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EDITORIAL

What's Out There

In this third volume of *RBMS*, I am thrilled to introduce a new section of the journal called *What's Out There* which will present reviews of books, films, plays, art exhibitions, conferences and other events of interest to our readers.

Reproductive biomedicine is definitely 'out there' in the popular imagination – whether in BBC documentaries about non-invasive prenatal testing and CRISPR-Cas9, newspaper articles about treating mitochondrial disease or growing embryos beyond fourteen days, adverts for fertility tracker apps and egg freezing, or soap opera storylines about surrogacy. *What's Out There* will give a sense of what kind of representations of reproductive biomedicine are currently on the cultural landscape. It reflects the editors' ambition that *RBMS* be a truly interdisciplinary journal and so we will be taking a broad approach in commissioning reviews for this section, encompassing literature, culture, public events and the arts.

I am personally delighted to take up the position of editor of *What's Out There*. I am a Senior Research Associate at the University of Cambridge where I am currently working on a study of media representations of IVF in the UK, focusing particularly on the birth of Louise Brown in 1978. As a social anthropologist working in a sociology department on a project that also draws on cultural studies, media studies and history, I strongly support this journal's interdisciplinary approach to reproduction, so it is an honour to become part of the editorial team. I believe it is important to get people talking across the disciplines in order to augment our knowledge and have our assumptions questioned, but also because reproduction is an inherently interdisciplinary topic and we can only hope to understand it if we take an approach that eschews traditional boundaries and conventional precepts.

In this spirit of interdisciplinarity and boundary-crossing, who better to have as the author of our first piece in *What's Out There* than *RBMS* Co-Editor-in-Chief, Sarah Franklin (Franklin, 2016)? Sarah has written a fascinating review of Louise Brown's memoir of her life as the world's first 'test-tube baby', which gives an insight into her very particular experience of being famous for how she was conceived – or, to put it another way, of being miraculous yet ordinary. As Sarah reminds us, in the wake of the

development of a global fertility industry, going back to the early history of IVF is an important corrective to certain assumptions that have become commonplace as this technology has become rapidly normalised. In the British media in 1978, IVF was at least as much about creating families and making parents as it was about scientific discoveries or technological innovations and the experience of the Brown family, which was central to the media narrative of the day, is a crucial reminder of this.

1978 was also a very interesting year in British history as the country teetered on the brink of the 'Winter of Discontent' and the subsequent election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. This was a time in which the post-war socialist and liberal consensus of the 1950s, '60s and early '70s was being rejected in favour of neoliberalism and social conservatism. As Sarah writes, Louise Brown was born to parents from a very 'ordinary' background, who nonetheless epitomised many of the social, political and economic changes of the late '70s and early '80s. Her parents, Lesley and John Brown, had gone from deprived childhoods in 'broken homes', to homelessness and indigence in their young adulthood, to buying their council house (before Thatcher even came to power) and working overtime to pay for private medical treatment by their early thirties. Yet despite their social mobility, which was further boosted by the money they received from Associated Newspapers for selling the exclusive rights to their story, they wanted nothing more for themselves or their family than to be normal and ordinary. In a profile in the *Daily Mail* newspaper in August 1978, John Brown explained that Louise would not be spoiled or treated differently from any other child and expressed his only ambition for her: 'She's going to be an ordinary girl brought up in an ordinary house as an ordinary person'.

Strangely, parenting is often overlooked in contemporary accounts of IVF. Like happily-ever-after romances that tell the story of how a couple got together and end at their first kiss, many of the stories we hear of IVF are about quests to conceive. IVF made Lesley and John Brown parents, certainly, but only up to a point. Once they had their longed-for children, the rest was up to them. With Louise Brown's memoir we now have an insight into just what sort of parents they were and of how the real legacy they left her

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was an ordinary, loving childhood. Steptoe and Edwards may have perfected the culture medium in which the embryo that became Louise spent its first days, but her parents created the stable environment in which she would grow up to be a warm, thoughtful and caring adult.

As editor of *What's Out There*, I look forward to bringing many further contributions to fruition, including from authors who might not normally contribute to a journal like this. *What's Out There* is an important part of the on-going development of this young journal and I hope that this section will also attract new readers. This is one reason that I will be encouraging reviews of popular, as well as scholarly, work. Initially, we envisage having a single *What's Out There* contribution in each volume. Contributions will be by invitation, but I am also happy to receive recommendations from authors, producers, publishers and would-be

review-writers. Contributions can be up to 3000 words long and illustrations are welcome. And, best of all, there will be no charge to the authors, as Elsevier has kindly agreed for the usual publication fee to be waived for one contribution in each volume.

I look forward to hearing more from you about what's out there!

Reference

Franklin, S., 2016. Louise Brown: my life as the world's first test-tube baby. *Reprod. Biomed. Soc.* 3:142–144.

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