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# Proud to be Flesh: A Mute Anthology on Network Cultures, 2002-

(was White Cube, Blue Sky)

Mute's compendium of net culture debate is lying low as it seeks a publisher. Having started as an attempt to link the information oriented - and politically inflected - debates of conceptual art with those surrounding the digital culture of the 90s, 'White Cube, Blue Sky: Art Cultures in the Information Age' has shapeshifted into the more modest format of an anthology. By collating historical material from our archive, it aims to give a flavour of milestone debates, shared obsessions and select artistic projects, rather than a comprehensive overview of new media art or culture. The book also contains new commissions, which either contextualise or supplement existing content. Editors: Josephine Berry Slater, Pauline van Mourik Broekman, Michael Corris, Simon Ford. White Cube, Blue Sky has received funding from the Arts Council of England and the British Academy.

Read Mute's proposal to the Arts Council...

In 2004, Mute will celebrate its tenth birthday; that of 'digital art'\* arguably falls round about the same time. White Cube, Blue Sky (working title) seeks to rise to the challenge of this moment by providing a transhistorical critique of digital art and a historical precursor to which it is often compared - conceptual art - so as to pose more general questions about the possibilities for critical art practice today.

As testified by the paucity of analysis digital art enjoys in the mainstream art press, outside of the mailing lists, art portals and other ephemeral fora where enthusiasts and cognoscenti discuss associated issues, this 'genre' has yet to be properly situated historically. Stuck between the rock of hype and the hard place of ghettoisation, a decade of feverish activity seems to have done little to improve digital art's position in 'serious' art discourse. Visionary, lucid and topical anthologies notwithstanding (Nettime's ReadMe!, Aperture's Electronic Culture, and no amount of Cultural Studies anthologies treating digital and convergent culture come to mind), the current bibliography of new media art is at best excessively tied to its moment of emergence, at worst art-historically amnesiac.

For an artform whose media, methodologies, (non) identities, concepts and positions owe quite as much as digital art's do to its direct historical precursors (most notably institutional critique, land, systems, performance and electronic art), digital art and its most notorious proponents have remained conspicuously overidentified with the modus operandi - and theoretical framework - of the heroic avant-garde. WCBS seeks to test this oft-made claim and tease out those narrative threads, which threaten to be submerged in digital art's imminent canonisation. It will do this by broadening the frame of definition to 'art cultures of the information age' and aiming for a more situated understanding, which would include various forms of 'socially engaged', installation and performance art dealing with processes of virtualisation, deterritorialisation or informatisation. Simultaneously, it will deploy the dialectic that lies at the book's core - between conceptual and digital art - to trace out an extended arc of development (both in cultural and contextual/political terms), which leaves the 1980s, not as the lost decade in between these two moments, but as a crucial pivot whose concerns over identity, representation, semiotics and mass media are subject to reanimation by the networked energies of digital practice.

In examining processes of deterritorialisation, informatisation and networked connectivity, WCBS will necessarily engage disciplines such as cultural geography, biology (and biotechnology), economics, gender studies, literary and postcolonial theory. It is committed to the interdisciplinarity this entails,

and regards self-reflexivity and an orientation towards practice to exist at the heart of this project. As such, the book's academic essays will be punctuated by artist-interviews, special projects and image works.

In conclusion, WCBS should not be seen as a chronologically and theoretically obedient 'corrective' to a flamboyant, but (as here described) adolescent decade of art practice, but rather an attempt to use the potentiality of successive art movements to ask fundamental questions about art, present and future.

\*Aside from it being in widespread use in the institutional context we seek to challenge, I have chosen the term 'digital art' to designate those art forms which are integrally linked to digital reproducibility, networking and infomatisation. Ostensibly, this term could include phenomena such as net art, web art, sonic art, and so on. Our focus will lie on situated art practices whose aim is not to use the Net as a virtual art gallery, but treat the digital domain in a near-territorial manner to ask questions about power, virtualisation, aesthetics, language, etc.