

The End of Sexuality and Other Apocalyptic Scenarios

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Can any action avert humanity's technological downfall? I try to remain hopeful and cast my lot with the possibility of change, but our situation and prospects both appear rather bleak. So many nightmare scenarios have been imagined for us. Science fiction anticipated genetic tinkering generations before the technology existed to actually do it. The dangers I have just briefly described are very real. Yet I find that every new revelation seems strangely familiar, as if we had been expecting it. Each sensational news report seems like it must have come from science fiction.

For instance, on October 6, 2005, the *Washington Post* reported, "It has recently become clear that a few offspring of cloned pigs and cows are already trickling into the food supply." Though the meat and milk industries have mostly observed a voluntary moratorium on producing food from cloned animals while the FDA formulates rules, some cloned animal products have entered the supply chain. The FDA is expected to rule that milk from cloned animals and meat from their offspring are safe to eat. "The FDA has made clear it won't require labels on clone products," wrote the *Post*, "which may leave meat-eaters who want to avoid them little practical way to do so."

This is surreal and scary. Our food supply is increasingly divorced from natural processes. Reproducing flocks of animals, like selected, saved, and replanted seeds, generate diversity in decentralized processes. Biotechnology creates uniformity. It seeks to control nature. But as we are seeing in the world around us, efforts to control nature typically have unpredictable repercussions, making us exceedingly vulnerable. The best protection of our food supply against disease and crop failures lies in the diversity of traditional decentralized agricultural practices. Unfortunately, decentralized systems of community food sovereignty are not high on the agendas of the multinational corporations vying for control of our food.

Toward what cataclysmic climax the path of biotechnology may eventually lead us we can only speculate. The futuristic dystopian image I often think of comes from the 1973 film *Soylent Green*. Set only a couple of decades beyond our own time, the film envisions massive environmental collapse. The only foods available are processed food bars of undisclosed origin. One day a week people receive special green high-protein bars. "Tuesday is Soylent Green Day." The character of the cranky old man, Sol Roth (played by Edward G. Robinson), refuses when a young friend offers him a bar of Soylent Green:

"Tasteless, odorless crud... You don't know any better. When I was a kid food was food. Before our scientific magicians polluted the water and soil and decimated plant and animal life... Why in my day you could buy meat anywhere, eggs they had, real butter, fresh lettuce in the stores..."

Soylent Green turns out to be made of people, a not unreasonable source of nutrients in the absence of any others. But what generally conjures up this image in my mind is the fact that so much of what we consume already consists of mystery ingredients that the law requires not to be included on labels. These include not only actual

GM ingredients but also many ingredients manufactured through processes that utilize enzymes produced by GM microbes.

My personal paranoid fantasy of where biotechnology industries are headed involves human reproduction. Isn't that the next frontier after plant reproduction and animal reproduction have been fully commercialized? There are already plenty of signs that human reproductive abilities are on the wane: decreasing fertility rates; reduced levels of sperm vitality and viability; the massive use of drugs by women to increase fertility and by men to overcome erectile dysfunction; and diminishing penis size linked to exposure to chemicals called phthalates, which are commonly found in plastics, cosmetics, and perfumes. It's not just us. "Animals throughout the world are undergoing unnatural sexual changes in response to environmental pollution," reports National Geographic.

The biotech industry, composed of many of the same corporations that gave us the endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the first place, are well positioned to take over the complex mechanics of human reproduction. The flaw with life processes, from the point of view of capital, is that by their self-regenerating qualities they resist commodification. "If life is to be commodified," writes Vandana Shiva, "its renewability must be interrupted and arrested."

Biotechnology corporations profit by halting the continuous, endlessly cycling and regenerating spiral of life and requiring corporate products to accomplish various biological reproductive processes—from plant seeds to babies.

Already human reproductive processes have become medicalized, drawn into the realm of experts with an ever-expanding array of specialized technology. Will we come to accept that human reproduction requires technological intervention, as we seem to be accepting for the food we eat? If we do not reclaim natural reproductive processes for the food we eat, we risk our disconnection growing to encompass the remaining natural processes—such as human sexual reproduction—that are still considered the province of generalists. Retaining our biological power to share and exchange our own seeds (and related pleasures) may depend upon the outcome of political struggles happening now, upon farmers and gardeners asserting their inalienable natural rights by continuing the ancient tradition of saving and replanting seeds.

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