit sediments itself in bodily mimicry. To what extent is the body iconic and an expression of specific states of being? How do temperament, age, environment, and social conventions determine the appearance of my face, my body, my posture?

These small sculptures recall the monumental sculptural project on facial expressions by Messerschmidt, although Mantegazza's study presents many more points of contact with the work of Warburg: for both authors the study of mimicry is the point of departure for understanding how the iconic dimension of the body is the index of a precise 'psychology of an epoch.' Both are interested in the variability of expression and, in the research of both, iconographic study of works of art, undertaken through photographs, allows the authors to formulate new models of investigation and new research perspectives. It is interesting to note how Warburg started from History of Art and came to the study of Medicine and Biology to understand the origin of *Pathosformeln* and how, according to a complementary and inverse path, Mantegazza started, in his analysis of feelings, from studies of experiments in Physiology, Chemistry and Medicine and then moved on to the analysis and use of works of art, museum collections and sculptures to draw "pictures of human nature,"[11] capable of embracing immense complexity. Alongside Warburg's research, the investigations of Mantegazza appear all the more important among the studies of the period, bearing witness to a happy encounter between heterodox methodologies and eminently visual instruments of investigation.

[1] Dixon 2009.
[2] Darwin (1872) 2014.
[3] Bargellini 1998.
[4] Bigoni, Defrance 2014.
[5] Mantegazza 1876.
[6] Mantegazza 1880.
[7] Mantegazza 1881.
[8] Murano 2016; Murano 2017.
[9] Pardini 1992, pp. 137-184.
[10] Mantegazza 1886, p. 434.
[11] Mantegazza 1871.