

The Impossible Clone

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Array

More than a pure form of simulation the will to clone is a perfect union of technology and discrimination – the desire to end otherness and to multiply the same. Cloning is the science of advanced prejudice which digitalized genetics makes possible. The age old biological roles of Father and Mother are here reduced to coding. When the clone does not turn out as we had hoped, and surely none will, we can blame the matrix.

Some fancy that the clone is a twin but it is really merely a genetic double, treble, quadruple... . It leads me to wonder about our relationship to complexity – has complexity become so disturbing that we seek the simplicity of the same derived from the same? Cloning has a mirror in the Petri dish where the most simple form of life, protozoa, divide. Cloning will be a journey where a highly complex creature imitates the most simple life form. Finally, Darwin disproved or radically reversed?

Cloning is a way out if individual existence for those who dream of an undifferentiated life of sequential multiplication. In cloning we dwindle into recipe – what an interesting destiny for a species which for the most part, and for so long, purported to worship individualism. The clone is the “mirror stage” as travesty, the end of the problem of subjectivity. Cloning calls for us to trade-in most of the lexicon of psychology for immortality in post human form. Yet, if cloning is a kind of technical victory why then does it mean our end?

It is now possible to clone headless chickens for a food source removing the moral dilemmas we face concerning the animal's consciousness of the terrible conditions in which it is kept. I wonder if this is but a step along the way to the cloning of headless humans for the harvesting of body parts? Bad news perhaps for the legion of human body organs smugglers around the planet.

Cloning is certainly a solution to the problem of reproduction but perhaps more sinister motives exist. Maybe some even perceive of cloning as a way, once and for all, to do away with the problem of woman given that several new technologies will soon make the role of the male non-essential to her reproductive efforts. It is possible to see cloning as the liberation of reproduction from sex and death. The clone is said to be the end of both sex and death – but what would be more the figure of death than a clone? The clone is a paradoxical monster – the embodiment of the death of death equipped with sex organs. No wonder cloning stirs so many passions of resistance.

Disarray

I suppose it is possible that proponents of biological cloning take some satisfaction in the presence of so much cultural cloning. In what remote corner of the earth can one not hear Michael Jackson playing on a radio while purchasing a bottle of Coca-Cola in a pair of jeans? Mass advertising, consumer society, and serial object based consumerism, attempt to train us to be cultural clones – copies of an ideal subaltern of the corporate order. Still, resistance to this order exists everywhere and it is a very open question as to whether or not even globalization will win out. The cultural clone can be frightening but it is everywhere more a myth than a reality.

Cloning, the mastery of code, is however a far cry from the mastery of development. Just as globalization is not guaranteed to win out so too it is very unlikely that cloning will ever work. There remains for cloning the problem of the social, of learning, influence, education, and individual thought. Think of the presence of the neo-clones in our culture prior to advanced genetics – what we have long known as twins. Twins can be two identical beings, raised by the same parents, in the same house, yet who often turn out to be remarkably different in preferences and actions. The problem for cloning, and it is a problem for the posthuman generally, is that the clone child will experience the billions of intrusions and interventions into its life that the twin has long experienced. These will help the clones each become a different being – even those who experience immersion in systems which contain a good deal of cultural cloning.

Biological cloning will succeed but individuality is too persistent. The problem of individual becoming is too great for science to overcome. This does not mean that some scientists will not continue to ignore ‘nurture’. Given all the efforts devoted to cultural cloning today it is indeed ironic that it will be the social which protects us from the sameness of clones. We only believe in cloning when we become obsessed with nature to the point of forgetting nurture. Biological clones will proliferate like cancerous cells but will never defeat the chaos of individuality which is the outcome of the social, despite itself. [1]

Endnote

- 1) This essay is dedicated to the memories of Jean Baudrillard which inhabit it.