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Hi,

mute is a UK based magazine about technology and culture. We are participating in the Hybrid WorkSpace at Documenta during August. What follows is our first posting; some general information, and the preliminary list of discussion ideas for our stay. We hope they're of interest. If you want to mail or email us about this project, please get in touch at the address in the signature or you can go to the --technoscience-- newsgroup at <http://www.documenta.de/workspace>

Best,

Pauline/Josie/Simon.

Hybrid WorkSpace
block 7
Sun, 17.8. - Tue, 26.8.

Technoscience. Vocabulary, Politics, Practice

mute is looking at 'technoscience' during its stay in the WorkSpace. As this word brings together so many different spheres, we thought it would be a good idea to focus on several core topics. These are all connected to the privatisation, virtualisation or militarisation of medicine and biology, though sometimes in tangential ways. We will talk about these topics by looking at contemporary events, biotechnology companies, academic institutions, food, medical and agricultural products. Examples would be the recently passed directives for the European Parliament about the patenting of gene and biotechnological research. The decision (to allow for the legal protection of gene research, carried out for companies or academies) was universally seen as a landmark development and one that falls very much in line with developments outlined in the book from which we took our block's theme (Donna Haraway's "Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan.Meets.OncoMouse")

We'd also like to talk about the ways in which a defense of natural integrity and ecological 'health' can serve conservative and 'xenophobic' ends. Biotechnology is not, by default, under criticism. Since much of the defense of the recent European directives, for example, came from patients with fatal or debilitating diseases, serious consideration needs to be given to the problematic contradictions inherent in many of the knee-jerk responses to cloning, gene technology etc. It is important to look at these phenomena from the premise that the histories and processes from which they develop have already irrevocably altered us, by the food that we eat, the air that we breathe and the medical aid most of us (especially in 'first' world countries) have received since we were born.

Several concurrent trends, linked also to cyberfeminist concerns (see dx newsgroup 'The Old Boys Network'), are under consideration. These trends are being interpreted by many as at once productive and oppressive - due to their challenging of oppressive orders while at the same time sustaining, even intensifying them. Broadly, they are linked to the ways in which biotechnology, gene manipulation, nanotechnology and new medicine enable both the maintenance, and creation/birthing, of 'normalized' bodies - and the ways in which they enable their mutation, mixing and technologisation (prosthetics, nanotech-robots, non-invasive surgery/administering of medicine, IVF treatment, skin grafting, bone extensions and bone marrow transplants, sex changes etc.). Clearly, these are not simple either/or questions nor do they suggest a body-centric essentialism, but since they impact on identity, subjectivity, societies and economies they constitute one faultline that can function as a starting point for discussion. If modern genetic, surgical and chemical technologies are being implemented to attain new levels of homogenisation, if the body being aimed for is the white, healthy, virus free one - one that has clear-access all through the insurance and health-check ladder, we feel it is important to consider strategies for understanding, questioning and disrupting the systems that nurture it, ones that operate at personal, local, and global levels.

mute will be at the WorkSpace from 17th - 26th of August. In addition to its editorial team (Simon Worthington, Josephine Berry and Pauline van Mourik Broekman) our group will consist of a number of writers, editors, artists and theorists, some of whom will be in Kassel physically, some of whom will contribute 'long distance'. Much in the keeping of the WorkSpace's setup, we hope to use small webworks, radio (online and off) and the newsgroup to discuss our topic. The group includes: Tom Paulus, Herman Asselberghs, Verena Conley, Armin Medosch, Manu Luksch, Josephine Bosma, Kate Rich (and BIT: the Bureau of Inverse Technology), Suzy Treister, Caroline Bassett, Lev Manovich, Critical Art Ensemble and Matt Fuller.

The following topics will function as a start to the discussion. If you'd like to get in touch with us about possible additions, questions or contributions, please go to the relevant WorkSpace newsgroup (<http://www.documenta.de/workspace-technoscience>) or email us (mute@easynet.co.uk). Soon we will also post a schedule and set of aims for the stay itself, including a list of possible interviewees from the Documenta 100 speakers series and German critics of biotechnology cultures.

*BIOTECH CONSORTIUM FRENZY

The role of consortia and global/continent-wide trade organisations in standardising companies' approach to the market, forging links with academia, lobbying government and presenting the biotech industries' activities and products to the press. Extending into the ways in which the success of these consortia, heavily Western-dominated, extend and consolidate Western orientation of research and scientific methodologies by the logic of being 'the best and only' (This isn't actually representative of the amount and/or quality of biological and biotechnological research being done in '1st, 2nd and 3rd' world countries, but an artificial imbalance tied to global economic hierarchies, which prevent certain findings being published speedily and consistently enough to make a significant impact on accepted medical/biotechnological standards and protocols.). Although it might be that there are other organisations that are more representative of this aggressive, though self-proclaimed 'communitarian' and 'social-minded' approach, two that we have come across whose tenets and rationale we are interested in looking at are: BIO (in the US - which calls itself the global leader) and EuropaBio, a similar 700+ member group based in Europe.

"The Biotechnology Industry Organization is the largest trade organization to serve and represent the emerging biotechnology industry in the United States and around the globe. The organization's leadership and service-oriented guidance have helped advance the industry and bring the benefits of biotechnology to the people of the world." (from the BIO website: <http://www.bio.org>)

***RISK MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY:
ECOLOGY/NATURE AS NEW LEGITIMATOR FOR MILITARY ACTION**

From being an arguably negligible factor in military combat, 'nature' and ecological directives have managed to undergo an identity-rehaul to become justifiers for military activity. In the absence of a unified or at least consistent ideological 'enemy', sustaining global ecological 'health' (as defined by national and international governmental organisations) becomes justification for hostile action as well as budget maintenance. We are interested in looking at the ways in which this new reasoning seems more resistant to argument than was the political one. In the same way that 'life itself' is resistant to being understood as 'constructed', nature here is conceptualised as something which is disconnected from the acts of the self-same military apparatus that claims to be protecting it.

"With the evaporation of the communist threat, the business of international security is no longer hedged around by ideological values, 'free' versus 'totalitarian. Increasingly, security overviews and wargame scenarios focus on the new tensions and conflicts caused by environmental 'threats': shortages of natural resources, water and oil, cross-border pollution, including radioactivity and acid rain, the environmental underbelly of North-South trade, resource degradation, and population control in the new migrant economy generated by economic restructuring." (Andrew Ross in "The Future is a Risky Business", FutureNatural, 1996)

Further:

***NON-LINEAR ECONOMICS/ECOLOGIES AND (RISK) MANAGEMENT**

How does thinking on the vicissitudes of global economic (and ecological) patterns - e.g. their non-linearity - affect how we understand the effectiveness of something like 'risk management'. Can the global economies/ecologies in which biotechnological products are researched, financed and sold be forecast - let alone steered - in a manner that the confident rhetoric of management suggests.

***DECISION SPACES**

Recently at the ICA in London -at a symposium called Parallel Space- McKenzie Wark talked about global events which are so drastic in their effects that they catapult us into a space in which new philosophical, political and personal trajectories can be suggested. He cited the stock market crash of '87 as such an example and talked about the way in which it catapulted us back to 1929 and consequent analyses of historical, economic and social parallels. In England, the BSE crisis triggered the kind of serious discussions of alternative farming you would never have found in the mainstream media had there not been an immense crisis. Yet, it now feels like things are back to normal. How can 'decision spaces' be harnessed in more effective ways and why do we need them to re-think our political structures?

***SPECIAL INTERESTS:**

*food. Supermarkets as new multinational players. *chemical fusions: ubiquitous chemicals like organo-phosphates are affecting the human organism in ways that simple dietary exclusions can not prevent. *intersections of research into artificial (silicon based) life and biotechnology. *information: opposition/promotion/networking use of the net and mainstream media channels by independents, state and corporate sectors in relation to technoscience. *human/non-human relations re-engineered by biotechnologies and modern medicine. *human rights/animal rights/biotech rights *move from info-economy to info-flesh economy (see contemporary venture capital investments in biotechnology companies etc.) *consequences of multinationals' moves from exploration/sales of non-renewable to renewable energy. *philosophical models and accompanying terminologies for understanding the new organisations of power. (also: how terms circulate in intellectual and commercial spheres. Though I doubt this one can have been directly inspired by it, Foucault's "biopower" can now be found at "The Original Six Day PowerDiet*" (<http://www.biopower.com>)

Some related URLs:

*JAX Mice Price List

<http://www.jax.org/resources/documents/pricelist95/index.html>

*The Norwegian Reference Centre for Laboratory Animal Science & Alternatives

<http://oslovet.veths.no/>

*Guide to Care and Use of Laboratory Animals <http://www.utah.edu/uouarc/gcula/title.htm>

*Genetically Engineered Mouse <http://weber.u.washington.edu/~radin/mouse.htm>

*Molecular Biology Products <http://www.techneuk.co.uk/hybrid.htm>

*Molecular Biology Links <http://www.techneuk.co.uk/hybrid.htm>

*Resources for Genomics, Molecular Biology and Evolutionary Research <http://megasun.bch.umontreal.ca/genomres.html>

And:

http://www.er.doe.gov/production/oher/hug_top.html (Human Genome)

http://www.ri.bbsrc.ac.uk/library/research/nt_notes.html

<http://www.ri.bbsrc.ac.uk/library/research/transgenic.html>

http://www.ri.bbsrc.ac.uk/library/research/nt_technology.html

(misc. Gene technology)

<http://dirk.invermay.cri.nz/docs/intro.html>

(Genome mapping of sheep)

<http://biotech.uams.edu/edu/bio11.html> (Biotechnology regulation)

Hoping to hear from you.

Pauline.

mute is a quarterly journal begun in the winter of 1994. The publication deals with the impact of digital technologies on culture and society. It participates with a community of artists, programmers and theorists who contribute essays, reviews, polemical shorts and fiction. (see original 'technoscience' text at www.documenta.de/workspace)

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*****PROUD TO BE FLESH*****

Read the introduction to our mini documentation web on an old version of Metamute, 'the Happy Valley'

Technoscience Introduction

issue 9

The Biotech industry "now rivals the oil industry for weight and influence" says Rob Cummins, the director of the Pure Food campaign. This quote, taken from a four day special report in The Guardian newspaper, is typical of the recent swelter of

media-speculation on the industry's growing power. The Labour government's moratorium on the introduction of genetically modified foods has brought to the boil a debate which has long simmered in the public psyche. After ploughing hundreds of billions of pounds into research, the American dominated 'agri-business' is too close to payback time to be put off by a handful of 'resistant Europeans'. After all, Europe is potentially the world's second largest market for their product range.

It is becoming an all too common revelation to hear of 'independent' government advisors, even critics, also holding down jobs on the boards of biotech corporations. This ambidextrous career strategy can only deepen the existing discrepancy between the industry's hi-finance PR and lobbying campaign and the absence of a powerful, independent critical foRSe. The corporate takeover of agriculture, the collapse of biodiversity, and the unpredictable results of letting engineered life forms 'into the wild' are just a handful of the doubts surrounding the biological revolution. But to be cautious does not imply a lemming like return to the illusory mbosom of Big Mamma Nature.

This summer, Mute spent ten days at Kassel's Documenta-X exhibition, participating in the Hybrid Workspace (see Mute 8, Short/Cuts). During this time, we explored the theme of Technoscience with invited guests (Kate Rich/BIT, Armin Medosch and Manu Luksch, Kathleen Rogers and Rob La Frenais, John Hutnyk, Krystian Woznicki and Josephine Bosma). Technoscience is the intersection point of the information and life sciences, where the technological marries the living in a bid to conquer death and disease, endow life with the utility of technology and technology with the kiss of life. The fact that Technoscience spans more than its trademarked products (OncoMouse, Dolly, bovine growth hormone, the Flavr Savr tomato, IVF) was one of the project's leitmotifs ? its economic dimension becomes the real Surgeon General presiding over the birth of this technoscientific progeny.

Browse the whole Hybrid Workspace archive, where Mute's mini website is housed (click on...
Technoscience.
Vocabulary, Politics, Practice
mute, London)