

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

This past August, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation hosted a symposium in commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the worldwide eradication of smallpox, an unprecedented accomplishment announced at the World Health Assembly on May 8, 1979.

The symposium brought a number of protagonists from the Smallpox Eradication Program together to discuss their experiences as well as any lessons they had learned that could be applied to combating other diseases. This issue of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* features Gilberto Hochman and Steven Palmer's exclusive interview with Dr. Donald A. Henderson, director of the World Health Organization's campaign from 1966 through 1977. We also bring you excerpts from a travel diary written by another campaign participant, Robert J. Wilson, a Canadian who kept notes on his April 1967 trip to Brazil. Palmer, Hochman, and Arbex's analysis of this documental source leads to interesting reflections on the campaign in Brazil, the vaccines used here, and the role played by expert communities in this international endeavor.

Our Analysis section opens with a fascinating article by André Luis de Lima Carvalho and Ricardo Waizbort about a figure not well known to us here in Brazil: Frances Power Cobbe, who earned renown in Victorian England as a social militant. Concerns about the ethical legitimacy of certain uses of animals fell on especially fertile ground in that country, which in 1822 had passed a law establishing penalties for the mistreatment of animals. André and Ricardo's article focuses primarily on clashes between Cobbe and Charles Darwin over the use of animals in scientific experiments. What lies at the crux of this article is the relation between humans and non-humans, between science and nature, which brings us to two other articles that examine nature from different angles. In one of these, two geographers from Campinas State University (Unicamp) explore Alexander von Humboldt's notions on the topic and his relation to the genesis of modern physical geography. Antonio Carlos Vitte, philosopher, and Roberison Wittgenstein Dias da Silveira, a hybrid of agronomist, sociologist, and anthropologist, address "postmodern antinomies on nature." As these authors see it, Humboldt developed a new interpretation of nature on Earth's surface, where the concepts of space and geographic landscape were essential, underpinned by a complex interweaving of aesthetic and instrumental influences. Modern physical geography, they argue, was essentially built upon the thinking expressed by Humboldt in his *Views of nature* and *Cosmos*. For the authors, the latter book offers current geographic knowledge a scientific and philosophical answer to the physical geography/human geography duality and thus responds to our contemporary need to transcend the confined borders of formal disciplines.

José Marcos Froehlich and Celso Reni Braidá analyze the notions of nature underlying our current conception of science. After presenting a brief inventory of the ideas entertained about this polysemic concept at different points in history, the authors draw our attention to current inconsistencies in postmodern images of nature, relying primarily on the thinking of Fredric Jameson, one of the few Marxists who used postmodern language in a materialistic analysis of the cultural logic of postmodernity in the 1990s.

In "The antinomies of postmodernity" – the first essay in *The seeds of time* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994) – Jameson offers us a cognitive map of that fin de siècle, charting trends in semiotics, poststructuralism, and cultural studies. Jameson argues that one of the main elements of postmodern society is the "end of nature," that is, its artificialization. For Jameson, the disappearance of nature erodes its other term, and our classic conception of city and of the urban are drained of significance and no longer designate any specifically differentiated realities. The urban becomes the social in general,

and both of them lose themselves in a new kind of global. Paradoxically, the disappearance of nature in its traditional form fosters the return of another type of nature, as various phenomena related to ecologism bear witness. This revival constitutes a foundational antinomy of postmodernity, one that, for the authors of this article, stems from contradictions that run deeper than the distinction between social and natural or between culture and nature. The authors thus propose that we move towards a conception of nature and science that does not require us to fashion human beings into strangers in the world they inhabit and seek to understand.

Our readers will also find three contributions by Argentinean authors in this issue of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*. Diego P. Roldán, of Rosario National University, analyzes discourses on the body, machines, energy, and fatigue at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century and shows how they helped to construct a bio-political understanding that placed the body in a relationship with capitalist production and the State.

Lucía Romero analyzes the academic modernization of the University of Buenos Aires and its Faculty of Medicine in the mid-1950s, with a focus on the ideas about clinical research, teaching, and health care espoused by Alfredo Lanari at the First Congress on Medical Education, held by the Argentinean Medical Association in 1957. The establishment of the La Plata Observatory (1882-1890) is the topic of Marina Rieznik, of the University of Buenos Aires, who studied the event from the context of conflicts surrounding the international missions that observed the transit of Venus across the sun, with the main actors being the director of the Córdoba Observatory, the governor of the province of Buenos Aires, and members of France's Bureau of Longitudes.

Leandro Belinaso Guimarães, of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, looks at how the discursive, social, and political processes that nationalized the Amazon gained firm footing under Brazil's First Republic. Using texts penned by Euclides da Cunha, he demonstrates that the forest was viewed and narrated differently during that period, as compared with the travel accounts written by naturalists down through the nineteenth century. Valéria Zanetti and her collaborators at the Vale do Paraíba University and São José dos Campos Pro-Memory Research Group describe how this city was transformed into a health resort for the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis in the 1930s. Relying principally on *Boletim Médico* – a periodical published by local tuberculosis specialists – and on related sources as well, they explain how this new status of “health resort” was a threat to the local population yet also became the driving force behind the local economy, which until the 1950s was based almost solely on the treatment of tuberculosis.

Flavio Coelho Edler, of the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz, is the author of “Clinical and experimental research in nineteenth-century Brazil: the circulation and control of knowledge in medical helminthology.” He examines how Brazilian physicians contributed to our understanding of diseases caused by parasitic worms during the second half of the nineteenth century and shows how this knowledge had differing impacts on three epistemic communities: Brazilian clinical anatomy, French medical geography, and the emerging field of medical parasitology. Acknowledging that these three traditions used heterogeneous approaches in legitimizing scientific facts as well as heterogeneous epistemological practices, Edler charts medical knowledge of that day and reveals the force lines present within these three disciplines.

The limited space of an editor's note keeps me from telling you about the other important articles you will find in the following pages. For those of you in southern hemispheric climes, fill your lungs with the fresh air of springtime now upon us. We're on the eve of presidential elections in Brazil and despite a rather sordid campaign, we hope the ideals of change will blossom in the collective hearts and souls of us all.

Jaime L. Benchimol
Editor