Editorial

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As social scientists working on and in biomedicine, we have become keenly attuned to the ways in which emerging technological capacities to see ‘beneath the skin’ are (re)configuring subjectivities – singular and collective – both somatic and political. To some extent, our own analytic attentions as social scientists may actually create and reify relations between technologies and subjectivities, sometimes attributing power to the former to reshape the latter at will. Margaret Lock’s extensive body of scholarship has consistently sought to question this conception of power relationships and to demonstrate the dynamic complexities that inhere in the local, embodied relations between persons and technoscientific theories and technologies. In this issue of *BioSocieties*, a lecture by Lock demonstrates the importance of this more nuanced and complex approach in an analysis of biomarker discovery and translation in Alzheimer Disorder (AD). Lock shows that although an emphasis on early detection and prevention, aided by molecular biomarkers, currently infuses almost all AD research and intervention strategies, the difficulty in stabilising those biomarkers reveals the hubris involved in claims that we will soon be able to use them to predict individual outcomes in a phenomenon as complex as ‘the living human brain’.

Bell’s article on cancer survivorship similarly engages with molecular biomarkers, here with a focus on cancer therapeutics and prevention. Although the role of biomarkers in cancer is well established, and their therapeutic potential demonstrated in a number of cases, Bell notes that there has been little social science attention to the impact of molecular screening technologies on tertiary prevention – that is, among patients who are already diagnosed and living with cancer. Using a conceptual, semiotic approach, Bell argues that ongoing experiences of diagnostic screenings within this group produce a kind of numeric subjectivity that is distinct from the accounts of living with risk that have been explored in other analyses of screening. Like Lock, Bell persuasively demonstrates that the impacts and meanings of the molecularisation of disease, as evidenced in clinical applications of biomarker technologies, require fine-grained approaches and analyses. This is particularly important because there remains so much about disease experiences and prognoses that escape attempts at scientific categorisation and control.

Three further articles attest to the real implications of such unknowns in the transactional politics of subjectivities and disease intervention. Brenninkmeijer’s work on neurofeedback illustrates the multiple, iterative engagements that human and non-human actors perform in articulating health outcomes in the uncertain context of neurofeedback efficacy. Huculak’s keyword analysis of ‘placebo’ shows how disciplinary arguments have resulted in a stalemate around what remains one of the most important mysteries in mind–body science: there is no set of agreed upon definitions of the placebo effect and placebo constructs. In a more optimistic light, Groves and Tutton argue that areas of scientific

uncertainty, such as biomarker information, risk assessments and disease susceptibility predictions, can be used strategically to manage expectations around biomedical technologies and to produce hope.

Commercial personalised genomics companies have a particular investment in demonstrating the social value of tests involving biomarker information, as a means of recasting debates about standards in an industry fraught with unknowns. The role of industry and the market in shaping understanding of health, disease and susceptibility is also, broadly speaking, at the centre of David Reubi's argument about taxation in global tobacco control. Like Groves and Tutton, Reubi disagrees with many aspects of current analyses in the field and shows, among other conclusions, that global economic market decisions, such as the decision to promote taxes on tobacco, can have positive as well as negative impacts on global health. In this analysis, Reubi reminds us once again of the limitations of uni-directional analyses of power when addressing the complex dynamics of disease, technologies, interventions and health outcomes.

This issue's Books Forum encapsulates many of the themes that emerge from the articles. Psychedelics are another of psychiatry's feared 'known unknowns'. There is substantial, global evidence of their powerful influence on the mind, particularly in the context of creativity and consciousness, and at one stage they were a legitimate part of the psychiatric pharmacopoeia. Yet efforts to develop therapeutic applications of psychedelic drugs ceased being part of the public face of psychopharmaceutical development after the 1970s. This Forum reviews the history of psychedelics and serves as a prelude to a later Forum, which will focus on the re-emergence of this class of drugs in contemporary biomedicine.

Finally, we are pleased to officially acknowledge a change in the publishing arrangements for *BioSocieties*. As of this issue, the journal will no longer be owned by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The future of the title has been secured through new ownership by Palgrave Macmillan. We are grateful to the LSE for many years of support of the journal, and to new colleagues at Palgrave for their support for the project and ambition of *BioSocieties*, and for easing the transition to new ownership. We look forward to working with Palgrave in a period of growth and innovation.

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