

## **:: Notes for Strategy (BUS 204) Seminar:: Session 5:: Stephen Shukaitis**

Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006) *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

“Biocapital is the articulation of a technoscientific regime, having to do with the life sciences and drug development, with an economic regime, overdetermined by the market.” (111)

This relation, the enmeshing of the life science’s with capitalism:

— “an analysis and theorization of the life sciences, especially as they pertain to biomedicine, with an analysis and theorization / of capitalist frameworks within such technoscience operates.” (6-7)

— “the life sciences are *overdetermined* by capitalist political economic structures within which they emerge” (6) – this is a contextual relationship, not a causal one.

— In other words, not to say that particular economic and political structures simplistically lead to particular kinds of emergence in this relationship, “they could still disproportionately set the stage within which the latter takes shapes in particular ways” (6)

Recall, in the first week, de Certau’s definition of strategy as the relations of force that generate a space separate from the environment, and creating of relations based around that division and delineation of a space/place. Biocapital can be understood then as variations of strategy in this sense, as the creating of spaces / places.

### **Formations of space in biocapital:**

- Upstream / downstream in drug development
- Patients in waiting
- Populations as test subjects
- Changes in IP laws and how that affects business arrangements (end of reverse engineering after WTO agreement, for instance)
- The use of hype and image to create possibilities for start-ups

### **Hype (Public Enemy says don’t believe it)**

“a culture of innovation, driven by vision and hype, is not simply a waste or unreal but rather an extremely productive mechanism of value generation in a speculative marketplace.” (110)

“Hype is not about truth or falsity; rather, it is about credibility or incredibility. A successful investor relations pitch for a company is one that sounds credible, even if no one who is being pitched to quite believes what is being sold.” (114)

Start-ups exhibiting particular logics and patterns of growth: “a deeper structural logic, of a start-up ‘growing up’ into a corporation, that leads to tendential outcomes... There is a logic of capitalism that pushes towards growth *in certain ways*, that necessitates streamlining, dispensability, and standardization, and that pushes against all those qualities of exuberance, innovation, and risk taking that allow star-ups to start up in the first place, and to create a certain type of community that everyone can buy into and feel a part of.” (263)

### **Modes of abstraction**

— “understanding biocapital involves analyzing the relationship between materiality and modes of abstraction that underlie the coemergence of new forms of life science with market regimes for the conduct of such science. In other words, one can understand emergent biotechnologies such as genomics only by simultaneously analyzing the market frameworks within which they emerge.” (33)

— This is how Dr. Harney has talked about how business approaches individuals, communities, populations to see what can be gotten / extracted from them. How can the group or individual be broken down (abstracted) even further in ways to extract resources that can be utilized?

— Viewing as physical labor power, abstracted, Taylorized → now, as even further abstracted bits of data, genes, information, ideas, creativity

### **Nationalism / Globalization / Religion**

— “biocapital is embedded in salvatory and nationalist tropes and imaginaries, by making the argument that in the United States, one can explicitly see biocapital in term of a ‘born-again’ messianism, while in India, what becomes explicit is the relationship of these emergent assemblages in term of concerns and debates around nationalism.” (181)

### **Biology / Information Science (link this with Tiziana’s book)**

“biology increasingly becomes an information science. Therefore, an analysis of biocapital involves asking at the outset where value resides as biology becomes an information science, and what work and whose agencies are required to create these values.” (41)

“These circuits, however, are not simply preordained networks but are often strategically constructed or constrained by various institutional actors, whose actions may be at cross purposes. The creation of value, then, is a consequence of both circuits of exchange and of strategic articulations of concerned individual and institutional actors.” (43)

“Capitalism’s incessant development is brought about not because of the superiority of its indices (efficient production, competition, market logic, or surplus value generation) but because of its willingness to constantly abandon, redefine, or mutate many of them in contested, unpredictable ways.” (59)