

Sexuality, Genetics, Biotech, Wetware, Body mods.

Scottish SF author Iain Banks created a fictitious group-civilisation called "Culture" in his eponymous narrative. The vast majority of humanoid people in the "Culture" are born with greatly altered glands housed within their central nervous systems, who secrete – on command – mood- and sensory-appreciation-altering compounds into the person's bloodstream. Additionally many inhabitants have subtly altered reproductive organs – and control over the associated nerves – to enhance sexual pleasure. Ovulation is at will in the female, and a fetus up to a certain stage may be re-absorbed, aborted, or held at a static point in its development; again, as willed. Also, a viral change from one sex into the other, is possible. And there is a convention that each person should give birth to one child in their lives. It may sound strange, but Banks states that a society in which it is so easy to change sex will rapidly find out if it is treating one gender better than the other. Pressure for change within society would presumably build up until some form of sexual equality and hence numerical parity will be established.

Does this set-up sound too futuristic? Too utopian? Too bizarre?

We may not forget that mankind is a sexual and tool-using species. And that's why our annual conference Arse Elektronika deals with sex, technology and the future. As bio-hacking, sexually enhanced bodies, genetic utopias and plethora of gender have long been the focus of literature, science fiction and, increasingly, pornography, this year will see us explore the possibilities that fictional and authentic bodies have to offer. Our world is already way more bizarre than our ancestors could have ever imagined. But it may not be bizarre enough. "Bizarre enough for what?" – you might ask. Bizarre enough to subvert the heterosexist matrix that is underlying our world and that we should hack and overcome for some quite pressing reasons within the next century. Don't you think, replicants?

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