

## Editor's note

One of the catchwords most insistently employed by the editors of our journal is interdisciplinary. This latest issue will most certainly convince our readers that the term is not just an empty principle — in the frontier zone where we find ourselves today, it is an inevitability.

A philosopher and a mathematician who have made significant theoretical contributions to risk assessment and management, to the fledgling area of ecological economics, and to the more traditional field of epistemology open the issue with a thought-provoking article on what they call post-normal science. According to the authors, post-normal science is a sounder approach to environmental-related issues since the latter differ from more traditional scientific questions not only in scale and urgency but also in their degree of inherent uncertainty and in the controversies inherent to today's events and policies. Both analytical and propositional, the article does not contest scientific knowledge or academic expertise within their legitimate contexts but defends what has already become a tendency: the expansion of peer communities in order to engage new social actors in quality control and in the critical assessment both of risks themselves and of knowledge about these risks. Post-normal science thus constitutes a new problem-solving strategy better tailored to a context that differs greatly from the one in which Kuhn, Merton, and other sociologists and philosophers of science devised their concepts.

Another specialist in the area — a doctor of logic and the philosophy of science — uses Georges Canguilhem's ideas as a touchstone in evaluating different concepts of health. Illness has constituted an important object of study for social scientists, who regularly draw

attention to polarizations or interrelations between the social and the biological. The article you will read shows that health is not just the opposite or the absence of disease. It is something opaque, outside the grasp of objective knowledge, a 'vulgar' idea that can only be uttered by those who subjectively and individually experience their bodies and the feelings of pain or pleasure they may bring. It is from this angle that the author examines the correlations between the social and the biological, the individual and the collective, the normal and the pathological that are to be found in Canguilhem's theory and in three other conceptual frameworks: that which since Galen has seen health as an organism's adjustment to its environment; the dangerous utopia posited by the World Health Organization, which has equated health to physical, mental, and social well-being; and, lastly, the 8th Health Conference's program, which reduces the concept of health to a superstructural effect of an individual's living conditions within society.

Health is also the thread that runs through the reading of Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-grande e senzala*, presented by a Casa de Oswaldo Cruz historian. Joining the broad circle of interpreters and guardians of this Pernambucan intellectual's work, the author takes a perspective adopted by few and ties it in with a prolific vein of research to found at Casa de Oswaldo Cruz: the sanitary mapping and sociological re-interpretation of Brazil's barren sertão lands by the scientists and physicians who came together under the influence (or myth) of the founder of Manguinhos. Oswaldo Cruz in fact serves as theme of the 'Images' department, which illustrates some of the mock-ups and project designs for monuments that were to history.

memorialize the researcher after his death, but which were never completed.

Of special concern for Gilberto Freyre, the issues of race and miscegenation are now at the top of the social science agenda. This is made evident not only in the article mentioned above but also in a number of the papers presented at the seminar held to commemorate the centennial of the Canudos war. Entitled “Brasil ser tão Canudos,” the event took place at Rio de Janeiro’s Museu da República in October and received the support of various institutions, including Casa de Oswaldo Cruz. I am pleased to inform our readers that the texts presented there — all of outstanding quality — will be published in a special issue during the first half of 1998.

Those who are following or taking an active part in current discussions on health care and social welfare, or those who are endeavoring to identify relations between recent changes in these sectors and experiences from the past or from other places, will have much to gain from the article on the health care reforms underway in Mexico since 1982, written by a Brazilian sociologist currently teaching in that country. As in Brazil, what is occurring there is a far-reaching revision of citizenship rights, a revision that has differentiated consequences for those who have already acquired certain rights, for those who have been or are about to be excluded, and, further, for various interest groups, such as the bureaucracy and the producers of public and private goods and services. The author has painted a dynamic picture of this social and political process which intermixes past and present conflicts over projects and outlooks for the future. She reveals alliances and transactions that serve as means for old and new social actors to demand advantages, obstruct regulations, and favor or hinder the technical/social-assistance model now in debate under the Ernesto Zedillo Administration (1994-2000).

The menu we offer our readers also includes a bibliographic essay on an area of investigation now gaining ground in Brazilian historiography: environmental history, or eco-

history. This new field draws on disciplines and conceptual tools as yet quite unfamiliar to most historiographers, forcing them to equip themselves to rethink relations between the social and natural sciences, society and biology, man and nature. For non-specialists who come into contact with the finest products so far available in the field — *Devastação e preservação ambiental no Rio de Janeiro*, by José Augusto Drummond, and *With broadax and firebrand: the destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest*, by Warren Dean, for example — environmental history provokes a strange sensation, a kind of *jamaís viu*: we no longer recognize historical settings that seemed familiar to us before; the attributes of the human characters found in these settings emerge altered under the eye of non-human actors who leave the wings of history’s theater to move onto center stage. Written by an anthropologist from Rio Grande do Sul whose work has appeared in this journal before, the article on the state’s medical crisis is complemented by the stories of two São Paulo physicians, told in the ‘Testimonies’ department. The first article documents the author’s perception of a ‘crisis’ brought on by the expansion of medical teaching, the diversification of students’ social origins, and the strengthening of the profession’s organizational unity and its struggles. For their part, the two Paulista doctors reveal a clear-cut perception of disjunctions between physicians’ daily practice and ideas they have long held, prompted by the growing specialization and wage-work that has characterized the transition from liberal professional practice to technological medicine.

This is the delectable fruit *História, Ciências, Saúde — Manguinhos* serves up in this issue. Enjoy it as you like, and please send us your comments. Editors get lonely when they don’t hear from their readers.

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