

## Editors' Introduction

When we began to publish *BioSocieties* almost four years ago, our aim was not merely to provide a forum for the highest-quality social scientific research that could enhance our understanding of the socio-political character and implications of contemporary developments in the life sciences and biomedicine. It was also to establish a place for the development of two kinds of interdisciplinary dialogue that we felt were vital but lacking. The first was interdisciplinary dialogue among the social scientists working on these issues. Surprisingly, perhaps, to those from outside these disciplines, there are disjunctures and mutual incomprehensions among the languages, concepts, problems and methods of disciplines that seem quite close—as historians, sociologists, anthropologists, economists and political scientists each inhabit their own thought communities, attend their own conferences, and publish in their own favourite journals. Interdisciplinarity is easy to preach but difficult to practise, and nowhere is it more critical than in investigations of the role that the life sciences and biomedicine play in constructing contemporary reality and imaginary futures.

But we also wanted to provoke another kind of interdisciplinarity that seemed even more necessary and yet even more elusive—we wanted to establish a mutually respectful dialogue between social analysts and scientific researchers in the life sciences and biomedicine. Our view was that social scientists should not be content with a role as *commentators* on developments in the life sciences, or with expressing anxious worries about the social or ethical *implications* of these developments. They should take seriously the increasing recognition that ‘the social’—in a multitude of different ways—is constitutive not just of biomedical and biological research, but of the very life processes that are its objects. A dialogue between social scientists and life scientists, therefore, should not only address more fundamental questions of research agendas, interpretations of findings, and the dynamics of scientific research and of clinical practice, but should also take up the challenge posed by the recognition that ‘the genome’ and ‘the brain’ are themselves socially shaped at the molecular level. We welcome the fact that a number of the central journals in the life sciences have now started to publish commentaries and debates led by social scientists. For our part, we will do our best to work with life scientists to overcome mutual suspicions, not to develop a common language—for we would not dispute the advantages of disciplinary specialisms and vocabularies that seem esoteric to outsiders—but at least to help develop what has been termed ‘inter-literacy’.

Each of the papers published in this issue of *BioSocieties*, in their different ways, makes a contribution to this interdisciplinary agenda. Alastair Matheson, the author of the article, ‘Corporate Science and the Husbandry of Scientific and Medical Knowledge by the Pharmaceutical Industry’, has a background in university science, but worked for more than ten years in a variety of roles within the pharmaceutical sector, including strategic analysis, consultancy, medical writing and the formulation of communications programmes. Matheson analyses the role of the pharmaceutical and medical device industries in the construction of scientific and medical knowledge, arguing that this knowledge has a specific character, reflecting commercial pressures and creating narratives which establish a particular kind of fit between products and the conditions that they claim to treat. Eschewing the popular temptation to vilify the industry and all its works, Matheson nonetheless argues

that an International Standard of Integrity in Science would strengthen pharma's contributions to medical and scientific knowledge. In 'The Commodification of Emergence: Systems Biology, Synthetic Biology and Intellectual Property', Jane Calvert addresses a related issue within the contemporary bioeconomy. This has been characterized by a desire to commodify the products of research in the biological sciences, and hence the need to make them fit with intellectual property regimes. Calvert's article explores the new problems and possibilities of commodification that are emerging as biological thought adapts itself to ideas of complexity and emergence in systems biology and synthetic biology. In 'Between Neutrality and Engagement: A Case Study of Recruitment to Pharmacogenomic Research in Denmark' Mette Svendsen and Lene Koch direct our attention to a crucial but under-analysed aspect of the research process itself: the recruitment of patients and research subjects. Contemporary genomic research relies on blood samples and health information from great numbers of individuals, as well as on access to medical records, and thus on the willingness of large numbers of individuals to participate without the prospect of personal benefit. Why and how do people make that decision, and with what implications? This is a question that has consequences, not just for ethics and citizenship, but perhaps even for the characteristics of the population whose samples are studied, and hence for the conclusions that are drawn.

*BioSocieties* seeks to publish contributions that depart from the standard form of the academic paper, when these cast significant new light on the issues that concern us. In 'Pass It On' we publish an excerpt from Tom Shakespeare's forthcoming account of his own life with achondroplasia, and the experiences of his family in living with this condition—a unique personal insight into responses to 'short stature' from someone whose pioneering work as a social theorist and disability activist is known across the world.

And we continue our practice of publishing the texts of recent lectures that exemplify ideas in formation, with Nikolas Rose's reflections on transformations in 'Race, Risk and Medicine in the Age of "Your Own Personal Genome"', in which he considers the ways in which 'personal genomics' welds together questions of disease risk and ancestry in novel ways, building ideas about population differentiation into the logic of research and into the technology for gene sequencing, and illustrating the reshaping of relations between genomics and identity in the contemporary period—what Rose terms 'molecular biopolitics'.

To complete this issue, we publish a provocative books forum in which three leading social theorists consider a number of recent books on the encounter of human and nonhuman species: *Thinking with animals: New perspectives on anthropomorphism*, edited by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (Columbia University Press, 2005), *The sacrifice: How scientific experiments transform animals and people*, by Linda Birke, Arnold Arluke and Mike Michael (Purdue University Press, 2007), Sarah Franklin's *Dolly mixtures: The remaking of genealogy* (Duke University Press, 2007), Erica Fudge's *Brutal reasoning: Animals, rationality, and humanity in early modern England* (Cornell University Press, 2006), Donna Haraway's *When species meet* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), and Michel Serres' *The parasite* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007). As Javier Lezaun, our Books Forum Editor puts it, these books show that the social sciences and humanities are converging with the life sciences in their wish to extract analytical value from encounters with animals.