Editorial

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In Social Anthropology, we are perhaps wearily aware now of certain dualities – nature and culture and subject and object amongst them – that ought long since to have been taken out of our analytical tool kits and treated ethnographically instead. Unsurprisingly perhaps, important elements of this were first effected by anthropologists studying Europe and then later refined and elaborated, albeit sometimes in a less ethnographic vein, by that largely ANT-fed beast known as STS (Science and Technology Studies) or more recently by AST (Anthropology of Science and Technology). At the same time, space has been made within both the social and natural sciences for the mutual articulations by which each might not simply incorporate the other but both can imagine themselves to be composing, together, some new middle ground.

In this first issue of a new volume (volume 32) of the journal, we see some more of the constructive insights that the social sciences can offer through their new relationships with the life sciences. These mutual engagements are their own form of cosmopolitics, the work of new diplomacies.

We open with reflections from Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached on neuroscience. The brain, they contend, has become an object through which to govern human citizens. To illustrate this, they take the reader on a critically informative journey through relevant aspects of psychopharmacology, brain imaging, neuroplasticity and genomics. Their article urges serious attention to the truth claims of neuroscience whilst warning of the ‘translation fever’ encouraged by ‘impact’-led funding and research. This is the scholarship of the social sciences and the life sciences brought together productively in what these authors want to see as ‘critical friendship’.

Following this article, we have a Special Section on the subject of ‘epidemics’, guest edited by Christos Lynteris. The articles in this collection – entitled ‘Epidemic Events and Processes’ – bring together epidemiology and social anthropology. They take us through epidemics critically distinguished as crises and as events, and through epidemics understood analytically as syndemics and as productive of both proliferating ‘projects’ and a compelling quest for ever-growing intelligence and ‘real-time’ surveillance. In this collection, we see the importance of a social anthropological understanding of the human subjects that epidemics, and responses to them, can constitute – and we glimpse some of the interagentivity in the treatment responses through which the lethal problem of ‘resistance’ can be created. The collection closes with helpful comments from Ezra Barzilay, a medical epidemiologist working at the US

Centers for Disease Control, for whom issues in some of the articles resonate with his own practical experience. We also had an exchange of views in our issue on climate change last year (volume 31(1), 2013), in which a former NASA scientist and Director of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography responded similarly in an Afterword. Such exchanges are important. In the case of 'epidemics' in this present issue, we see the import of anthropological material as it brings to the fore issues which, in another disciplinary language, are the historically contingent 'externalities' of 'disease events'. Long may these conversations continue.