

cesagen

# The Right Stuff

**EGN Conference, London**

**25 April 2012**

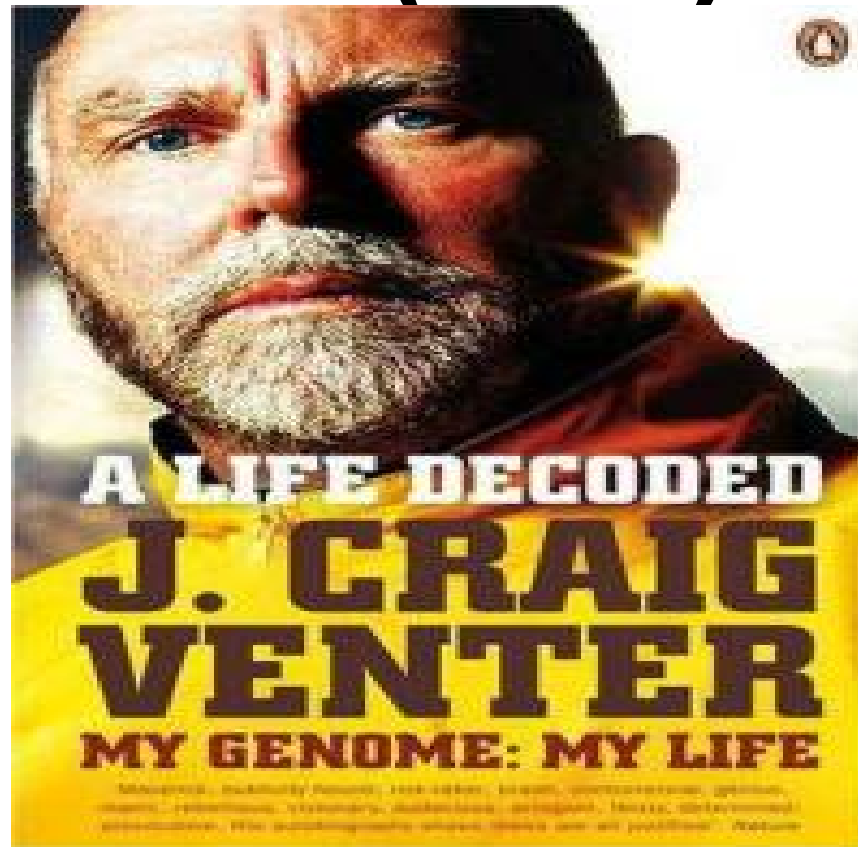
**Maureen McNeil, Lancaster University, UK**



# Marc Quinn, *John Sulston* (2001)



J.Craig Venter, *A Life Decoded: My Genome: My Life* (2007)



# My DNA, My Life

My genetic autobiography can be found throughout my body. Each of my one hundred trillion cells (with the exception of my sperm and red blood cells) packages my DNA in forty-six chromosomes, a number typical of humans and of no particular significance, save that chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans have forty-eight....

...But overall we do know that the order of the letters in the DNA provides a recipe (translated into action in cells through the medium of a more ancient genetic molecule, RNA– ribonucleic acid) to make, in my case, one Craig Venter. (p.7)

# My Y Chromosome and Sex

At the age of sixteen, when I still had long blond hair, I was fully introduced to the genetic programming on my Y chromosome. I had a girlfriend named Kim, whom I had met earlier that year after she transferred to Mills High School. My Y came into its own when Kim had a sweet Sixteen party while her parents were away. ...(p.18)

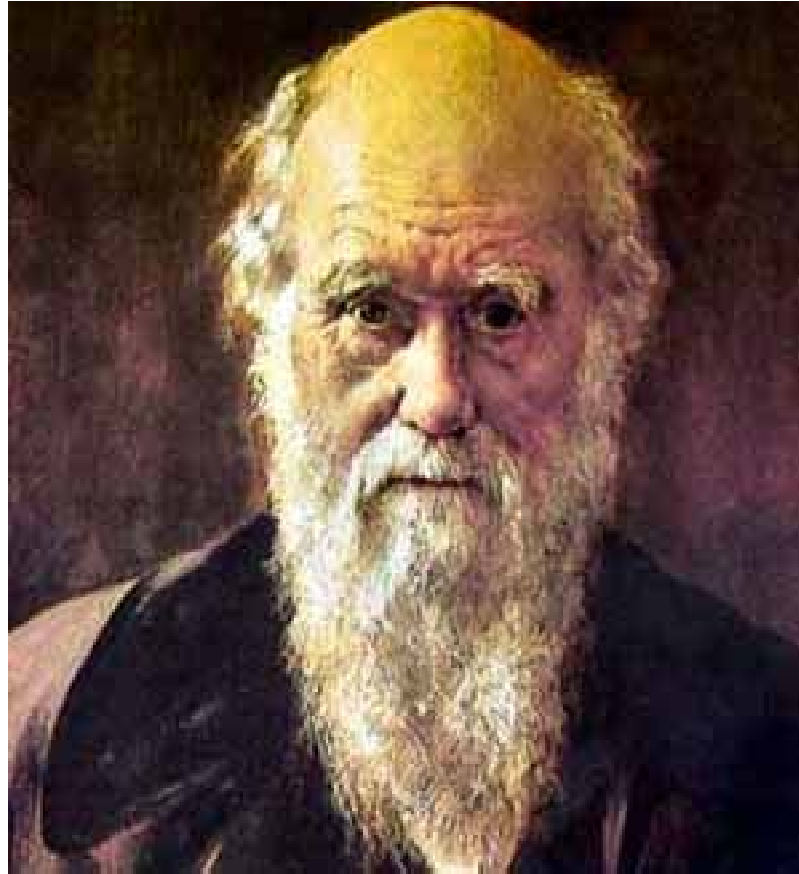
# Genomic Portraits of Genomic Scientists

- genealogy of ‘portraits’ of scientists
  - a) genealogy of visual portraits of scientists (bio-art interlude)
  - b) genealogy of autobiographical writing
- ‘the modest witness’ (Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Haraway 1996) to ‘the immodest witness’
- ‘the great tradition’?: sperm, genomic testing and technoscientific performance

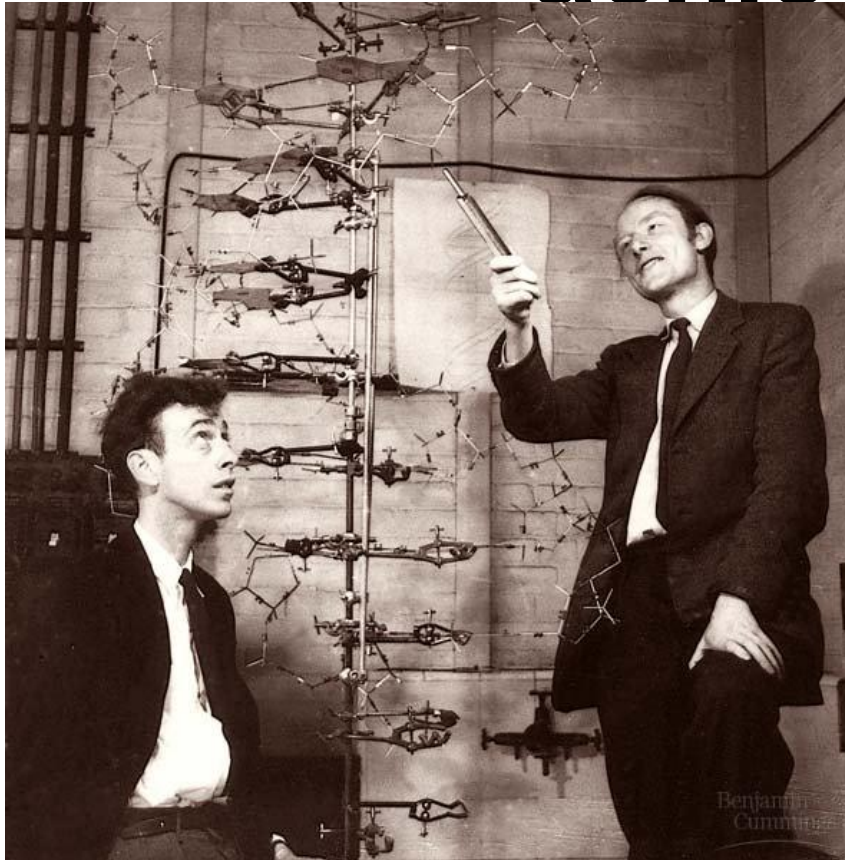
# Visual portraiture of scientists



# Genealogy of portraiture of scientists



# Genetics: the icon and images of technoscientific achievement



- gene as icon (Nelkin and Anker 2005)
- photograph of Watson and Crick (1963)

# Marc Quinn, *Self* (1991)



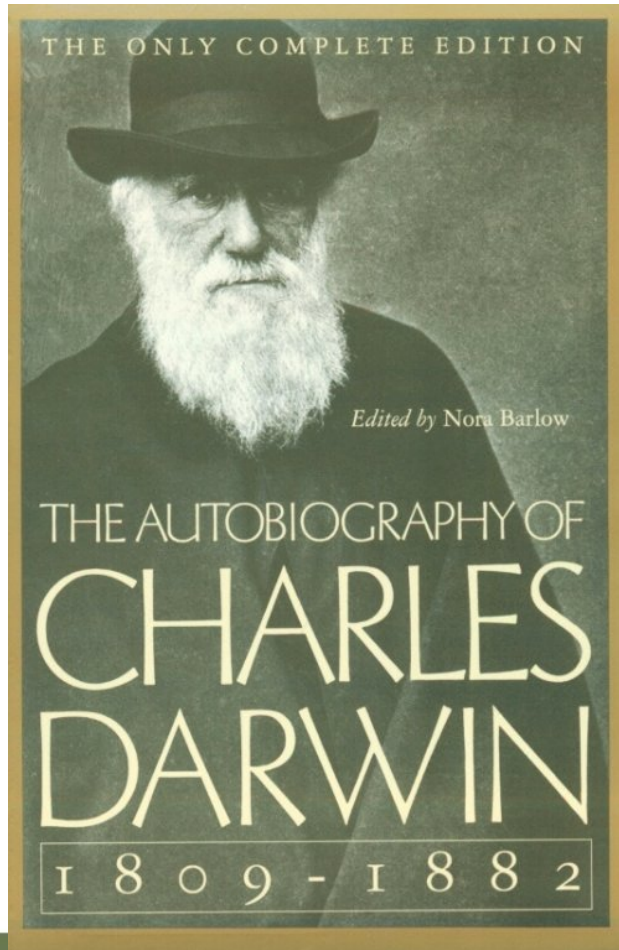
- bioartist
- representing the self and life
- materialism
- realism and mediation

Sulston's 'most realistic portrait' – National Portrait Gallery, London

- 'biovalue' (Waldby)

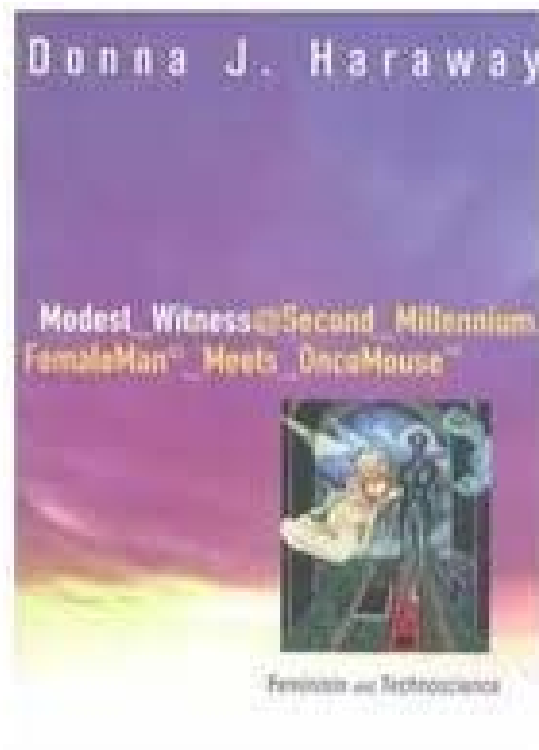
# **Writing lives in science: biographies and autobiographies of scientists**

# Autobiographies of scientists



- intellectual
- personal
- narrative of accomplishment
- corporeality and representation of the body of the scientists (e.g. disease vs genomic profile)
- intertextuality (Watson 1965)

# The Modest Witness



# 'The modest witness'

- 'the modest witness' (Shapin and Schaffer 1985) – C17 - Boyle
- Haraway (1997) - critical reading of 'the modest witness' – making science/making gender
- 'practical inheritances which have undergone many reconfigurations but which remain potent' (Haraway 1997:33)

# ‘The immodest witness’

- James Watson, *The Double Helix* (1968) – secular scientific hero
- the body of the scientist
- on display
- part of the representation of the self
- ‘the stuff’ of science – genomic material, genomic theory and technoscientific achievement

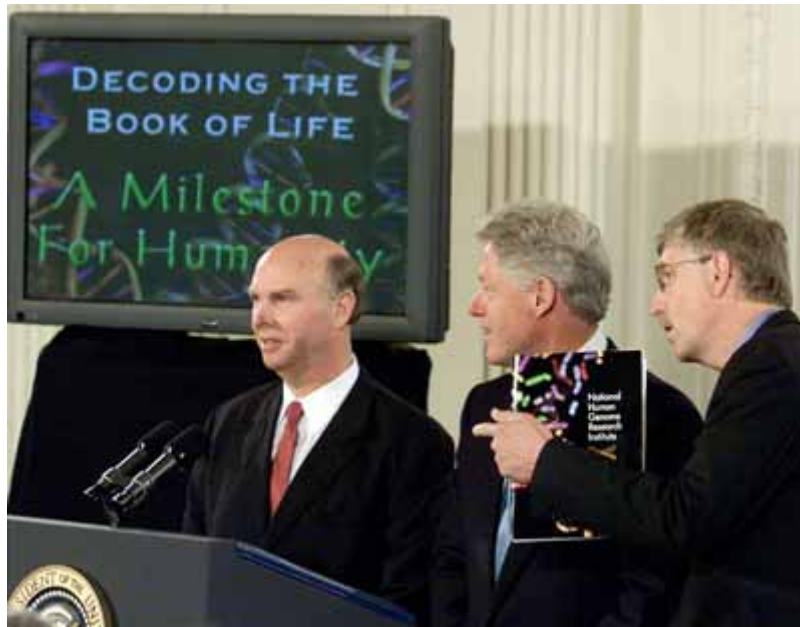


# ‘The immodest witness’

- immodesty and display: no longer denial of self and denial of body
- self – mind and body – incorporation of genomics (O’Riordan 2010)
- corporealisation and materialisation (Murphy 2006)
- mediatization of scientific achievement

# The 'real' 'right stuff' and/vs mediatization

# Mediatization: Genomics on the world stage



# Genomes 'R Us'

- HGP: race, key personalities
- national stakes: US vs UK; US/UK ('the special friendship'?)
- commercial ownership vs public property

# **Sperm, genomics and technoscientific performace**

# The great tradition: sperm and scientific prowess

- Sulston's sperm- DNA- Quinn's image
- HGP original sequencing – Venter's sperm
- traditions of self-experimentation – scientific medicine
- use of doctor's own sperm; medical students' sperm – reproductive experimentation C20

# Genomic material: sexual difference

- genetic testing: paternity, genealogy, forensic (rape, etc.)
- sperm vs blood
- Venter: initial sampling for HGP – women-blood; (some) men – sperm
- gendering of sampling practices

# Conclusions

- coming together of self-representation and biology; biology and autobiography
- instantiation of version of the self and biotechnical knowledge
- Thacker – ‘science as mirror’
- media and representation –representation practices and subjectivity
- portraiture – naturalisation
- materialism and mediation
- modest, immodest witnesses, gender



# References

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