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# About us

Mute is an online magazine dedicated to exploring culture and politics after the net. Mute combines quarterly issues dedicated to specific topics (Precarious Labour, The Knowledge Commons, etc) with regularly updated articles and reviews. The site also features ongoing coverage of relevant news and events contributed by ourselves and our readers.

As well as the online magazine, Mute also publishes a quarterly book (aka Mute Vol. 2) which features selections from current issues together with other online content, specially commissioned and co-published projects, and relevant historical material.

Finally, Mute is also an online multi-media resource, with a Public Library where readers can contribute reviews as well as upload media files which flesh out and diversify media history and other of Mute's perennial concerns.

## **Our history...**

Mute magazine was founded in 1994 to discuss the interrelationship of art and new technologies when the World Wide Web was newborn. But, as mass participation in computer mediated communications has become more integral to contemporary capitalism, its coverage has expanded to engage with the broader implications of this shift. Mute's investigation of the social, economic, political and cultural formations of 'network societies' maintains an accent on the relationship between technology and the production of new social relations. At the same time, the magazine's remit has grown broader and now includes analyses of geopolitics, culture and contemporary labour that, while necessarily inflected by contemporary developments in technology, go far beyond this.

While Mute was born out of a culture that celebrated the democratising potential of new media, it becomes ever more apparent that we need to critically engage with the ways in which new media also reproduce and extend capitalist social relations. Mute invites its readers and writers to consider new possibilities for resistance to hegemonies wherever they find them, from socio-economic and technical structures, to codes of representation and enunciation, to the production and articulation of psychic experience and beyond. We also welcome critiques of the contemporary fetishisation of ICT as either inherently progressive or entirely reactionary. Finally, Mute hopes to stimulate approaches to art and politics that challenge the orthodoxies of both the constituted left and 'critical' new media culture.

## **Mute in context**

### **Form follows function**

From its inception, Mute\* has regarded message and medium, content and carrier as inherently linked. This approach has forced a constant reinvention of our publishing format (we are now on our fifth!) and, more generally, never taking theory's relationship to practice for granted. As a collaborative entity operating within the network paradigm, Mute has a tacit function as a test site: we feature and review innovative and radical cultural practices, but also participate in them, court infection and reflect their evolution within our own. The discourse on prosumers or, more urgently, that of the 'open publishing' models popularised by platforms like Indymedia and Wikimedia provide one such example, and we have been duly haunted by the spectre of editorial decentralisation.

### **Bottom up world**

One promise of 'many to many' media was that it would upturn the traditional broadcast model of mainstream media and deliver unto the world a multitude of active producers, narrowcasting personalised media to each other and cutting out the middleman. Our function as producers would extend from media and informational goods into the material realms of manufacturing and consumer products, all of which would be subject to 'mass customisation', as futurist Alvin Toffler had it in an

early characterisation. But for all their associations with empowerment, participation, and the agency of the small, the prosumer is an infinitely ambiguous figure - certainly no guaranteed counterforce to capitalism-as-usual. (Providing many large corporations free content through opinion portals and the like, their oppositional status is further problematised by the nature of the reputation economy which supposedly motivates them.) Other standardbearers of democratisation, to be found travelling under banners like 'Grow Your Own', 'DiY' and 'independent media', have irrevocably altered the media power im/balance, even if their often homogenous social composition troubles any claims for a revolution.

### **Ceci n'est pas un magazine**

It was such issues which prompted Mute to publish 'Ceci n'est pas un magazine', a series of mini-manifestoes and progress reports outlining our own plans for a long-term participative publishing model. Part 1 was published in issue 19 (2001), part 2 ('The Magazine that Mistook its Reader for a Hat') in issue 25 (2002/3), and further associated documents have accompanied the recent overhaul of Metamute, all of which are available here.\*\*

What's documented in these files is one path from traditional top-down publishing (albeit that of small magazine) into the uncharted realms of interactivity. In fits and starts, it portrays Mute's vision of diversification, as we attempt to deal with the promise of new media through the provision of tools, editorial content and peer to peer structures. We now find ourselves a hybrid publication attempting to fuse bottom-up content generation with conventional editorial practices of selection, commissioning and editing.

\* The present Mute magazine could not have existed without a predecessor and namesake published through the Slade School of Art from 1989-1992. 'Mute v. 01' was an open contributions publication in a variety of formats, edited by Simon Worthington, Daniel Jackson, Helen Arthur and Stephen Faulkner.

\*\* Ceci n'est pas un magazine, the ongoing project of Mute's decentralisation, was heavily influenced by consultancy from Quim Gil (presently of Interactors.coop) and early work on OpenMute.org by Toni Prug (of Open-organizations.org).

### **Mute's economy and organisation...**

#### **Mute finance**

After running on a mixed economy of barter, grant and private monies since its inception in 1994, Mute started receiving revenue funding from the Arts Council of England in 1999. The grant is now set at £65,000 per annum, having significantly increased in the past couple of years, and goes towards the core costs of staff, premises and production. ACE's 'core funding' is supplemented by project funds allocated to new initiatives; in recent years Mute has received nearly £100,000 from ACE for such projects. Grants were awarded for White Cube, Blue Sky (a book now renamed Proud to be Flesh: a Mute Anthology on network cultures); web tools resource OpenMute; business development, FLOSS migration and new online art commissions as well as an OpenMute national workshop tour, UserLand. Approximately £40,000 has also been received from creative-industries agencies London Innovations and CIDA for technology projects centred on wireless networking (YouAreHere) and software development (TNS).

#### **State funding and autonomous cultures**

This makes Mute one of many European cultural organisations which discuss, profile or support autonomous practices while receiving their own financial support from the State. There are those who feel this generates unacceptable contradictions. Others regard the situation as merely a delicious irony.

With corporate-oriented or voluntary-based models seemingly providing the only alternatives for larger provisions of 'public culture', Mute conceives of its present grant dependence as an opportunity to codetermine the purpose of such monies as well as use the investment to develop a model of self-sustainability. If the State has earmarked funds to keep alive its conceptions of citizenship and the public sphere, then there is scope for organisations to redirect these towards emergent alternatives. Rather than functioning as instruments to an authoritarian agenda of 'social inclusion' (or, in Europe's less conspicuously Blairite realms, the maintenance of an elite critical culture), at this juncture it seems imperative for us intermediaries to invite structural redefinition through public participation. Metamute.org's New Publishing model and website has certainly been developed in this spirit and in line with the groundswell of critical energy directed at governance globally, is subjecting its organisational and financial workings to as much of an overhaul as its content. Please watch this space for new sections, including financial reports and other organisational documentation.