Autumn School

Bio-objects and bio-objectification: a methodology in the making

The COST Action IS 1001 “Bio-objects and their boundaries - governing matters at the intersection of society, politics, and science” and the IPP (Institute of Public Goods and Policies of the High Spanish Research Council) welcome applications for the multi-disciplinary international Autumn School ‘Bio-objects and bio-objectification: a methodology in the making”, which will take place in Madrid from the 26th to the 28th of November.

About the Autumn School:

In recent years, remarkable advances in life sciences, especially in the field of biomedicine, biotechnology and synthetic biology, have helped to bring into being a range of new biological objects (or what we call bio-objects), such as genetically modified organisms and embryonic stem cell lines, and the creation of new life structures through “synthetic biology”. These “bio-objects” are full of promise and hope for innovations in the life sciences, in fields such as agriculture, medicine and food. These promises and hopes, however, do not proceed merely from the expectations of new therapeutic breakthrough or of new sources of renewable energy; they also spring from the potential of these bio-objects to create new economic value. In this vision, bio-objects can be understood as biological elements that become commodified for the market forces to incorporate them into economic relations and value chains with a view of producing value and benefits. In other words, we seem to be facing the emergence of “new economies of life”.

Concepts like biovalue (Waldby 2002), life surplus (Cooper 2008) or biocapital (Rajan 2006), have been recently elaborated to explore and discuss these economies and their organizing principles. Whilst diverging in significant
ways, these concepts converge on one issue: the process of value creation generated by practices of bio-objectification, increasingly incorporating biological resources and organisms into the capitalist system of production and trade. In order to understand how these processes work we need to further develop our understanding of the role and boundaries of bio-objectification in building commodifiable bio-objects, and, more generally, how, through stabilizing their socio-technical identity, they can be mobilized in public and private markets. This requires discussion over the methodological framework and early toolkit that COST members have produced and which will be available to all delegates.

**Aims and objectives:**

The aim of this Autumn School is, first, to explore and study in details the process of bio-objectification, its implications for current societal relationship among human beings and between human beings and the living organisms. It also aims at achieving a better understanding of the role therein played by science, and at obtaining a more comprehensive view of the economic, social, ethical and political relations that generate, and are generated by these new bio-objects. In order to do that, a methodological toolkit will be presented and developed during the three days of the schools. All the participants will have a chance to use this toolkit not only to reflect upon their research topics and issues, but also to contribute to its development, elaboration and refinement.

The training staff is composed of 4 tutors/trainers, including:
Prof. Andrew Webster, University of York, UK
Dr. Vincenzo Pavone, IPP-CSIC, Spain
Dr. Lucia Martinelli, Museo delle Scienze, Trento, Italy

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**Logistic details:**

The Autumn School will last for three days and involve up to 15 participants, together with the 4 tutors/trainers. It is organized in two working days, in which all participants will work and interact individually and in small groups.

Successful applicants will be asked to prepare a 20-30 minutes presentation relating to their own current PhD research, and in doing so, try to link it to a conceptual framework on bio-objects and bio-objectification processes. The latter will be sent to all successful applicants in advance. It will also be introduced at the Autumn School.

On the third day, the participants will have a chance to participate to the COST Workshop “Bio-objects and value creation: towards new economies of life”, which will also take place in Madrid, where the main outcomes and results of the school will also be presented.
Applications:

Who can apply?
We welcome applications from PhD students interested in bio-objectification processes.

Applications should contain:

1) A cover letter of interest
2) A formal abstract of current research developments
3) A brief explanation of how these research developments relate to the topic and objectives of the Autumn School.
4) It should also contain some indications of what kind of issues and topics the applicant would like to discuss during the school.

The application should be sent to costmadrid@yahoo.com by September 30, 2012. Successful applicants will be notified by October 15, 2012.

Grants:
A number of Grants covering a part of travel and allocation costs are available. Only PhD students from institutions already participating in this Action are eligible for these grants. Please indicate in your cover letter, if you are interested in such a grant or need it.

Contact:
For more information, please contact: Vincenzo.pavone@csic.es, Andrew.webster@york.ac.uk or the organizational team: costmadrid@yahoo.com.

About the COST Action:

Europe seeks to become the most dynamic knowledge-based economy of the globe, and the production and circulation of “bio-objects”, such as stem cells, chimera, tissue samples or genetically modified organisms, play a key part in this endeavor. This Action develops novel interdisciplinary tools based on a range of evidence that will improve our understanding of “bio-objects”, their production and governance. The core questions answered through this COST Action are: how are the boundaries between human and animal, organic and non-organic, living and the non-living opened up?; how do bio-objects change social relations?; how does the public-private interface shape the making of bio-objects?; and finally, how does the governance of bio-objects perform at different levels, from the level of the European Union and its Member States to the sub-political level, and finally in clinics and laboratories?

For more information please see: http://www.univie.ac.at/bio-objects/