Editorial

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It is not often that the articles in the journal bifurcate neatly along conceptual lines, but in this issue they have conveniently presented themselves this way, allowing not only for neat reading, but also for a comparison of how certain concepts and themes in the broad intellectual field from which *BioSocieties* draws are applied to different kinds of problems. Therefore, in this issue, one set of articles deals with concerns about time, specifically the uses of time in scientific innovation and the production of scientific knowledge. Another set of articles deals with medical standards, specifically the problematics of establishing and implementing standards that then constrain innovation and, also, ethical medical practices. We also have an excellent Books Forum that does not, unfortunately, fit into this neat conceptual matrix, but does offer readers an engaging and, given the complexity of the subject matter, unusually lucid appraisal of recent attempts to get to bio-social grips with key dimensions of what was once considered an essentially human capacity: morality.

Drawing on work from the sociology of expectations, Michael Morrison discusses the promissory work of recent definitions of reproductive medicine in the scientific literature, focusing on the rhetorical strategies employed in these definitions. Morrison traces diverse visions for reproductive medicine, showing that these are variously embedded in references to archetypal longing for human regeneration, technological determinism and hope. Although therapeutics and products in reproductive medicine are narratively framed in terms of a ‘transparent, linear temporality’, with ‘predictable’ and ‘clearly demarcated and articulated’ futures, Morrison argues that these narratives deliver hope, rather than truth. Arguably, part of the reason why actors rely on promissory narratives in relation to innovative technologies is because the temporalities along which techno-scientific practices evolve are dependent upon the idiosyncratic time frames of non-human actors. These non-human actors sometimes do not move fast enough for instrumental human needs. This temporal tension, and its impact on scientific technology development, is well illustrated in Matt Hodges’s ethnography of apomixis technology development (apomixis is the ability of certain plants to ‘self-clone’). Hodges’s analysis focuses on the ‘protophase’ of technology development, when ‘a technology’s potential form is unclear, contested and the subject of speculation ...’. Through a critique of a public-private partnership called the ‘Apomixis Consortium’, Hodges is able to develop a compelling argument for a theoretical interest in time among social scientists working on the production of biocapital.

Nora Engel’s work on TB diagnostics in India also draws from careful fieldwork among numerous local and international stakeholders across a variety of settings. In her analysis of innovation in TB diagnostics, Engel shows how standardization and innovation, somewhat paradoxically, are mutually influential. She develops a subtle argument for the need to balance the extremes of standardization and the extremes of innovation. Along with other

theorists, Engel believes that ‘flexible standardization’ and the participation of a range of stakeholders in TB diagnostics are key to producing a negotiated and collaborative middle ground, on which service delivery to those in need is most likely to succeed. The companion article in this set, by Vinay Prasad and Adam Cifu, presents an interesting comparative view on the problematics of standardization in medicine, this time in the world of the clinic. Here the focus is on medical standards of practice and proof of efficacy in the world of evidence-based medicine. The authors argue strongly that the frequent phenomenon of ‘medical reversal’ – the discovery years later in clinical trials that standard medical practices have no benefit to patients – suggests the need for physicians to adopt a new ethic that acknowledges their responsibility for the ‘burden of proof’ of efficacy of medical treatments they offer. Like Engel, Prasad and Cifu consider that conflicts of interest among different stakeholders likely prevent those delivering medical services from carefully scrutinizing the efficacy of those services.

Finally, the Books Forum in this issue focuses on recent publications in evolutionary behavioral science, and on the neuroscience of morality. Books Forum editor, Nicolas Langlitz, notes that collectively the books reviewed in this issue imply that ‘[F]or at least four centuries, Western thought has been led astray in presupposing an essentially egoistic human nature, to be restrained by the state or let loose to serve the common good on free markets’. Perhaps the notion of a deeply rooted prosocial human capacity offers something more than a promissory hope for the future.

Adele E. Clarke
Nikolas Rose
Ilina Singh