

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Monsanto is sorry, but decades late

*'Hubris' ignored potential public objections to genetic modifications*

Monsanto CEO Hugh Grant last week attributed the public backlash to genetically modified crops in general, and to the company in particular, to Monsanto's "hubris" in promoting the technology.

"We did really cool science and we worked within global regulatory requirements," he told *The Independent*, a British newspaper. "From where we were, the conversation with consumers was an abstract."

Grant's admission is decades late. But it is on point. The company did an excellent job in marketing to growers. But it was either oblivious to or it ignored the potential for objections from the public.

As a result, the advances in crop production already realized by the work of Monsanto and other biotech companies are under assault by critics who wield powerful emotional arguments that aren't backed by science.

Monsanto applied equally impressive innovations to its business practices. And it is here the company's stormy relationship with the public probably took root. Monsanto bought up established seed companies that had already developed traditional hybrids on which Monsanto could stack its biotech traits.

It recognized early the value of patenting gene sequences it could use in its own products and license to its competitors. The licensing agreements restrict what traits produced by other biotech companies may be stacked with Monsanto's, limiting the market for its competi-

## More than good wishes is what saves buildings

Facadism is an architectural term that's been around for decades, sparking much debate about the practice of stuffing entirely new interiors within the shells of old buildings.

In the most extreme cases, literally the only original element left standing is the facade, or decorative face nearest the street.

Here in the Pacific Northwest, the comparative youth of buildings coupled with city-enveloping fires and earthquakes meant there weren't many active debates about this subject until relatively recently. Always-interesting preservationist Knute Berger of the online news source Crosscut this week wades into what some see as an overuse of the strategy in Seattle. There, a continuing rapid transformation of older commercial and industrial blocks by a surging high-tech sector is being facilitated by facadism.

This strategy has been raising hackles since at least 1985, when architectural critic Paul Goldberger wrote in *The New York Times*, "facadism holds out a great temptation — it seems, on the surface, to give both sides what they want. The small, older buildings valued by preservationists appear to be saved, while the large new ones developers seek can still be built.

"But while facadism pretends to a certain earnestness, it is at bottom rather pernicious. For the compromise it represents is not really preservation at all. To save only the facade of a building is not to save its essence; it is to turn the building into a stage set, into a cute toy intended to make a skyscraper more palatable. And the street becomes a kind of Disneyland of false fronts."

Astoria, for its part, has done rather well at keeping old buildings alive as

tors while enlarging Monsanto's.

Monsanto aggressively protects its patents, requiring farmers who buy the seed to sign agreements barring them from saving seed from previous crops. That rubs more traditional farmers used to saving seed the wrong way. Monsanto's enforcement was at times heavy handed. That behavior allowed critics to paint the company as a corporate behemoth that bullies small, family farmers.

Though far from the only biotech developer, Monsanto has become for critics the global symbol of an industry they say is driven by greed and that is destroying traditional agriculture without regard to the health of consumers and the environment.

But that brings us back to the science.

After more than 20 years of wide-scale production of genetically modified crops critics have failed to produce any documented hazards for people who consume them.

Far from producing calamity, biotechnology provides the best prospect for feeding the world's growing population with crops engineered to resist drought and disease.

Not all consumers want biotech products. But none of the alternative cropping methods promise to produce the required quantity of food.

much more than hollowed zombies of their former selves. It might in fact be said that architectural resurrection is the single pivotal theme of the city's ongoing 21st century success story. By recognizing the value embedded in worn and underutilized structures, Astoria is a much better-endowed community than it could conceivably afford to be if the old architectural slate had been wiped clean. Not only do older buildings contain heritage-quality materials and techniques, but personality and memories also permeate the town's many century-old businesses and homes.

Acknowledging that outright preservation is the best outcome for good-quality, old structures, there admittedly are some situations in which buildings have deteriorated too much or were designed for purposes that can't be easily adapted to modern needs. This, in a nutshell, is the civic argument now revolving around the Waldorf Hotel. Is there an economically feasible way to save the Waldorf, giving it a high-value use while preserving its fundamental architectural characteristics? Hope for this outcome is much in evidence, but an actual vision and the money to implement it are not immediately obvious.

One suggestion has been keeping the building's ground-floor facade while starting from scratch on the inside to make it suitable for the library. This is the sort of compromise that Goldberger and presumably Knute Berger would see as a betrayal of common sense and preservation principles.

Market forces likely will make the Waldorf decision. Astoria is not overly endowed with building space. And buildings quickly deteriorate in this climate. Preservation? Adaptive reuse? Demolition? Site reuse? Which will it be?

## Time for a Better 'Sound of Music'

By LAWRENCE DOWNES  
New York Times News Service

The *Sound of Music*, the movie, turns 50 this year, as popular as ever, a bedrock memory of untold millions of childhoods. Mine, for sure.

Some far-off day, when neural engineers do a digital download of my dying brain, they will find, way back with the oldest grudges and PINs, *The Sound of Music* soundtrack, every line and rhyme. She climbs a tree and scrapes her knee. When the dog bites. Yodel-ay-hee-hoo.

The movie is returning to theaters for two days in April, and no doubt many in middle age will go, to visit an old friend who they hope hasn't aged a bit.

A few may be disappointed. *The Sound of Music* is a great movie, but it isn't a very good one. Critics in 1965 recoiled from its operetta schmaltz, its wooden acting, the sentimental goop poured all over what was already considered one of the sappier Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. They were right, even though the movie's many devotees will disagree, now and forever.

Don't get me wrong — I love the movie and still enjoy making fun of it. But I often wonder why it has never been reimaged, rescued from its reputation, reborn as a movie to enjoy for reasons other than nostalgia or camp.

I had this thought after seeing *South Pacific* in its first Broadway revival; the director, Bartlett Sher, shook off the dated racial themes and left it radically refreshed. I remember, too, how the director Trevor Nunn, with Hugh Jackman as Curly, darkened *Oklahoma!* and made it almost terrifying.

Shouldn't it be possible, without total demolition, to respectfully up-end everyone's idea of *The Sound*



Lawrence Downes



AP Photo/Keovork Djansezian, File

Julie Andrews, center, is joined by Christopher Plummer, left, her costar from the film "The Sound of Music," and the film's director, Robert Wise, during a reception for the event where Andrews received the ELLA award in Beverly Hills, Calif. in April 2001. The 1965 Oscar-winning film adaptation of the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical "The Sound of Music" is celebrating its 50th birthday in 2015. To honor the milestone, 20th Century Fox is releasing a five-disc Blu-ray/DVD/Digital HD collector's edition, the soundtrack is being re-released, the film will be screened more than 500 movie theaters in April 2015.

of Music? To unearth cruelty and carnality, honesty and deep feeling, all the things that lie buried under all that Salzburg sunshine and the radiance of Julie Andrews?

In other words: Is this story really as one-dimensional as we think it is?

Here is Maria, a girl supposedly so wild and unfit for the convent that one nun suggests tying a cowbell on her neck. Another supplies the perfect tag line: "She's a wonderful girl — some of the time." There is the captain, who has seven (seven!) children. He also has issues, as we see from the moment he meets Maria and tells her he wants her out of that dress.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were no babes on Broadway. Their shows often have secondary couples who, unlike the prim leads, couple from the get-go. In *Oklahoma!*, Ado Annie just "cain't" say no. *South Pacific* has Lieutenant Cable and young Liat, who meet and mate in about a minute. In *The Sound of Music*, it's the daughter Liesl and Rolf, the Nazi telegram boy, whose name sounds like what I want to do whenever he's on the screen. Their duet, in a gazebo in a thunderstorm, is all about sex and crossed signals. She's

ready; he's an idiot. Later, she sneaks into the house, soaked, and Maria lies to cover for her.

*The Sound of Music* is never going to be *Spring Awakening*, the rock musical about sex-addled 19th-century German adolescents. But there is a lot that isn't saccharine in the source material: devotion and desolation, spiritual fervor and erotic longing. A lonely captain who dumps

**Is this story really as one-dimensional as we think it is?**

his rich girlfriend for the babysitter. All that, plus lusty goat-herds. And Nazis!

Poor Andrews has been lugging this rucksack over the Alps for 50 years. It's time for another Maria to take it from here. What's Lady Gaga doing?

I mean no insult to the lovely, the luminous, the practically perfect Andrews. But I liked her better in that other movie, the one where she plays an unlicensed caregiver who is hired to provide structure to two at-risk children, but instead brings them to hang with her boyfriend, a street musician who likes to get high at his uncle's house. Can there be wit, irony and genuine laughs in a family film? Yes — keep *Mary Poppins* just as it is.

## Tell me how this ends well

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN  
New York Times News Service

HONG KONG — I've been in China for the last week.

It's always instructive to see how the world looks from the Middle Kingdom. Sometimes the best insights come from just reading the local papers.

On March 25, The China Daily published an essay detailing how "Beijing authorities" had "launched inspection tours of kindergartens this week to ensure that children are not overburdened with schoolwork. Although Chinese, mathematics and English are supposed to be taught to primary school students, it is not uncommon to see preschool-age children across China being forced to study these subjects." The essay went on to explain why it wasn't healthy to "begin preparing for the college entrance exam" in preschool.

Reading that, I suddenly had a vision of a SWAT team from China's Ministry of Education bursting through the doors of kindergartens and declaring: "Put those pencils and books down! Back away from your desks, and nobody gets hurt!"

What a problem to have! Kindergartens teaching math and English too soon.

In the same paper, there was also an article about the latest fighting between Shiite pro-Iranian and Sunni pro-Saudi factions in Yemen. Clashes there have focused on Yemen's second-largest town, Taiz. Wait a minute! I was in Taiz in May 2013 working on a documentary about how Yemen was becoming an environmental disaster. We focused on Taiz because, as a result of Yemen's devastated ecosystems, residents of Taiz get to run their home water faucets for only 36 hours every 30 days or so.

So there you have it. The news out of China is the crackdown on

kindergartens teaching math and English too early, and the news out of Yemen is that Sunni and Shiite factions are fighting over a town that is already so cracked up the water comes on only 36 hours a month, and the rest of the time you have to rely on roving water trucks. And that was before the latest fighting.

But at least we've found the problem. I've read that it's all President Barack Obama's fault. I wish. Obama has said and done some boneheaded things in the Middle East (like decapitating the Libyan regime with no plan for the morning after), but being wary about getting further embroiled in this region is not one of them. We're dealing here with something no president has had to face: the collapse of the Arab state system after 70 years of failed governance.

Again, the comparison with Asia is instructive. After World II, Asia was ruled by many autocrats who essentially came to their people and said, "My people, we're going to take away your freedom, but we're going to give you the best education, infrastructure and export-led growth policies money can buy. And eventually you'll build a big middle class and win your freedom." Over that same period, Arab autocrats came to their people and said, "My people, we're going to take away your freedom and give you the Arab-Israel conflict."

Asian autocrats tended to be modernizers, like Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, who died last week at 91 — and you see the results today: Singaporeans waiting in line for 10 hours to pay last respects to a man who vaulted them from nothing into the global middle class. Arab autocrats tended to be predators who used the conflict with Israel as a shiny object to distract their people from their own



Thomas L. Friedman

misgovernance. The result: Libya, Yemen, Syria and Iraq are now human development disaster areas.

Some saw this coming. In 2002, a group of Arab social scientists produced the U.N.'s Arab Human Development Report. It said the Arab world suffered deficits of freedom, knowledge and women's

empowerment, and, if it did not turn around, it would get where it was going. It was ignored by the Arab League. In 2011, the educated Arab masses rose up to force a turnaround before they got where they were going. Except for Tunisia (the only Arab country whose autocrat was also a modernizer), that awakening fizzled out. So now they've gotten where they were going: state collapse and a caldron of tribal, sectarian (Shiite-Sunni, Persian-Arab) civil wars — in a region bulging with unemployed, angry youths and schools that barely function, or, if they do, they teach an excess of religion not math.

I read President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt declaring that "the challenges facing our national Arab security are grave, and we have succeeded in diagnosing the reasons behind it." And that was? Too little Arab cooperation against Persians and Islamists. Really? Some 25 percent of Egyptians are illiterate today after \$50 billion in U.S. aid since 1979. (In China, illiteracy is 5 percent; in Iran, 15 percent.) My heart goes out to all the people in this region. But when your leaders waste 70 years, the hole is really deep.

In fairness, el-Sissi is trying to dig Egypt out. Nevertheless, Egypt may send troops to defeat the rebels in Yemen. If so, it would be the first case of a country where 25 percent of the population can't read sending troops to rescue a country where the water comes through the tap 36 hours a month to quell a war where the main issue is the 7th century struggle over who is the rightful heir to the Prophet Muhammad — Shiites or Sunnis.

Any Chinese preschooler can tell you: That's not an equation for success.

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