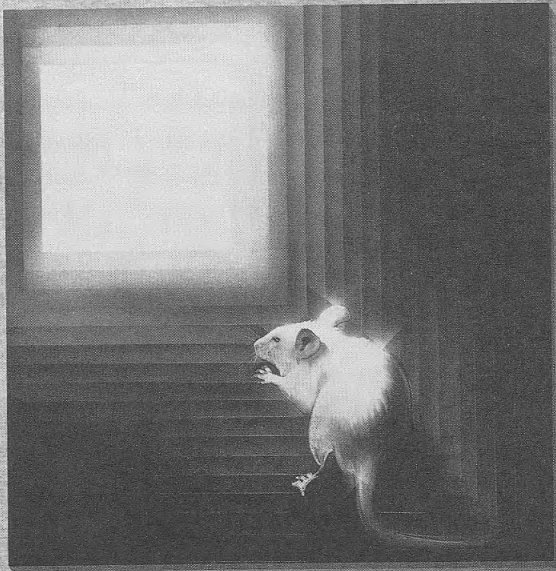


Stalking Cancer



ONCOMOUSE™ shortens the path to knowledge in carcinogenesis

ONCOMOUSE™/*ras* transgenic animal is the first *in vivo* model to contain an activated oncogene. Each OncoMouse carries the *ras* oncogene in all germ and somatic cells. This transgenic model, available commercially for the first time, predictably undergoes carcinogenesis. OncoMouse reliably develops neoplasms within months...and offers you a

shorter path to new answers about cancer. Available to researchers only from Du Pont, where better things for better living come to life.

For more information about OncoMouse and monoclonal antibodies for specifically detecting the activated *ras* oncogene protein, call 1-800-551-2121.

Better things for better living



Circle No. 151 on Readers' Service Card

When Man™ Is on the Menu

Donna Haraway

In its April 27, 1990 ad for OncoMouse™ in *Science* magazine, DuPont Corporation presents its fully commodified rodent, “the first *in vivo* model to contain an activated oncogene” that results in reliable tumor production, under the title “Stalking Cancer.”¹ Produced by genetic engineering, this fine transgenic mouse is “available to researchers only from DuPont, where better things for better living come to life.”² The mouse is a weapon in the war on cancer, a conflict that sustains empires of technoscience and biotechnology. In the strongest possible sense, OncoMouse™ is a technological product whose natural habitat and evolutionary future are fully contained in that world-building space called “the laboratory.” Denizen of the wonderful realms of the undead (where better things for better living come to life), this little murine smart bomb is also, in the strongest possible sense, a cultural actor. A tool-weapon for stalking cancer, the bioengineered mouse is simultaneously a metaphor and a technology. This is the normal state of the entities in technoscience cultures, including ourselves. In science, as Nancy Stepan pointed out for nineteenth-century studies of sex and race, a metaphor may become a research program.³

“A Few Words About Reproduction From A Leader In The Field” is the advertising slogan for Logic General Corporation’s software duplication system in the May 1, 1983 issue of *Science*. The immediate visual and verbal impact of Logic General’s advertising image insists on the absurdity of separating the technical, organic, mythic, textual and political threads in the

semiotic fabric of technoscience culture. Under the unpromising orange-to-yellow rainbow of the earth-sun logo of Logic General, a biological white rabbit has its (her? sex and gender are not so settled in this reproductive system) back to us. Its paws are on a keyboard, that inertial, old-fashioned residue of the typewriter that lets our computers feel natural to us, user-friendly, as it were. But the keyboard is misleading; no letters are transferred by a mechanical key to a waiting solid surface. The computer–user interface works differently: even if s/he doesn't understand the implications of her duplicitous keyboard, the white rabbit is, like her mouse cousin, in her natural home — s/he is fully artifactual. Like fruit flies, yeast, transgenic mice and the humble nematode worm, *Caenorhabditis elegans*, this rabbit's evolutionary story transpires in the lab; the lab is its proper niche, its true habitat. Both material system and sign for the measure of fecundity, this kind of rabbit occurs in no other nature than the lab, that preeminent scene of replication practices in our hypermodern world of rationalized copying practices. Figures in stories of enlightenment, the bunnies, worms, mice and men of technoscience are simultaneously research models, cultural metaphors and potent jokes — jokes with the power to remake worlds and the subjects who inhabit them.

As with DuPont's OncoMouse™, which climbs toward the blindingly bright, open shutter of a camera, the rabbit is also peering at a luminous icon of technoscientific illumination; but with Logic General we are not in a biological laboratory. Looking into the screen of a video display terminal the organic rabbit peers at its image, but the image is not her reflection, indeed, *especially* not her reflection. This is not Lacan's world of mirrors: primary identification and maturing metaphoric substitution will be produced with other techniques, other writing technologies. The white rabbit will be translated, her potencies and competences relocated radically. The guts of the computer produce a kind of visual product other than distorted, self-birthing reflections. The simulated bunny inside the computer screen peers out at us face first. It is s/he who locks her gaze with us. S/he also has her paws on a grid, one just barely reminiscent of a typewriter, but more reminiscent of an older icon of technoscience — the Cartesian coordinate system that maps the

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CIRCLE 106

world into the imaginary spaces of rational modernity and enlightenment.

In her natural electronic habitat, the virtual rabbit is on a grid that insists on the world as a game played on a chesslike board made up of a square array of floppy disks. This rabbit insists that the truly rational actors will replicate themselves in a virtual world where the best players will not be Man, though he may linger like the horse-drawn carriage that gave its form to the railroad car or the typewriter that gave its illusory shape to the computer interface. The functional privileged signifier in this system will not be so easily mistaken for any primate male's urinary and copulative organ. Metaphoric substitution and other circulations in the very material symbolic domain will be more likely to be effected by a competent mouse. The vague femaleness of both the rabbits, of course, gives no confidence that the new players other to Man will be women. More likely, the rabbit that is interpellated into the World in this non-mirror stage, this diffracting moment of subject constitution, will be literate in a quite different grammar of gender.

Like OncoMouse™, both the rabbits in the Logic General ad are cyborgs — compounds of the organic, technical, mythic, textual and political — and they call us, interpellate us, into a world in which we are reconstituted as subjects. Interpolated — that is, inserted — thus into the matrices of technoscientific maps, we may or may not wish to take shape there. But, literate in the reading and writing practices proper to the technical-mythic territories of the laboratory, we have little choice. We inhabit these narratives, and they inhabit us. The figures and the stories of these ads haunt us, literally. The reproductive stakes in the texts of Logic General and DuPont — and, in general, in the inscription practices of the laboratory — are future life forms and ways of life for humans and unhumans.

If these are the zones in which those who respond to DuPont's and Logic General's call take shape, then such shaping highlights our need for stories of shape-changers. We need stories for imagining how to be responsible within and for the zones in which we find ourselves. Most important obligations and passions in the world are unchosen; "choice" has always been a desperately inadequate political metaphor for resisting domination and for inhabiting a

livable world. Interpellation is not about choice; it is about insertion. It is past time to put our reading practices into action. My question, rooted in a reading of the technoscience text in the world, is a political one: If technological products are cultural actors, and if "we," whoever that problematic invitation to inhabit a common space might include, are technological products at deeper levels than we have yet comprehended, then what kind of cultural action will forbid the evolution of OncoMouse™ into Man™? The question has a historical antecedent from the olden times of historical narrative, when revolution was not a bad joke: What is to be done?

NOTES

1. This short intervention is revised from a section of a paper-in-progress, "Of OncoMouse™ and Man™," for a book to be edited by Carl Cranor, *Genes 'R' Us, So Who's That?*, which grew out of a residential study group sponsored by the University of California Humanities Research Institute, winter 1990, at U.C. Irvine. I wish to thank the UCHRI and all the participants in the study group.

2. Those who follow the commercial circuits of biotechnology will know that DuPont became DuPont-Merck shortly after the "stalking cancer" advertising series appeared. The slogan, "better things for better living," seems to have passed from the Earth. But, like the words from the introduction to "Star Trek," "to boldly go where no man has gone before," millions of earthlings have paid DuPont's slogan the compliment of incorporating it into a most refractory unconscious, where it will be compost for future advertising copy.

3. Nancy Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy and Science," *Isis* 77 (1986), pp. 261–77.