

Freaks in Space: "Extraterrestrialism" and "Deep-Space Multiculturalism"

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BOUNDARY BREAKERS

Freaks are those human beings who exist outside the structure of binary oppositions which govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition. They occupy the impossible middle ground between binary pairs.

—ELIZABETH GROSZ¹

The alien . . . always positions itself somewhere between pure familiarity and pure otherness. . . . Taking its place on the border between identity and difference, it marks that border, articulating it while at the same time disarticulating and confusing the distinctions the border stands for.

—MICHAEL BEEHLER²

A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a "system" allowing polyphony, mixed response . . . and resistance to integration. . . .

—JEFFREY JEROME COHEN³

It is no accident that Elizabeth Grosz, Michael Beehler, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen figure freaks, aliens, and monsters in nearly identical terms: the three categories are merely three branches of the same amorphous and disturbing family of "boundary breakers." All three, in their relationship with and proximity to the "human" and the "normal," raise and problematize the discreteness of opposing categories such as Self/Other, Difference/Sameness, Human/Nonhuman, Normal/Abnormal. All three transgress schemes of cultural categorization. All three simultaneously fascinate and horrify.

Yet, in a late-twentieth-century American context, the three are not the same. If I can extrapolate from my own refusal to equate freak show freaks with monsters, I suggest that the terms "freak" and "monster" resonate differently in contemporary American culture. To locate the site of the extraterrestrial alien in the contemporary Science Fiction (SF) text, we first need to differentiate between the concepts of the modern freak and the monster.

To the extent that it is possible and desirable to draw distinctions between the two, I suggest certain contingent and contestable differences. As opposed to the monster, I propose that the freak is, as Fiedler notes, "one of us."⁴ Though corporeally or behaviorally different in some disturbing way, the freak remains identifiably *human*.⁵ The monster, as Cohen has remarked, exists at more of a remove: there is something irreducibly superhuman or nonhuman about it; having a human body differently configured, the monstrous body exists *beyond* the human.⁶ Thus, on a continuum stretching from human to nonhuman, from a mythical conception of a unified, bounded self to an equally mythical notion of an absolute other, the freak remains contiguous with the human, while the monster exists at a farther remove, at a point approaching the unknowable. A gap exists between the monster and the human, a gap problematically occupied by the freak.

A second distinction between the freak and the monster is the aspect of physical threat. One component of Noël Carroll's definition of the monster, as articulated in *The Philosophy of Horror*, is the ability of the monster to cause bodily and/or psychic harm to those it encounters.⁷ If we are willing to adopt Carroll's definition in this context, then another distinction that can be drawn between the freak and the monster is threat potential. The encounter with the freak does not imperil the immediate health or physical well-being of the observer. This is not to say that the freak is not dangerous in its own way, but the threat of the freak exists at the level of psychological dis-ease; the corporeal freak induces anxiety via the stimulation of repressed fears concerning bodily integrity and social individuation. Although the proximity of the freak to the "normal" may be disconcerting and produce anxiety, the freak generally does not endanger those it encounters.

Although never "human," the extraterrestrial can fall anywhere on the continuum between human and monster: the alien can be unproblematically monstrous (e.g., the ever-popular, disgusting, dangerous, and emphatically nonhuman Blob), or as close to human as possible without actually being human (e.g., *Star Trek's* Spock).⁸ Most aliens fall somewhere in between monster and human: into the freak zone.

Perhaps it is not coincidental that 1940, the date Robert Bogdan defines as the swan song of the American freak show, is also the same date noted as the beginning of what has been dubbed by SF critics and aficionados as the "Golden Age of Science Fiction." The American SF scene in the 1940s witnessed an explosion of popularity and creative talent. Authors such as John Campbell, Lester del Rey, Robert Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, Isaac Asimov, Clifford D. Simak, and Ray Bradbury opted to write in and transformed the SF genre, fashioning a bevy of unfamiliar worlds and exotic aliens in the process.

To what can we attribute the attraction of speculative formats in the 1940s? Perhaps with the freak show's waning hold on American culture, along with society's moral reevaluation of exhibiting real-world non-Western or disabled people for amusement, a psychic *need* for freaks found expression in SF fiction and film. Although the freak show may be all but extinct in contemporary America, it remains alive and kicking on the big screen, where Wookies, Draks, Klingons, Ewoks, and a host of other aliens spanning the alphabet from the lovable E.T. to the mischievous Q to the imperialistic V enthrall and disturb viewers with a vast array of somatic forms and divergent cultures. The freak show, the exhibition of difference for amusement, the apex of terrestrial "political incorrectness," is alive and well in space.

This chapter will concentrate on two SF series, both of which have enjoyed immense popularity in America and worldwide: the George Lucas *Star Wars* trilogy, *Star Wars* (1977),

The Empire Strikes Back (1980), and *The Return of the Jedi* (1984); and the recent television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (*STNG*), aired from 1987 to 1994. These two SF series present alien races in two distinct manners: whereas the *Star Wars* movies exoticize and emphasize the alien as freakish and essentially inferior in a manner that I will refer to as “Extraterrestrialism,” the more “progressive” *STNG* attempts to assert (not unproblematically) an ethic of cultural relativism that I will call “Deep-Space Multiculturalism.” Before I explore this difference, however, it is worth noting in brief the ways in which the American freak show, from its earliest inception, has always been “science fictional.”

SCIENCE/FREAK/FICTION

The work of Bogdan makes evident that the freak emerged from the conjunction of science and fiction. As he staunchly maintains, the “freak” is not an essential ontological category, but a construct produced at the crossroads of multiple discourses, including the medical, anthropological, and economic. Always problematically articulated in opposition to varying conceptions of “normalcy,” the freak “is not a quality that belongs to an individual. . . . [It] is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people.”⁹ In this sense, freaks are always already fictional—not born, but made. And the text that is the freakish body can be read to reveal the ideologies and attitudes of the cultural context that scripted it.

Bogdan observes that scientific and medical discourses have been heavily implicated in constructing and modifying the changing story of the freak. Nineteenth-century American scientists and physicians, intent upon establishing “scientific” classifications for “freaks of nature,” achieved heightened visibility by serving as “experts” in cases of “human curiosities,” and the fact that “reputable scientists” were interested in such things legitimated the public’s voyeuristic interest in freak exhibits. In addition to the interest displayed in freaks by physicians and scientists, the “educational” and “scientific” value of the freak show was further legitimated both by the association of freak displays with museums, which frequently incorporated exhibits of “human curiosities,” and by the continuing exploration of the globe. Bogdan notes that non-Western people brought back to the United States and exhibited as freaks “stimulated the popular imagination and kindled belief in races of tailed people, dwarfs, giants, and even people with double heads that paralleled creatures of ancient mythology.”¹⁰ The “freak” thus became a locus defined by the convergence of nineteenth-century scientific and anthropological discourse, as well as folklore and mythology.

Added to the stories told by science and the freak-tales already prevalent in the culture were those told by the showmen. Bogdan writes that showmen “embellish[ed] their exhibits with presentations that were in some cases half-truths and in others out-and-out lies. . . . Mid-nineteenth century America provided the ideal venue for humbug to be institutionalized as a fine art and as a basic and lasting part of the freak show.”¹¹ Drawing from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scientific reports and travelogues, freak show promoters, exploiting and feeding the public’s interest in the “exotic” and the “primitive,” claimed to have gathered their exhibits from various mysterious parts of the world. Bogdan even details a few (precocious) instances in which the exhibit’s origin was claimed as extraterrestrial.¹² Together, the showmen and the prevalent scientific discourses collaborated to script the popular conception of the freak.

If science, as Donna Haraway maintains, is "our myth," a story about knowledge and power, a "contestable text,"¹³ then the exhibition of the freak show freak was always a double fiction, the showman's story layered upon the scientific story. Contemporary SF follows this same recipe in building its aliens: juxtaposing and enmeshing the scientific with the fantastic and sensational, SF merely relocates the terrestrial freak into orbit. Inasmuch as SF aliens frequently function as thinly veiled metaphors for real-world racial, ethnic, religious, somatic, and political groups, the presentation of exotic extraterrestrials often functions prejudicially and imperialistically, much as the actual incorporation of non-Western peoples into the freak show did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

EXTRATERRESTRIALISM

Science Fiction provides a rich source of generic metaphors for the depiction of otherness, and the "alien" is one of the most familiar: it enables difference to be constructed in terms of binary oppositions which reinforce relations of dominance and subordination.

—JENNY WOLMARK¹⁴

If "Orientalism," as famously proposed by Edward Said, is the manner in which ideas of the "Orient" and the "Oriental" were constructed and existed for the West as "a topic of learning, discovery, practice" on the one hand, and a site of "dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements"¹⁵ on the other, then it seems appropriate to refer to constructions of exoticized space aliens in SF texts as "Extraterrestrialism." The ostensible difference between Orientalism and Extraterrestrialism is, of course, that the former has affected and continues to affect millions of real-world inhabitants. Orientalism, as a system of discursive practices involving the stereotyping of the "Oriental" as biologically inferior and serving to justify imperialism, has functioned as a powerful real-world force.

In contrast, Extraterrestrialism refers to purely fictitious creations. However, the alien is never innocent, never totally divorced from real-world politics. As numerous SF critics have observed, "one cannot depict the totally alien."¹⁶ Extraterrestrials, particularly because they do *not* exist in the real world outside of the texts and tabloids that give them life, readily become metaphors for terrestrial groups and situations, thereby constructing and reinforcing specific ideological positions. Leighton Brett Cooke explains, "Fictional aliens are shaped to satisfy the fantasy needs of human readers; there is little else they could be expected to do."¹⁷ Cooke adds, "By now, the potential of science fiction for the expression of xenophobic, even racist sentiments is well acknowledged."¹⁸ As with the stereotypical "Oriental," underlying the imagining of aliens are specific configurations of power. As we shall see with the *Star Wars* movies, for example, Extraterrestrialism, by drawing from repertoires of real-world stereotypes, can function as an unproblematic extension of Orientalism. Depictions of aliens in SF texts can tell us a great deal about the extent to which a given culture values and fears human difference and diversity.

STAR WARS AND THE DEVIANT ALIEN

The American freak show has not disappeared, it simply has been relocated to "a galaxy far, far away." Presented as fairy tales, dislocated in time and space, the *Star Wars* movies wear

their ideological affiliations on their sleeves. As John Fieder notes, "The rebels are clean, white Americans who befriend life-like machines. The Empire's vaguely Prussian militarists are machine-like men. The odd extraterrestrial stands in for ethnic variation in traditional American style, either dangerous scum . . . or as the inarticulate sidekick, Chewbacca."¹⁹ Chewbacca is Big-Foot in space, the freak show hirsute man in orbit, the missing link between man and animal. However, if we cast *Star Wars* in the mode of the traditional American romance, a tradition structured, as Fiedler notes, by the homosocial pairing of the white hero and his nonwhite companion, (Huck and Jim, Ishmael and Quee-Queg, etc.),²⁰ then the depiction of Han Solo's furry sidekick as an "inarticulate," ape-like brute incorporates some well-known and particularly nasty racist stereotypes of black men. Chewbacca as both missing link and subordinate nonwhite companion reifies the position of white male as top of the evolutionary ladder. Perhaps Chewbacca's hulking presence serves as substitute for the displaced black body of James Earl Jones, present only as the authoritative voice of the black-garbed Darth Vader.

Particularly interesting in *The Return of the Jedi* is the ease with which the "good" Annakin Skywalker is separated from the "dark" side of the "force" and recuperated as Luke's father once he sheds Darth Vader's black exterior (and the voice of James Earl Jones). Conveniently forgotten in the drive towards reunification of the family that occurs at the end of *Jedi* (a Disneyesque reunification in which the role of the mother, as it is throughout the trilogy, is excluded entirely) is Annakin-as-Vader's complicity not only in a multitude of individual deaths, but in the destruction of an entire *planet*. The *Star Wars* trilogy exhibits a Manichean pattern of black-and-white morality in which the metaphors of "light" as good and "dark" as evil are realized not only in the "dark" and (presumably) light sides of the "the force," but also in the corporeal divisions of "clean white" rebels and nonwhite alien scum.²¹ The clearest illustrations of this operative Extraterrestrialism, the exhibition and exoticization of freakish aliens implicitly presented as inferior, occur in the memorable cantina sequence of *Star Wars* and in the stronghold of Jabba the Hut sequence in *Jedi*.

Lucas provides this description of Luke's descent into the cantina: "The murky, moldy den is filled with a startling array of weird and exotic alien creatures and monsters at the long metallic bar. At first the sight is horrifying. One-eyed, thousand-eyed, slimy, furry, scaly, tentacled, and clawed creatures huddle over drinks."²² As Luke enters the cantina, the camera lovingly lingers on one freakish form after another as the alien denizens cavort and mingle, banter in strange dialects, consume dangerous-looking concoctions, and nonchalantly take draughts from hookahs. A conjunction of the freak show and the opium den, the outlandish inhabitants bear witness through their physical representations to Ben Kenobi's characterization of the Mos Eisley spaceport as "a wretched hive of scum and villainy."²³ Here deviation from the white human norm represented by Luke and Ben unproblematically correlates with moral degeneracy, for this carnivalesque atmosphere is a mercenary world without law or compassion.

As Ben separates from the young, wide-eyed Luke to look for off-world transport, Luke is accosted by a drunken alien, referred to in the script as a "hideous *freak*,"²⁴ and his facially disfigured human companion. A fight ensues, during which Ben severs the arm of one of Luke's assailants with his light-saber. The cantina patrons, momentarily distracted by this eruption of violence, return to their activities at the end of the skirmish unfazed and unexcited; we are to understand that such displays of aggression are common in this establish-

ment. Confirming this assumption is Han Solo's execution of the unsightly named "Greedo," the "slimy green-faced alien"²⁵ bounty hunter who has just expressed his delight at an opportunity to kill the cornered Solo. As before, the freakish cantina clientele barely acknowledge the killing. For his part, an unconcerned Solo tosses a few coins on the bar on the way out, mumbling, "Sorry about the mess." Within the *Star Wars* universe, the killing of an alien is of little importance.

The cantina sequence is a freak show pure and simple. It is structured as a world of difference and deviance, and the camera's isolation of monstrous form after monstrous form for the audience's amusement turns this spectacle into an extraterrestrial exhibition. The unquestioned correlation of external difference and disfigurement with moral degeneracy works to essentialize the freakish alien as inferior. This is the first test of Luke's *bildungsroman* development and serves as a powerful lesson: beware the freak. In contradiction to the familiar maxim, books *can* be read by their covers: external ugliness is symptomatic of internal moral degeneracy. (I shall address the correlation of *cuteness* with innocuousness and naiveté presently). And it is appropriate that a limb is severed in this sequence, prefiguring both Luke and Vader's loss of right hands in *Empire* and *Jedi*, respectively, as well as C3PO's numerous dismemberments and Luke's decapitation of the fantasy Vader in *Empire*. Luke, and the *Star Wars* movies more generally, display a preoccupation with issues of bodily integrity and bodily limitations. Perhaps one function of the somatic freak is to excite anxiety in the viewer by triggering repressed memories of the pre-Oedipal body-image.²⁶ The morphological alien stimulates uneasiness about the integrity of one's own body, an uneasiness articulated in the cantina sequence by Luke's juxtaposition of freakish alien bodies with a severed arm.

The moral degeneracy of the unwholesome alien is corroborated by the court of Jabba the Hut in *Jedi*. Jabba himself is the most monstrous creation of the *Star Wars* series and is described enthusiastically in James Kahn's novelization of the movie as follows:

His head was three times human size, perhaps four. His eyes were yellow, reptilian—his skin was like a snake's . . . covered with a fine layer of grease. He had no neck, but only a series of chins that expanded finally into a great bloated body. . . . Stunted, almost useless arms sprouted from his upper torso, the sticky fingers of his left hand languidly wrapped around the smoking-end of his water-pipe. He had no hair—it had fallen out from a combination of diseases. He had no legs—his trunk simply tapered gradually to a long, plump snake-tail that stretched along the length of the platform like a tube of yeasty dough. His lipless mouth was wide, almost ear to ear, and he drooled continuously.²⁷

Greasy, diseased, bloated, misshapen, incomplete—Jabba is a freak show unto himself, suggesting simultaneously the fat man, the legless wonder, a misshapen fetus, and the enlarged head of an achondroplastic dwarf. And, of course, to confirm Jabba's alien degeneracy, as with the Cantina denizens, he does not speak English. Like the cantina, his stronghold, populated by an array of evil-looking aliens, is a bastion of debauchery. From his position on the platform, Jabba surveys his domain and ogle his scantily clad slave dancer, before gleefully feeding her to his pet monster to the delight of his court. The water-pipe (present also in the cantina), as well as Jabba's sultan-like reclining position on the dais and the haremlike slave dancer, make the link between Orientalism and Extraterrestrialism obvious. Jabba's engorged

size and repulsive appearance correlate directly with his unrestrained appetite for wealth and power. In opposition to Jabba's excess, the white, human heroes demonstrate the (American) virtues of self-government, control, and discipline. Jabba's degeneracy is the unrestrained appetite of the "Oriental despot" and, to the extent that the viewer consciously or unconsciously makes this connection, Extraterrestrialism functions as a futuristic extension of Orientalism.

Of course, not all aliens in the *Star Wars* movies are evil monsters, and the audience easily can identify which aliens are safe and friendly: as a rule, ugly aliens are bad, cute aliens are good (albeit still inferior). The latter is the role of the ever-lovable Ewoks, those funny, furry, diminutive second cousins to the Wookiee whose presence dominates much of *Jedi* and for many is its most memorable aspect. We know that these walking teddy bears are innocuous because they are cute; within the world of *Star Wars*, this is assurance enough. Tribal forest dwellers, the Ewoks are also figured as being too "primitive" to be sneaky or double-dealing; they live in trees, ornament themselves with crude bone necklaces, and believe in magic. If Chewbacca fills in as the nonwhite companion of the American romance, then the Ewoks play on an equally stereotypical construction of the "primitive" African pygmy tribe living in the jungle, astounded by the white man's technological "magic" and too simple to be devious. Through Chewbacca and the Ewoks, the *Star Wars* movies evoke both the threatening and trivialized stereotypes of Africans. In each case, the intellectual superiority of the white male is reconfirmed by comparison.

A powerful discourse of Extraterrestrialism thus operates in the *Star Wars* movies: the intrinsic difference of the alien often translates into inferiority and moral bankruptcy, while simultaneously affirming the valor and superiority of the white male heroes. The essentialized alien others and the fear of difference operative in the *Star Wars* features reveal that the impulse to exhibit freakishness has been relocated from the terrestrial freak show into SF cinema. In fact, most of the extraterrestrials in the *Star Wars* movies suggest a freak show parallel: as noted, Chewbacca is a missing link or hirsute man and Jabba is both fat man and a legless wonder. The Ewoks suggest the "cute" freak show midget. Further, by suggesting that Chewbacca is black, Jabba is the "Oriental despot," and the Ewoks are "primitive" tribal members, the racist, hegemonic resonances of alien representations find grounding in real-world discourse. It matters little whether the audience recognizes specific racist overtones behind the representation of any individual alien species, because the general equation of the *Star Wars* movies is unmistakable: difference equals danger. The white male Jedi, fighting to maintain his position of authority in a universe of freaks and evil others, is the top of the evolutionary ladder. The audience views an array of alien others at which to gawk and laugh, but the serious job of saving the universe lies with the "normal" white male humans.²⁸

DEEP-SPACE MULTICULTURALISM?

In contrast to the *Star Wars* movies' imperialist view of difference, the question of how to deal with alien races and cultures in nonprejudicial and nonimperialistic ways is a persistent theme of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series. In its ostensible sensitivity to the value of diversity, its resistance to judgments based on appearance and degree of deviance from a humanoid norm, and its incorporation of both nonwhite and alien others into the crew of the *Enterprise*, *STNG* apparently demonstrates an ethic of what I will refer to as "deep-space

multiculturalism." The back cover to *The Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion* describes the program as follows: "Led by Captain Jean-Luc Picard . . . , the *U.S.S. Enterprise* blazed a trail of understanding across an unfamiliar galaxy. . . . [It] brought to vivid life a future where cooperation and mutual understanding proved the key to solving humanity's problems—and enabled galactic civilization to flourish."²⁹ To its credit, the series indeed does take major steps toward dismantling unfounded conjunctions of physical difference with intellectual inferiority and/or moral degeneracy. However, in contradiction to this utopian universe of the future suggested in the quotation above, the world of *STNG* is not a perfect galaxy of peace, love, and understanding. Although the bridge of the *Enterprise*, under the moderate and controlled command of Captain Picard, is a locus of "enlightened understanding," the rest of the universe always has something to learn about being "human." And inasmuch as its alien representations slip with greater or lesser degrees of ease into identifiable metaphors for real-world groups, racist and imperialist ideologies again reassert themselves, even beneath the deep-space multicultural façade of the *Enterprise* bridge.

Several "alien" races are represented on the bridge of the *Enterprise*: there is Worf, the black Klingon, chief security officer (the brawn); Data, the android (the brains); and the half-Betazoid ship's counselor, Deanna Troi (the sensitive female/sex object). All three of these characters, however, fail in different ways to measure up to the level of human white male; each is in some way, either literally or metaphorically, "alien."

The fact that Worf was raised by human foster parents means that there is not a "full-blooded" alien on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. Indeed, Worf can be integrated into the crew precisely because his savage Klingon instincts have been "tempered" by his lifelong association with humans. In spite of this, Worf is still depicted constantly fighting to pass as human, to suppress his Klingon instincts—nature and nurture are in constant conflict. Klingons in *STNG*, though more trustworthy than Romulans because they rigorously adhere to an honor code, are warriors one step away from barbarians. In the episode entitled "Birthright,"³⁰ Worf teaches certain isolated Klingon youth the art and glory of the hunt. In the forest, armed with a spear, Worf literally can smell the scent of his prey. The bloodlust of the Klingon warrior, not surprisingly, translates into equally aggressive and animalistic sexual practices: aroused Klingons growl at each other and Klingon foreplay is very violent. The racist stereotype of the primitive animal savagery of the black man requires little elaboration. As with Chewbacca, the black Klingon finds its freak show parallel in the missing link or wild man. Worf's human masquerade frequently slips to reveal his essential otherness—a "primitive" savagery that removes the black man from the circle of "enlightened humanity" back to the freak show stage, again reconfirming the superiority of the controlled, "evolved" white male.³¹

In contrast to the hypermasculine Worf, Deanna Troi, the half-Betazoid "empath" (the *Enterprise's* exotic Circassian beauty), assumes the typical feminine role of sensitive nurturer. For the first several seasons, Counselor Troi had the dubious distinction of being the only bridge member to wear a skirt. Several costume changes later, Troi was still the only officer to don a cleavage-accentuating scoop-neck. Only half-Betazoid, Troi's telepathic abilities are not keen enough to actually read thoughts—she is restricted to sensing emotional states. Although she assumes more authority as the series progresses, in Cassandra-like fashion, the bridge crew typically acknowledge her assessment of a given situation and then continue with whatever plan they were already considering. Troi's primary role on board the *Enterprise* is as psychologist for the crew and love interest for, first Riker, and then Worf. (Her involvement

with the aggressive Worf at the end of the series' run seems to confirm the sexist assumption that all women *want* to be dominated). Mary Jo Deegan's analysis of the role of women in the original *Star Trek* series seems equally applicable to *STNG*: "Since all men vie for power, human and alien males have a common bond. In their lust for power even male Klingons behave more like men than human women do."³² In Deegan's evaluation, women in *Star Trek* are always "aliens," secondary figures who either "provide romance or reveal that any woman's desire for power is 'abnormal.'"³³

Data, the android, although not an "alien" in the biological sense, most clearly exemplifies the extraterrestrial position as articulated by *STNG*. Data *wants* to be human and is constantly learning what it means *to be* human. Deprived of emotions and coolly logical, Data is *STNG*'s Spock substitute. The series chronicles Data's development and his convergence with "humanity," which within *STNG* is the evolutionary apex—the position occupied by the white male. Synonymous with goodness, decency, integrity, ingenuity, and compassion, "human" serves not simply as a biological designation, but as a moral marker. Alien races are assessed by the extent to which they can understand and approximate the human. It is taken as self-evident that all alien cultures, if they do not already, will understand and recognize the obvious superiority of human parameters such as beliefs in the ideas of individual responsibility and equity, and the experiences of guilt and compassion.

In general, alien races in *STNG* can be divided into two categories: those races (generally depicted as "primitive") that need to learn emotional restraint (e.g., races such as the Klingons that need to be taught moderation), and those (generally technologically advanced) races that need to "loosen up" (e.g., Vulcans and androids). Through this universe of inadequate alien others travels the remarkably controlled and duty-bound Captain Picard, exemplifying the virtues of the Aristotelian mean and, Christ-like, teaching both the barbaric primitive races and the logical, emotionally frigid races he encounters the value of *mercy*.³⁴ Physical diversity is tolerated to the extent that the alien's *values* coincide with the "human."

Although *STNG* staunchly maintains the universal superiority of the "human," it has taken a major step forward from the alien depictions found in the *Star Wars* movies; physical deviation from a humanoid norm is no longer automatically equated with moral degeneracy.³⁵ The shift is somewhat comparable to the rejection of the permissible exhibition of non-Western others as freaks in favor of a more tolerant ethic of cultural relativism. The continuing *Star Trek* series (*Deep-Space 9* and *Star Trek Voyager*) now find themselves facing the same conundrum confronting contemporary ethnography: how to survey/study/write about other cultures without objectifying and "dehumanizing" the other. *STNG*'s progressive thinking never reached the level of questioning its own authority or realizing the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge. How far the spin-off series will go in this direction remains to be seen.

HORRIBLE OTHERS, HORRIBLE SELVES

This essay started with three quotations, each suggesting how freaks, aliens, or monsters function as categorical boundary breakers, entities that transgress cultural schemes of classification and violate hierarchical structures of binary opposition. The construction of the alien is always a complex play of disavowal and identification. The extraterrestrial alien, as a fictional creation, must function as a site of tension between self and other. As a projection of

otherness generated from within the self, the figure of the alien articulates what a given culture perceives as different, aberrant, strange, freakish. Extraterrestrialism, the process of "othering" that essentializes alien difference as inferiority, acts to reify and reinforce the "human" as superior. Inasmuch as the freakish SF alien frequently draws from real-world racial stereotypes, the "human" frequently narrows to white, American, and male.

Yet, the alien is a site of ambiguity, anxiety, and contestation. The vehemence with which the alien, the freak, and the other are renounced, degraded, and disavowed by a culture, be it on the freak show stage or in the SF feature, suggests a commensurate level of anxiety in the collective distancing psyche. Constructed as a freak, a curiosity to be exhibited and gawked at, the alien calls the human into question. To live with the alien, the freak, and the monster is to come to terms with ourselves.

NOTES

I offer my thanks to Jeffrey Cohen, Noreen O'Connor, and Jill Angelino for their advice and insight.

1. Elizabeth Grosz, "Freaks," *Social Semiotics* 1, no. 2 (1991): 25.
2. Michael Beehler, "Border Patrols," in *Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction*, ed. George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 32.
3. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming), 6.
4. Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 24.
5. This distinction results, at least in part, from modern medicine's recuperation of the freak as pathological. As Robert Bogdan observes, during its heyday the freak show was a form of amusement incommensurate with pity. It did not force spectators to confront their own racism, imperialism, and handicapism; rather, it confirmed prejudices and beliefs in inherent racial inferiority and the undisputed superiority of the West. See Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 111, 197, 267, 277. I suggest that from a nineteenth-century perspective, the freak and the monster, if not identical, were much closer in proximity that they are in contemporary American culture. As medical science increasingly became able to identify the biological basis of many physical abnormalities, and in some cases provide treatments, the notion of freak as ontological other was destabilized and the physically deviant freak was relocated from the realm of the monster to that of the human.
6. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, personal communication, June 1995.
7. Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), chap. 1.
8. In fact, inasmuch as "human" serves not just as a biological category but a moral marker, the alien, by desiring to be human, establishes certain criteria for defining the human, and often ends up being *more* human than human. The alien in this context not only recognizes its fundamental *lack*—its "want-of-being," as Lacan would say—but strives to realize a definition of "human" that few humans demonstrate. See the "Deep-Space Multiculturalism?" section of this chapter.
9. Bogdan, *Freak Show*, x, 3.
10. *Ibid.*, 6.
11. *Ibid.*, 31.
12. "In the 1920s and 1930s, Eko and Iko, brothers with albinism and dreadlocks, were presented as ambassadors from Mars discovered near the remains of their spaceship in the Mojave Desert." Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 105.
13. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 185.
14. Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 2.
15. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 71.

16. Gregory Benford, "Effing the Ineffable," in Slusser and Rabkin, *Aliens*, 14.
17. Leighton Brett Cooke, "The Human Alien: In-Groups and Outbreeding in *Enemy Mine*," in Slusser and Rabkin, *Aliens*, 183.
18. *Ibid.*, 181.
19. John Fieder, "Embracing the Alien: Science Fiction in Mass Culture," *Science-Fiction Studies* 9 (1982): 33-34.
20. See Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).
21. Billy Dee Williams's character Lando Calrissian in *Empire* and *Jedi* only slightly complicates this assessment. Women (Leia) and animals (Chewbacca), those who feel rather than think within Lucas's universe, instantly distrust him, as does the audience. Although he turns out okay in the end, we never entirely get over our initial negative reaction to the character.
22. George Lucas, script to *Star Wars*, in *The Art of Star Wars*, ed. Carol Titelman (New York: Ballantine, 1979), 58-59.
23. *Ibid.*, 53.
24. *Ibid.*, 59, emphasis mine.
25. *Ibid.*, 70.
26. According to Jacques Lacan, prior to the mirror stage the infant is incapable of controlling the movements of its body and is dependent upon the care of others. The child's recognition of the mirror image as its own and joyous assumption of a spatial identity are undercut by the gap between the unity of the image and the continuing fragmentary character of the infant's existence. This discrepancy occasions a kind of primal paranoia—the self is alienated from itself, and this discordance lies at the foundation of the Lacanian notion of human identity. According to Lacan, fantasies about the dissolution of bodily unity and control stem from repressed memories of the lived bodily experience of the infant prior to the mirror stage. I am proposing that the somatic freak can excite such pre-Oedipal memories in the viewer. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1-7; and Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 45.
27. James Kahn, *The Return of the Jedi* (New York: Ballantine, 1983), 336.
28. At the end of *Star Wars*, Luke and Han receive medals while Chewbacca stands by and is excluded. Perhaps his loud growl, upsetting the solemnity of the ceremony, is one of frustration rather than joy!
29. Larry Nemecek, *The Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), back cover.
30. This episode first aired February 22, 1993.
31. If Worf incarnates one stereotype of the black man as feral, then the other black male character on the show, Geordi La Forge, incarnates the opposite stereotype of the subservient black man.
32. Mary Jo Deegan, "Sexism in Space: The Freudian Formula in "Star Trek," in *Eros in the Mind's Eye*, ed. Donald Palumbo (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986), 221.
33. *Ibid.*, 209.
34. It is intriguing that the captain of the *Enterprise* should be a Frenchman, John-Luc Picard, portrayed by the commanding British Shakespearean actor, Patrick Stewart. Presumably, Captain Picard unites the stereotypes of British reserve and duty with French *joie de vivre*, although the former quality seems to be much more in evidence.
35. It should be noted that only rarely is the open-mindedness of the *Enterprise's* crew to physical "abnormality" pushed to the limit. A salient aspect of *STNG* is the improbably high occurrence of anthropomorphic alien races. Klingons, Romulans, Vulcans, Betazoids, Ferengi, Bajorans, and so on are all differentiated from humans solely by minor facial and cranial deviations. "The Chase," a sixth-season episode first aired April 26, 1993, explains the biological similarity of so many divergent races through recourse to a common ancestor that "seeded" similar DNA codes on a variety of worlds.