Books Forum Introduction

Drugs medical and mystical

Guest Edited by Adele E. Clarke

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences,
University of California, San Francisco, USA
E-mail: adele.clarke@ucsf.edu

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Pharmaceuticals are shaping our lives, cultures and the planet in infinite ways. Medical, mystical, prescribed and self-determined uses of drugs are the focus of this Books Forum.

The predominance of corporate interests has provoked a social scientific literature often quite critical of contemporary pharmaceutical practices and their cultural incorporations. In both David Healy's *Pharmageddon* and Joseph Dumit's *Drugs for Life*, reviewer Todd Meyers finds much evidence for the prioritizing of financial gain over social need, but also expresses fatigue with the corresponding indignation. It is the authors' treatments of the role of drugs in changing conceptions of health and care,

which attract Meyers' interest. He contrasts Dumit's account of pharmaceutically dominated forms of life and Healy's advocacy of a return to a prelapsarian medical practice not yet corrupted by big pharma with Sylvie Fainzang's study of self-medication. However, *L'automédication ou les mirages de l'autonomie* reveals that taking pharmacotherapy into one's own hands allows only a partial escape from the rule of profit and professionals, as the self-management of disorders continues to be based on a clinical rationale.

Continuing a recent Books Forum on psychedelic drugs, Natasha Dow Schüll provides us with a nuanced review of *Neuropsychodelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain* by Nicolas Langlitz, the regular editor of this Books Forum. She traces the ambitious range of his book from chapters on the history of research on psychedelics within various neurosciences since the 1940s, to ethnographic accounts of recent professional meetings, to autoethnography of his recent participation as an experimental test subject in a Swiss lab. Drawing creatively upon the breadth of possibility of engagement through anthropological fieldwork, Langlitz innovatively reconfigures a past anthropological concern with unity across cultures to instead explore science and oneness in the face of contemporary disenchantment.

Adele E. Clarke is Professor Emerita of Sociology at University of California, San Francisco and a co-editor of *BioSocieties*. With Geof Bowker, Stefan Timmermans and Ellen Balka, she recently co-edited *Boundary Objects and Beyond: Working with Leigh Star* (MIT Press, 2014), and is working on a second edition of *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn* with Carrie Friese and Rachel Washburn (Sage, 2015).