

in their introduction, has to a considerable degree defined itself in terms of the state of its nerves and, one might add, increasingly identified itself with the pinnacle of that system, the human brain. Neurology thus became: 'modernity's representative science of the body' (p. 33).

The thirteen papers explore various aspects of this 'symbiotic' relationship from a variety of viewpoints and with varied success. The contributions tend to be brief and to sketch out themes rather than to explore them in any depth. Some of the topics covered are familiar. Jane A. Thraillkill, however, succeeds in finding new aspects to the well-worn topic of railway spine and the incipient diagnostic category of traumatic neurosis. She sees the discourse that arose around these complaints as productive of a novel 'forensics of self' (p. 99). This was in turn, she argues, conducive to a new sense of personhood. Aura Satz provides a stimulating discussion of the relation of the identification of 'phantom limb syndrome' in the nineteenth century with the contemporary manifestations of other ethereal bodies in spiritualist séances. Both neurology and spiritualism, she asserts, challenged received notions of the extent and duration of the body. In her account of what aphasiology has to say about the subject of modernity, Laura Salisbury rightly focuses upon the centrality of the neurological reconfiguration of language in initiating a conception of the self as, not only embodied, but also embedded in a perceptual world where the distinction between consciousness and *res extensa* is effaced.

Overall, this volume is representative of the level of interest that currently exists in writing a cultural history of the nervous system – an interest that is a reflection of the centrality of the 'neurological' in contemporary culture. The variety of approaches and materials that these essays draw upon gives an indication of how rich and challenging such a history will be.

Stephen Jacyna,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the
History of Medicine at UCL

Antje Kampf, *Mapping Out the Venereal Wilderness: Public Health and STD in New Zealand 1920–1980*, Ethik in der Praxis/Practical Ethics Studies, Band 28 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. iii + 272, €29.90, paperback, ISBN: 978-3-8258-9765-9.

Do not be deterred by the German publisher's misspelling of 'venereal' on the front cover, for it is catalogued correctly. Nor should you dismiss this careful and intelligent history of the public health response to sexually transmitted diseases in New Zealand as a peripheral study. New Zealand may be geographically remote and was once socially conservative, but its social policy for much of the twentieth century has been distinctive and instructive. It is more egalitarian than its Australian neighbour, and its record on race relations, while far from sufficient, has been vastly better. These are social characteristics that shaped the way doctors, nurses and administrators dealt with the problems of STDs. Finally, this book is not for purist cultural historians of disease: rather it is a careful review of discourses, policy and practice within the government medical service and public health authorities from 1920 to 1980, just as HIV/AIDS was entering public consciousness and health concerns in Australasia.

New Zealand did not have a severe STD problem: the frontier society of ocean wanderers, escaped Australian convicts and adventurers that would have suffered high infection rates was long past by 1920. By then, they had a magic bullet for syphilis, and the practical experience of coping with the high STD rates in overseas servicemen during the First World War. There needed to be a new rational approach: notification, clinics and treatment. None the less, the cultural assumptions remained of individual moral deficiency and of aberrant women (in particular those who hung around the ports) who were a reservoir of infection to entrap males sowing their wild oats. Kampf includes a detailed case study of venereal

disease and the Maori that builds an unexpected (to an outside reader) finding that race was less significant than class in stereotyping or deforming public-health responses.

Military venereal disease is a major focus of the book, in particular the lessons learned from the First World War for the more sensitive management in the Second. Civilian infections and the fears over 'amateur' and professional prostitution in wartime are investigated separately. (The long distances from the fronts enabled home populations to be protected from infected soldiers more effectively.) The study is enriched by the attention paid to the patient's perspective and his or her agency in seeking better treatment.

Post-war, this is largely a story of a medical profession gradually learning to 'think socially' rather than 'morally': to start to understand how to identify 'at-risk groups'; to reduce the stigma and fear which might deter the seeking of treatment; to trial more effective sexual education and public health campaigns. As Kampf concludes, by the 1980s, after travelling a 'rocky and winding' road, a new generation of sexual health physicians had arrived at a place where their patients were clients, their tools were biomedical and psycho-social and they worked in multi-disciplinary teams. The next phase of the story will be New Zealand's response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS. This is a book of interest to historians and to sexual health practitioners.

Janet McCalman,

Centre for Health and Society,
University of Melbourne

Gabriela Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories: Mexican Peasants, National Projects, and the Making of the Pill* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. xiv + 331, £17.99/\$23.95, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8223-4605-0.

Heralded as one of the world's key transforming medicines, the oral contraceptive pill has prompted many different histories since its first arrival half a century ago. Some have considered the motivations and difficulties of those who helped finance, synthesise and test the original pill. Others have looked at the impact the medicine has had for women and society as a whole. Few of these histories, however, have examined in detail its history from the perspective of the Mexican peasants who helped gather and process the Mexican wild yam (*barbasco*) necessary for its emergence. Soto Laveaga's *Jungle Laboratories* provides a vivid account of these Mexican peasants, tracing their involvement back to the rise of the global synthetic steroid hormone industry from the 1940s that helped pave the way to the pill in the 1950s.

Based on archival sources and more than fifty interviews with former *barbasco* pickers, processing plant owners and state officials, *Jungle Laboratories* yields fascinating insights into the social, political and economic consequences of the global search for medicinal plants at a local level within the rural regions of southeast and southwest Mexico. The book particularly highlights the interrelationship between local allegiances and power structures in the development of *barbasco*. These were not static and shifted over time as the plant was converted from a local weed to a highly lucrative international medical commodity, firstly as cortisone, and then as a contraceptive pill.

Soto Laveaga argues that the scientific exploitation of *barbasco* was heavily dependent on the skills of rural Mexicans and their knowledge of soil conditions, growth cycles and ability to distinguish between different yam species. It was a Mexican peasant who helped Russell Marker, the first American chemist to synthesise steroids from *barbasco*, to track down the first plant for his research in 1942. When the *barbasco* plant proved difficult to transplant elsewhere, steroid production continued to rely on the expertise of Mexican peasants. Within eight