

* **Book Review**

The Apothecary Pharmacy of Yesterday and the Pharmacy of Today: Counters in search of relief

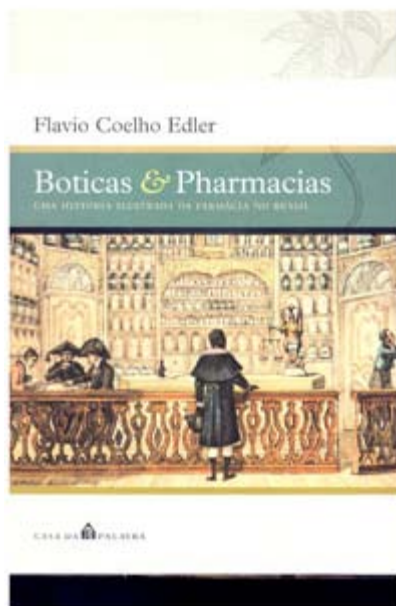
Liandro Lindner

Journalist, Specialist in Communication and Health, Master's candidate in Information and Communication in Health (ICICT / Fiocruz).
liandro.lindner@gmail.com

Elaine Kabarite

Bachelor of Political and Social Science, Specialist in Contemporary History, Master's candidate in Information and Communication in Health(ICICT/Fiocruz)
elkabarite@gmail.com

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"A picture is worth a thousand words". The sentence assigned to a Greek-American director Elia Kazan has been repeated so much that it turned to be the mantra for photographic exhibitions, film series and marketing discussions. Applied to health care, it demonstrates that the images gain force, preceding and often surpassing the texts of messages to be transmitted. Advertising campaigns are a major example of these strategies. However, long before the empire of edited images dominated the relations of communication, the illustrations had already been part of routine health care, the pursuit of balm for the body ills and the craving for relief. Like prehistoric man drew scenes of life on the walls of his cave in order to register his routine and influence his surroundings, "drug stores" had an important role in building the imagination of health and disease in Brazil

In this sense, the book "Apothecary pharmacies & pharmacies: an illustrated history of pharmacy in Brazil" by Flavio Coelho Edler presents the history of pharmacy in Brazil focused on the history of craft and medical treatment in social, cultural and specific historical contexts. As a historian with a PhD degree in Public Health, the author unites these two fields of knowledge in this textual and visual "journey" and raids in the area of imagery communication trying to illustrate the periods through the artistic representations and advertising. Shamans, priests, barbers, practitioners, religious persons and *blood-letting physicians* appear in the images in order to illustrate this line of narrative supported by this resource, creating almost a visual anthropology of healing practices. The book production was collective - although all the work was totally supervised by Edler, responsible for final editing and redaction - and had the help of two other historians *Verônica Pimenta Velloso* and *Luis Antônio Teixeira*. The definition of visual language and graphic design was done by Victor Burton and

publishers. According to Edler, the ease of relying on financial support for research and presentation of images allowed that there had a rich repertoire of images, allowing to choose the most representative ones as described in the introduction.

When interviewing the author we discovered that the work had been an assignment by the editor and had the financial support of a major distributor of drugs through the Rouanet Law, which may clarify how critical the limits of this type of work are. The author states that he "had a complete freedom to develop the analyses of the Colonial and Imperial periods, but I felt some embarrassment (censorship) to deal with some more contemporary themes", which meant whether to leave them out or cover them superficially, choosing only a point of view and "forgetting" other aspects. Among many aspects of this book, the attention is drawn by the refined research and wealth of information that this work brings. It is a very innovative and interesting proposal, which resulted in a neat publication, not only for the illustrations, but also for uncovering a historical and social panorama of healing practices in Brazil, which is crossed by various fields of knowledge, and this makes it complex and relevant. In the description of the process of different medical, indigenous, African practices as well as of religious orders and fraternities, which competed with doctors, surgeons and apothecaries who were lay regarding therapeutic aid and assistance to the patients, the author tells and evaluates the processes of almost always conflictual sociocultural interaction. Prior to the 20th page you can see, as a watermark, an image of the leaf of *Cannabis Sativa* (marijuana). Although the author states that the image came as a "license" without advertising the text, it remains curious that the engraving illustrates the part of the book about the scholarly knowledge as well as popular knowledge. Its active ingredient has been the candidate for the drug to treat glaucoma, asthma, epilepsy as an analgesic and especially potent antiemetic in chemotherapy. The use of this figure, though without any reference to its use and handling, awakens the reflection on the role of drugs in contemporary society and its use in the pursuit of physical and mental well-being.

Through a linear historical narrative, the book tries to rescue the importance of professional activities to combat and cure disease through the centuries, with the narrative divided into three periods: Colony, Empire and Republic. Focused on crafts and drug practices, the first part is devoted to the Colonial period, introducing an encounter of European practices with the practices of indigenous and African healing through the use of medicinal plants and rituals. During this period the Jesuits acquired a fundamental role because besides that educators took the role of healers in trying to reframe the indigenous medicine, they became major disseminators of Brazilian medicinal plants around the world. During the period of the Empire in Brazil medical practices cohabit even more widely and generated much friction between the so called involved "professionals". The resources went from praying to purging or bleeding, coming through incantations, herbs, talismans, exorcisms and animal products. The central focus is on the figure of the apothecary, druggist, practitioner or qualified pharmacist and their stories interwoven with the study of prevalent diseases, health legislation, pharmaceutical practices of drugs, medical and pharmaceutical sciences, and more than that, the history of the pharmaceutical profession and its relationship to medicine. The third part of the book discusses the "Development of Contemporary Pharmacy" highlighting the wave of changes in the role of pharmacy, including the advent of new drugs that not only relieve the disease, but also heal it. After the First World War with the growing drug industrialization, a new therapeutic reality appears with the creation of a new classification of remedies, which obtain the trademark, moving beyond the status of professionals. Already in the 60s during the climate of "new age" at that time, alternative therapies and compounding pharmacies - as opposed to allopathy - grew expanding the discussion of the drugs to other fields. At the same time there was an increase of the investments in advertising and promotion, generating huge investments that, in consequence, influence thinking and the final price of drugs.

The use of the images was the main strategy to make the book interesting to the reader. Another strategy (explained in the introduction) was the use of boxes to detach curiosities and other anecdotal aspects as well as the use of sacred images of different cultural backgrounds that was deliberate, clarified and supported by the text. The choice of illustrations followed the same historical aspects, which the author uses to organize the chapters, also indicating the changes in the form of visual representation of health and illness, of the relief in search of solution and of the possibility of cure. It is noted that the religious and mystical figures represented in the engravings show a relational element together with the form of conception about life and death, reward and punishment, normality and marginality that contributed to the formation of the worldview in the first centuries after the discovery of Brazil. This conception seems to influence even today the way to deal with health, creating the illusion that knowledge is located in an upper part, earlier formed by divinities and today inhabited by professionals in white coats, with whom the patients search for relief and beg for attention and care.

One can not neglect the political aspects of the publication. Sponsored by a distributor of pharmaceuticals and published in 2006, the year when the submission of the Bill 7703/2006 on the

National Congress started. This Bill defines the practice field, the private activities and private positions of medical professionals known as a project "Medical Act". The book brings these issues in a subliminal way in its narrative. In Chapter eight, in order to highlight the work of the Pharmaceutical Associations since the late 19th century, employers or entities formed by academics and researchers appeared. The Brazilian Pharmaceutical Society was established in 1851 with the aim of "ensuring the practice of pharmacy in Brazil"; fifteen years later, the figure of the apothecary ceased to exist while pharmaceutical activity gained strength with the focus on professionalism. Other aspects of corporate and professional performance as the needs for inclusion in the Regional Pharmacy Council or the foundation of the Professional Association of Pharmacists of Rio de Janeiro - a first class entity in this category established in 1947, succeeded by the Syndicate of Pharmacists of the state of Rio de Janeiro, founded in 1997 - are not detached in the publication.

One can not help noticing that the images of the last part the book focuses on pills, tablets and capsules, entitled "New Answers to Old Challenges". A link between contemporary society and the search for quick, painless and immediate solutions through chemistry is suggested, as if the responses to health problems might be given by an intake of something. By observing the influence of drugs that act on the control of mood, attention deficit, combat of depression or erectile dysfunction, the figure of the professionals runs the serious risk of becoming secondary, restricting themselves to a mere prescriber of solutions. It is probably not just by chance that the final figures show no human being and are limited to machinery and manufactured goods.