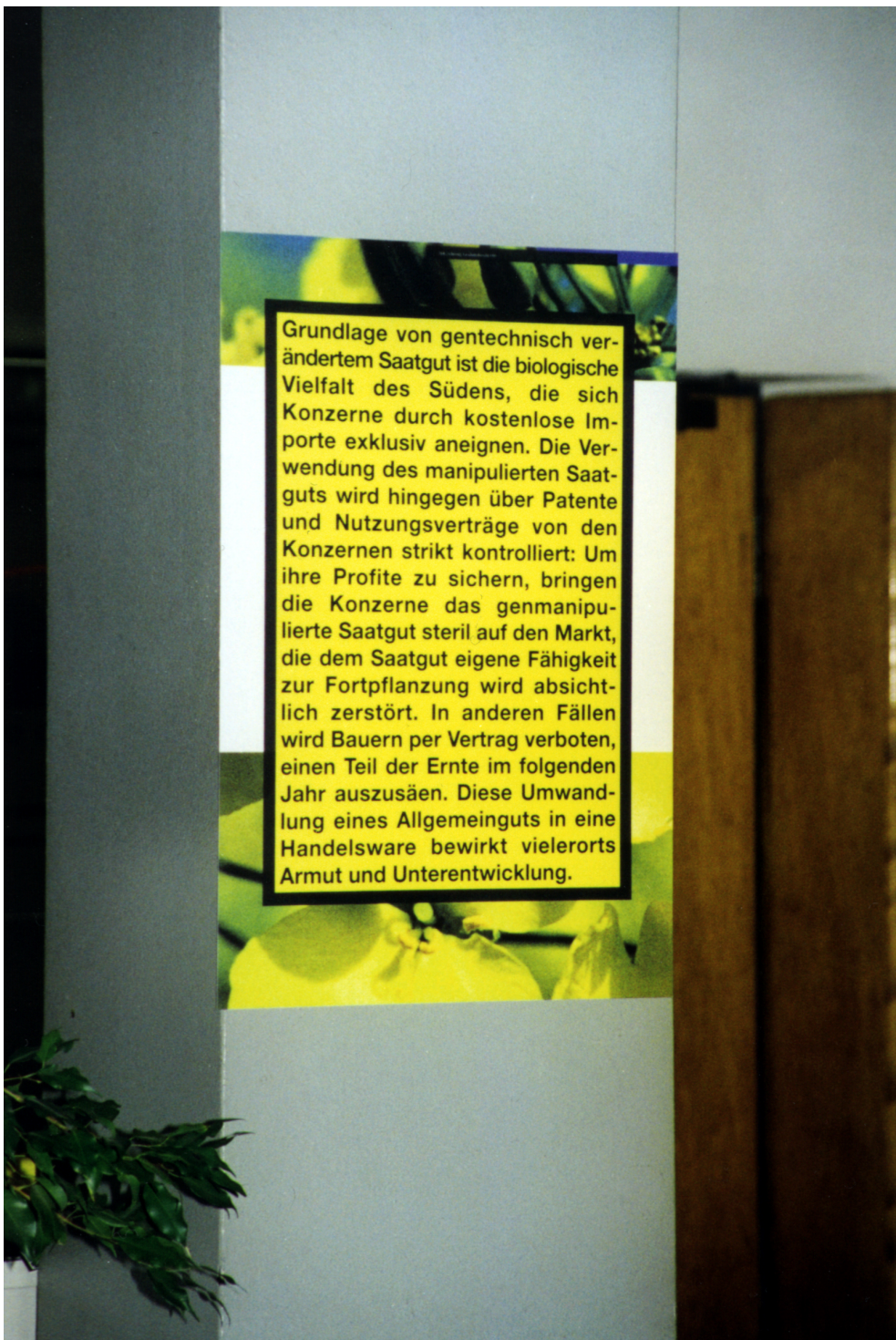


## **Focus on Companies**

Text/image montages by Oliver Ressler

Contribution to the exhibition "Model, Model..." of the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein on the occasion of the RWTH-project weeks "Der künstliche Mensch – Visionen des Machbaren" in Aachen, May 4 – June 16, 2000

"Focus on Companies" refers to the exhibition taking place at the same time in Aachen, "Focus on Genes". "Focus on Genes" is a travelling exhibition put together by the socio-culturally agile Hygiene-Museum in Dresden which attempts to represent genetic engineering "in a popular scientific and experience-oriented way."



"Focus on Companies", text/image montage, 79 x 52 cm, 2000. Installation view: "Modell, Modell...", Neuer Kunstverein Aachen, Aachen, 2000

The text reads: The basis for genetically manipulated seeds is the biological diversity of the South which companies contract exclusively through free imports. The use of manipulated seeds, on the contrary, is strictly controlled by the companies through patents and contracts for use: In order to secure their profits, the companies bring sterile genetically manipulated seeds to the market. Thus, the seeds own ability to reproduce is intentionally destroyed. In other cases, farmers are forbidden by contract to plant a part of their harvest in the following year. This transformation of common property into a market product in many cases creates poverty and underdevelopment.

According to the announcement of the project, the "fundamental contents of the exhibition, 'Focus on Genes' are dealt with in great detail in a richly illustrated catalogue which was published in the framework of the "Gene-Worlds" project in 1998." Similar to this preceding exhibition from the Hygiene-Museum, once again knowledge about genetic engineering should be presented for "forming your own opinion" and coming closer to the goal of "weighing out the chances and risks which the use of genetic engineering offers from a medical, ethical and social perspective."



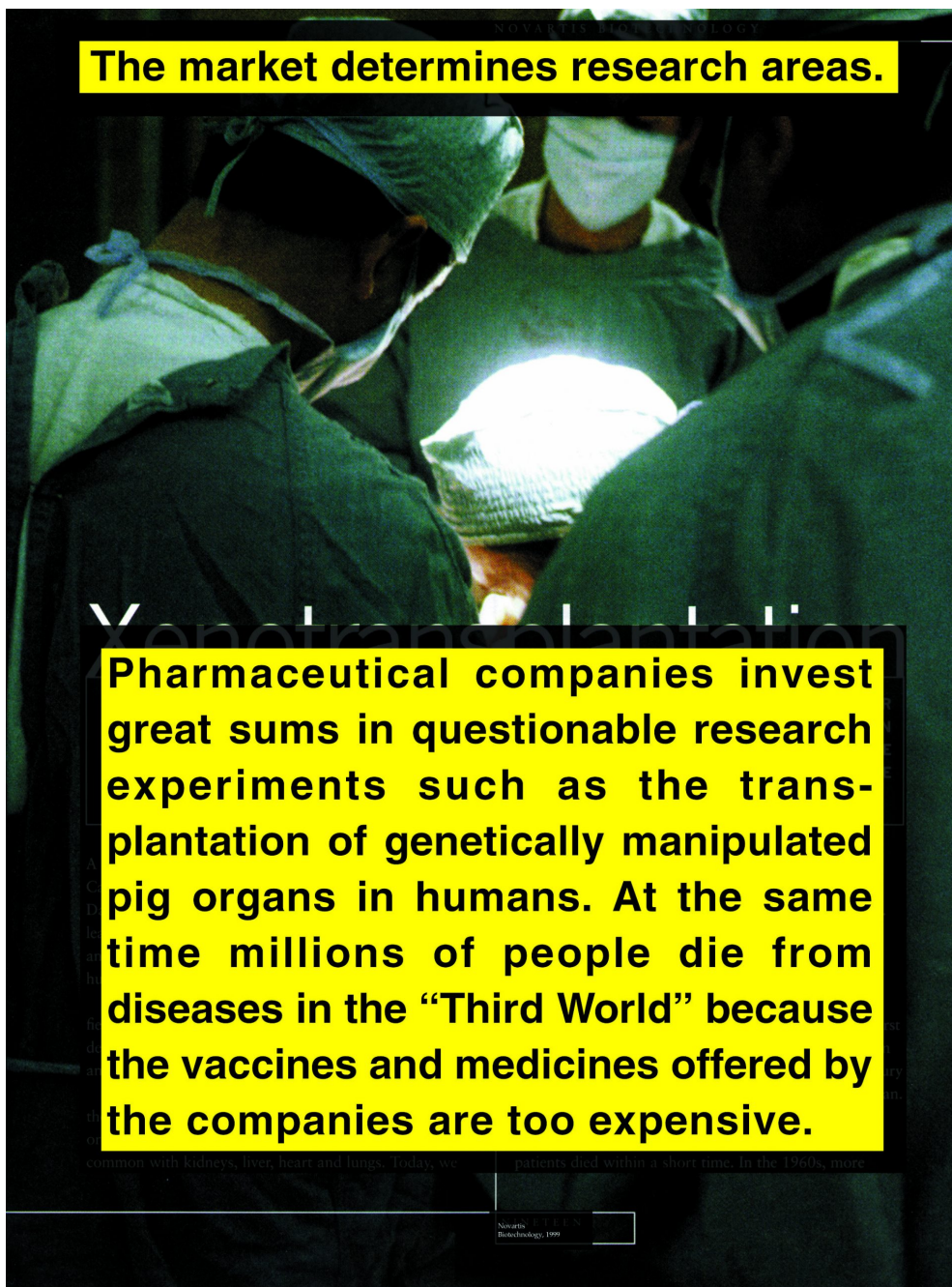
To provide a counterpoint to the five "Gene-Worlds" ("Gen-Welten") exhibitions shown in Germany and Switzerland, in 1998 I simultaneously realized the project "antiGene Worlds: Oppositions to Genetic Engineering".\* In a text published in the context of this project\*\* I pointed out that the concept of "Gene-Worlds" is based on the false assumption that individuals can contribute to the decisions made about which technologies are implemented and which are not. The decisions about these things are not made in a democratic way, but, rather, in connection with powerful financial interests and the political pressure from companies. In both "Gene-Worlds" and "Focus on Genes," the exhibition's role consists solely in creating acceptance!



"Focus on Companies", text/image montage, 74 x 54 cm, 2000. Installation view: "Modell, Modell...", Neuer Kunstverein Aachen, Aachen, 2000  
The text reads: Scientists' opinions are presented as objective, the opinions of all other people as subjective.  
Scientific research is always an expression of existing social power relations.

The project "Focus on Companies" therefore puts those companies which advance genetic engineering research and product development at the center of critique.

The starting point for the print series produced for the exhibition in Aachen are current publications from companies such as Novartis, Schering, Bio-Rad Laboratories and Roche, which appear as sponsors for "Focus on Genes". Selected pages from company reports and brochures were chosen whereby the original texts which thematize the various areas within genetic engineering are replaced by black framed yellow text fields.



"Focus on Companies", text/image montage, 2000

In contrast to the *warning signs* of the "antiGene Worlds" project, the dangers which arise from the technologies themselves are not at the center but rather the ecological and social logic of genetic engineering and its global, socio-political



effects. For such areas there is no place either in the publications of the companies or in "Focus on Genes".

Therefore, the texts of the companies' brochures are covered over with a political commentary which takes up various themes from the exhibition (Xenotransplantations, Gentech-rice with Vitamin A, anti-squash tomatoes) and takes on other perspectives.



"Focus on Companies", text/image montage, 72 x 55 cm, 2000

The text reads: Science is a means of pushing through economic interests and political ideologies. Through genetic engineering, new markets should be made accessible and the accumulation of capital secured. The seizure of plants, animals and people by transnational companies, accords with the capitalist economic system's totalitarian principle of transforming everything into products.



"Focus on Companies", text/image montage, 54 x 72 cm, 2000

The text reads: Genetic engineering is based on the delusive idea of an absolute control-ability to steer biological processes. Whereas the companies expect increased profits from the new capitalist offensive in the agrarian sector, genetically produced food stuffs have no advantages from the perspective of the consumer. Nonetheless, they are to carry the ecological, economic and political costs and risks.

\* Oliver Ressler, geGen-Welten: Widerstände gegen Gentechnologien, Edition Selene, 1998, 84 pages.

\*\* Various versions were printed in the "antiGene Worlds" publication, in the magazines ak – analyse & kritik, iz3w – Blätter des Informationszentrums 3. Welt and in the GID – Gen-ethischer Informationsdienst.

"Focus on Companies" was shown at various institutes of the RWTH Aachen.