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## Black and White World: Race, Ideology, and Utopia in *Triton* and *Star Trek*

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*David Columbia*

[In *Triton*], a certain masculine psychology, treated as a social object, is analyzed down into its conflicting elements until it can no longer be radically distinguished from a certain 'femininity' that men begin by defining and distinguishing as wholly apart from and supplementary to the masculine.

—Delany, "Interview" 42

One of the key questions on the contemporary agenda concerns the cultural construction of whiteness. One of the signs of the times is that we really don't know what "white" is.

—Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing" 205

**T**his is an essay about utopian representations of race. More generally, it examines the project of imagining a future in which contemporary racial problems—specifically the conflicts between blacks and whites in the U.S.—have been, to whatever degree this may be possible, resolved. This project interests me for what might be called negative and positive hermeneutic reasons. The negative reasons have to do with the common representation

in utopian fictions and science fiction of futures in which “racial problems” have been erased; that sort of fiction demands a critique on specifically ideological grounds. The positive motivation for this project is to work toward opening at least some critical space to discuss the possibility of resolving some of our contemporary problems about race, to ask what the spaces for such solutions might look like.<sup>1</sup>

Methodologically, this paper is part of a larger project that will apply ideological criticism to social issues, such as race, gender, and sexuality, especially in terms of the utopia/ideology dialectic that is so visible in science fiction. In applying ideological analysis to these social issues, one main benefit is the opportunity to deconstruct those less-than-visible, neutralizing, and neutering terms that occupy central positions in social ideologies: to penetrate these blinding, perhaps because white, places, where no one has gone before. In order to look at blackness in *Star Trek* we need also to look at what *Star Trek* says about whiteness, at the way whiteness maintains its ideological grip. This deconstructive analysis is similar to the one Samuel R. Delany enacts in *Triton*: to deconstruct utopian aspirations—which means precisely not to discount them altogether—in part by critically dismantling juridical norms of whiteness, masculinity, and “straight” sexuality.

*Triton*, written in 1973 and 1974 and published in 1976, offers its reader the subtitle “An Ambiguous Heterotopia,” which science fiction readers will recognize as a commentary on, and reaction to, Ursula K. LeGuin’s 1974 novel *The Dispossessed*, subtitled “An Ambiguous Utopia.” I want to focus here on the shift in Delany’s novel from “utopia” to “heterotopia,” and to use briefly *The Dispossessed*, itself a sophisticated and highly critical version of utopia, as a foil for *Triton* to try to get at that deconstructive operation. I will also discuss the way Delany shifts from the classically heroic utopian center of consciousness to a villainous one. The specific characteristics of Bron Helstrom, *Triton*’s protagonist, provide some suggestive hints toward the complex operation of the contemporary Science Fiction Utopian Imaginary, pointing, in a sociological sense, toward, and even representing, a particular, hopeful future, intending to “defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present” in Fredric Jameson’s words (“Can We Imagine the

Future?" 151), but at the same time functioning as the Imaginary of our present.

Delany's use of the term "heterotopia" comes from Foucault's *The Order of Things*, itself published in English just before composition started on Delany's novel. The relevant passage is found in the Preface to that work and is quoted as the epigraph to Appendix B of *Triton*:

there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclitite*; and that word should be taken in its most literal, etymological sense: in such a state, things are "laid," "placed," "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all. *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to "hold together." (Foucault xvii–xviii; Delany 345)<sup>2</sup>

Delany invokes Foucault in part to oppose LeGuin's usage of "utopia" in *The Dispossessed*, although he clearly admires that book. And of course *The Dispossessed* is itself not a conventional utopian work, which is why LeGuin calls it an "ambiguous utopia." In fact, as Jameson and others have pointed out, LeGuin's novel is in many ways determinedly dialectical, and therefore determinedly and dialectically opposed to uncritical notions of utopia. But what Delany seems to take from *The Order of Things* is that very Foucauldian notion of "the heteroclitite," that sense of a pervasive but uncategorizable irregularity in any given order, of an unavoidable resistance to a clearly established regime of Truth.

Delany points toward the heteroclite utopia, though in an unexpected way, when he says in a recent interview that

“[h]eterotopia” is, after all, a real English word. It’s got several meanings. You can find it in the *OED*. If you do, you’ll find it has some meanings that, I’d hope, apply quite directly to the book. (“On *Triton* and Other Matters” 318)

This is a more cunning claim than it may seem, because, although “heterotopia” does occur in the *OED*, it is offered only as an alternate term for “heterotopy,” a term from physiology, which has two principal definitions: the general physiological notion of “displacement in position, misplacement,” and the specific meaning in pathology of “the occurrence of a tumour in a part where the elements of which it is composed do not normally exist.” No usage of “heterotopia” itself is provided. In that same interview Delany himself asserts that “a major definition of ‘heterotopia’ is its medical meaning. It’s the removal of one part or organ from the body and affixing it at another place in or on the body. That’s called a heterotopia. A skin graft is a heterotopia. But so is a sex-change” (319).

Although these meanings do not precisely conform to the dictionary definitions of heterotopy, they resonate with the concerns of *Triton*, whose main character, Bron Helstrom, Delany wants his readers to dislike strongly.<sup>3</sup> One of Bron’s main problems has to do with his sexual relationships—Bron is absolutely unable to understand or empathize with his partners, especially a woman he seems actually to love, called “The Spike.” So it comes as a pretty large surprise when, in the last quarter of the novel, Bron decides without warning to change his sex, which Delany portrays as a simple and common operation on Triton.

As Jameson has noted, “in utopian discourse it is the narrative itself which tends to be effaced by and assimilated to sheer description, as anyone knows who has ever nodded over the more garrulous explanatory passages in the classical utopias” (“Of Islands and Trenches” 16). But what Delany, in this sense partly like LeGuin before him, injects into the utopian narrative is character: the reader is granted descriptions of Triton’s utopian society only through the eyes of a character who the reader is supposed to rec-

ognize not only as “unreliable” but as morally compromised, seriously unable to comprehend the world in which he lives. This puts him at odds with the utopian aspirations of the narrative description, and it sets him apart from Shevak, narrator of *The Dispossessed*, who for all that book’s admitted ambiguity toward utopia per se nevertheless functions as a relatively stable and sympathetic center of consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

In denying the reader this center, Delany lodges one of his principal critiques of the utopian genre and of utopian thinking in general. Not only does he refuse the reader the ability to imagine herself in “the utopian place,” but he puts in that place a figure whose function is exactly to force a critique of the overriding and mainstream ideology upon which the very idea of utopia itself rests. In other words, by injecting into the very center of his utopia an ideologically compromised and therefore representative figure of white, “straight,” masculinity, Delany paradoxically injects into his utopia a heteroclit element, an element that refuses his utopia the closure or order his (uncritical) readers may desire. In that sense, he specifically and deliberately makes his utopia a “place of difference,” an ideal world that by definition cannot be fully described or apprehended.

Bron, who transcends traditional boundaries of gender in an ultimately conservative and traditional manner, presents an odd locus of identification for the present-day reader. He willingly undergoes a transformation that an individual in our time, living according to Bron’s beliefs and the ruling ideology, would refuse even to consider. This crucial displacement of ideology and utopia, including their displacement onto an organic as well as a characterological site, helps to fix the general displacement that *Triton* seeks to enact. It is in this respect that the notion of utopia—not as a projection of future social hopes but rather as a doubled reflection of our own society and the forms of its ideology—emerges. As Delany says in the same interview from which I have already quoted, “SF is not about the future. SF is in dialogue with the present. It works by setting up a dialogue with the here-and-now, a dialogue as intricate and rich as the writer can make it” (“On *Triton* and Other Matters” 320). That is Jameson’s perspective on SF as well, but what I am suggesting is that the combination of SF and utopia produces a form that exists in a kind of unique tension, that serves

at once to project *and* to mask the present-day ideology in which it is constructed *and also* to project deformations and corrections of the social hopes lodged within that ideology.

This heady mix of ideological, Imaginary, and social functions is well summed up by the social structure of Triton, in which every sort of imaginable (and several unimaginable) genders and sexualities coexist peacefully, and also by Bron himself, a man whose notion of masculinity reflects directly on our own most central and (until recently) least-examined notions of sexuality. The racial makeup of Triton, too, is remarkably fluid, and it is no accident that one of Bron's primary goals after his (or her) sex change operation is to have a relationship with Sam, a prominent diplomat, and significantly a "good-looking, friendly, intelligent" black man with an "amazing mind" and a "magnificent body" (30–31), who previous to the narrative proper undergoes an FTM (female-to-male) sex change operation himself.

I lack the space here to go deeply enough into the specific ways in which the novel lodges its critique of hegemonic masculinity—and, indeed, hegemonic whiteness—against and through Bron. Instead, I have tried only to point out the ways in which the novel's struggle against utopia in and of itself produces a "heterotopia," which I will read as a displacement of utopian and ideological forces into itself, a self-conscious rereading of the form of utopia that allows a multi-valenced presentation of the central and in some important sense unexaminable grounds on which any dominant ideology rests itself. It is not hard to infer that Delany is aware of what Jameson calls the disjunctive process out of which utopias must always be produced.<sup>5</sup> In Jameson's view, that process, minus a critical understanding, leads to a "desperate formalism"; without a critical understanding of the disjunctive nature of utopia, its function can too easily be to deconstruct itself within its own ideological contradictions.

This brings me to *Star Trek*, which I hope to have now situated in the contexts of both SF and utopia.<sup>6</sup> In many crucial ways, *Star Trek* embraces uncritically the utopian forms that LeGuin and Delany, in diverse ways, take as their objects of critical scrutiny. The episode of *Star Trek* I would like to deal with is the one called "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" (episode number 70, which first aired on 10 January 1969), which stars Frank Gorshin as Bele, a

representative of the government of the remote planet Cheron. Bele has been chasing a fugitive named Lokai across the galaxy for “more than 50,000 of your terrestrial years,” because Lokai is guilty of inciting revolution and treason, which have resulted in the deaths of thousands of his fellow Cheronites. For my discussion here, the salient fact, which readers familiar with the series will no doubt remember, is the skin coloring of Bele and Lokai: like all members of the ruling class of Cheron, Bele is stark black on the right side and stark white on the left, while Lokai, like all members of the oppressed class, has just the opposite pigmentation. Interestingly, the show wants us to believe that this skin coloring corresponds to regular human skin tones for blacks and whites, even though the colorings as they appear on Bele and Lokai are charcoal black and chalk white—diametric opposites, but also costumer’s colors. To be sure, the general liberal-humanist point the show is making is laid right on the surface by this arrangement: the accidents of the history of racial division are arbitrary, as offensive as Bele’s insistence that the viewer of the show and the observer on the *Enterprise* should be able to directly see that Lokai is of an “inferior breed” because he is “black on the right side.” Of course, the viewer sees no such thing. Like the crew of the *Enterprise*, the show’s viewer sees Lokai and Bele as fundamentally of the same species, fundamentally “human” (in whatever sense “aliens” are human), fundamentally equal; their quarrel at base is pointless, like racial conflict on our own Earth; we should all act like members of one glorious Federation, “containing” multitudes.

Now this in part unobjectionable liberalism is surely part of the texture of *Star Trek* in general and this episode in particular, and I do not imagine that it can be entirely gainsaid. Nevertheless, the particular context of this show is fascinating, as Spock might say, as is the context in which the show’s liberal message about race is delivered. This context is interesting in at least four specific ways, and in these ways it helps to expose the inner workings of what might be called the “logic of race in *Star Trek*,” which is much more polished, distracting, and reified in other episodes and in *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine*, and depends as much on a logic of whiteness as of blackness.<sup>7</sup>

The first point has to do with the reduction of racial conflict in human history to pure pigment, which erases cultural and political

difference in favor of a formal matter that is realized only morphologically—much like the costumer’s coloring that displaces real human skin tones. The equivalence of color implied by the somatic representation of black and white on Lokai’s and Bele’s bodies (really, in the episode, faces) radically rewrites human racial conflict: in fact, it is what allows the condescending and conservatively utopian recountings of human history in the episode. In one of the episode’s most strangely reflective scenes, for example, Lokai sits in the crew lounge and tries to radicalize Sulu, Chekov, and several other crew members and convert them to his cause, which is clearly meant to reflect on African-American history: his people were enslaved for thousands of years by people in Bele’s class; they were freed thousands of years ago, but the freedom they achieved was greatly restricted, completely conditioned by the oppressive ideology of the ruling class, and so forth. Indeed, it is clear that the words Lokai utters are the words of civil rights activists at the very time the show was being produced and aired. Lokai explains the difficulty in transmitting the urgency of his story by saying that “[t]here is no persecution on your planet.” Sulu concurs: “There is no such persecution today.” The scene is doubly reflective, since on one reading what Lokai is trying to do is to make white people understand the plight of blacks in America—this is the very discourse out of which his words arise. But in terms of its Imaginary function, the scene represents our present-day world as having rid itself of the very conflict on which the show hinges. Curiously, and in a suggestively supplementary way, Spock stands outside the crew lounge during this scene, just listening; no mention is made further on in the episode of his overhearing it; he utters no judgment on it in particular.

This brings me to the second, even more plainly ideological, part of the show’s contextualization of the race issue. Because in the midst of the civil rights era, this supposedly liberal program, while explicitly aligning Lokai’s cause with the cause of African-Americans, and providing plenty of evidence for the justness of that cause, explicitly and determinately refuses to endorse him in any way. This is attributed to Lokai’s somewhat open predilection to violence (already hardly an ideologically innocent representation), but it extends further, so that only the barest hint is ever given of anyone on board the *Enterprise* saying directly that Lokai

and Bele are in every sense equal, and specifically that they are morally equal with the crew members themselves.

Rather, “equality” is troped in the episode in terms of disruptive emotion, namely “hatred.” (I should mention here that “emotion” plays a crucial role in the construction of normative ideologies of the “human” in *Star Trek*, but I will have to address that elsewhere.) Whenever Lokai and Bele are portrayed as equals, it is directly related to their mutual hatred and to their own “race’s” hatred of the other’s “race,” and it is this hatred that is portrayed as specifically equivalent: no gesture is ever made at implying that Lokai might in any sense be *justified* in hating the representative of a race who has overtly and covertly enslaved him and his people for thousands of years.<sup>8</sup>

The ending of the episode is no less telling. After an interminable amount of wrangling over the control of the ship—I will return to this in a moment because it is also highly suggestive—at the end of the show the *Enterprise* arrives at Cheron, only to discover that the planet has been destroyed utterly: no Cheronite is left alive but for Lokai and Bele themselves. The planet’s destruction is conveyed to the viewer in another remarkable way, because the scenes of burning buildings and fire-choked streets must have been eerily familiar to any contemporary viewer of the episode: they look just like the riots, especially the Watts riots, which occurred during the several summers prior to the production and airing of this episode in early 1969. Certainly this helps to explain some of the antirevolutionary bias of the show, but I also think it reflects something far deeper. It is fascinating, for example, that no one on the *Enterprise* guesses that Bele and Lokai will beam down to the planet surface to continue their fight (Kirk even asks, “Where can they run?”). It is as if the awful energy they contain—which burns visibly red-hot and threatens literally to tear the *Enterprise* apart when Bele and Lokai fight—must be put back where it belongs, in what is in some sense “our” world.

This helps provide a context for the astonishing exchange which ends the show, during which nearly every regular cast member is present on the bridge:

**Uhura:** It doesn't make any sense [that is, Bele and Lokai returning to Cheron to continue their fight].

**Spock:** To expect sense from two mentalities of such extreme viewpoints is not logical.

**Sulu:** But their planet's dead; does it matter now which one's right?

**Spock:** Not to Lokai and Bele. All that matters to them is their hate.

**Uhura:** Do you suppose that's all they ever had, Sir?

**Kirk:** No. But that's all they have left. Warp factor 2, Mr. Sulu. Set course for Starbase 4.

That the producers and writers of the show put these words in Uhura's mouth is really remarkable. It is difficult to watch Nichelle Nichols saying that she does not understand why Lokai would hate Bele or why Lokai would want a revolution, considering what her role represents on *Star Trek* (for example, as half of the famous first-ever "interracial kiss" on broadcast U.S. television), and, in this respect alone, what her personal feelings about the civil unrest of the sixties might be. I am not implying that the sort of violent and anarchic demonstrations of the Watts riots might have been actively endorsed by a mainstream TV show. However, it is astounding that Uhura is not only made to say that she cannot understand the *basis* for the conflict but that she is also actively, grammatically chastised by Spock, the representative of white rationality, for not being "logical," which can be read as something far worse.

It is not hard to understand why the TV executives and producers might be interested in containing the violent energy represented by the Watts riots and other racial and civil unrest of the 1960s. And they do a good job of it, too: I think that is how we should read the remarkable fact that the *Enterprise* happens to arrive at Cheron at just the precise moment when the planet is still in flames, yet every one of its inhabitants has been killed: it is a moment of profound suspense, when the very elimination of the human from the field of ideology allows the inverse pull of utopia to take a final and terrifying hold. But it is clear that a further kind of containment is enacted in this episode, in no small part by having Uhura, and Sulu as well, pose the questions they do at the show's end, and by having Spock and Kirk be the authority figures who provide interpretive readings of Bele's and Lokai's fight.

And this brings me back to the two further contextualizations of racial conflict within the episode. The first has to do with the bizarre dramatic theme of the show, namely, that Bele is able somehow to assert mental control over the ship and thus to direct it wherever he wants. Of course, the show never explains how it is that Bele has this ability while Lokai does not. But the terror this causes within the crew is emphasized over and over, so that almost immediately on the discovery of the fact Kirk threatens to destroy the entire ship, which is depicted in the rather famous self-destruct sequence. Rather than just dropping Lokai and Bele off on their home planet and allowing them to continue their conflict by themselves, Kirk chooses to destroy the *Enterprise*. (Here, at least, the show implies that this is because Kirk wants to protect Lokai from persecution, though that is never overtly stated.) Well, what is Kirk afraid of? The answer is, of course, the destruction, or maybe better the deconstruction, of the entire rational-logical structure of the Federation, that control over ideology maintained by utopian representation and figured here by both Kirk and Spock and several times referred to in the show as the ultimate, unquestionable repository of authority. Insofar as that rational-logical structure, the Federation, represents the white power structure in place in the U.S. (and the neutralizing and blinding ideology upon which it rests), the show offers us the spectacle of that power structure and of what we might call hegemonic whiteness watching the Watts riots in horror, while relying on its utopian displacements to make those conflicts strange, alien, not part of "us" and significantly not our fault. This is what antiutopian critical theorists point to as the sustaining features of utopia, features that contrast strongly with the critical heterotopian strategies developed by Delany in *Triton*.

In fact, though, this reading has a resistant underside, in part because the presence of both black and white on both Bele and Lokai's bodies is meant to implicate, again in a liberal-humanist fashion, white people particularly in the irrationality of race hatred and oppression. But this admission, always lurking at the edges of the show, threatens as well literally to tear the *Enterprise* apart, even to inspire the adherents of the *Enterprise* to destroy themselves rather than choose sides in the conflict they supposedly can rationally mediate. The Federation's utopia has no tools with which to

intervene, to understand, such conflict; after all, it is not “logical,” apparently, to attempt to extricate oneself from a millenniums-old oppression. I think this accounts for one of the oddest moments in all of *Star Trek*: after Bele relinquishes mental control of the *Enterprise* for the second time, Kirk asks Sulu whether control has returned to the helm. Sulu, beaming, as if under the influence of drugs or in some other state of beatitude, looks up at the camera and at Kirk and declares, “It’s beautiful, Captain.” What has been returned so sublimely, of course—in a moment of not just intellectual but fetishized and even sexualized joy—is not command of the ship so much as the assurance that the Federation’s rational ideology will not be torn asunder from within, the assurance that *Star Trek* will still be able successfully to displace present-day conflict onto utopianized, science-fictional futures. That project, and also the very project of the white majority to maintain rational distance from and control over the energies loosed by U.S. racial conflict, is radically endangered in the ideological Imaginary, and it is that endangerment which is enacted and displayed in “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield.”

The show provides one final contextualizing device that illustrates this conflict, or perhaps lack of conflict, through its frame narrative. At the beginning of the episode the *Enterprise* is en route to Ariannus, a planet on the “commercial lanes” which is “under attack by bacterial contamination.” In between Lokai’s two attempts to take control of the ship, the *Enterprise* completes this frame mission with a startling lack of drama. Eventually, the ship releases tanks of bactericide from high above Ariannus; during this scene there is strictly speaking no dramatic conflict pending between Lokai and Bele or in the frame story so that Scotty just sits in the Captain’s chair and says things like “[f]inal run completed, Captain.” The lack of dramatic energy here, I think, functions as a supplement, foregrounding the unrealizable utopian effort of the show: to decontaminate itself of the racial conflict, of the call to take sides, and of the Federation’s (that is, U.S. racial ideology’s) complicity in the very conflict which Bele and Lokai are meant to displace. This dispassionate decontamination is precisely what the ideological work of the episode is meant to enact, and precisely what it, like any straightforward representations of utopia, cannot accomplish.

The logic of race in *Star Trek* operates more smoothly and is more fully reified in *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* than in the original show. I want to end this discussion by speculating briefly on what goes on in these shows. I will concentrate on *The Next Generation* because *DS9*, whatever else can be said about it, seems very much in its nascent stages at the time this essay is being written.

It seems useful to me to begin with a very provocative statement by the *Village Voice* writer Jeff Salamon, who recently wrote there that

the Federation-Klingon alliance reads like a straightforward colonialist narrative: we get to see Worf grow progressively more human, but neither Riker nor Picard seems even remotely influenced by Klingon culture. ("Race Men and Space Men" 47)

This seems just right to me. One of the neutralizing functions of the white ideology of *Star Trek* is to portray the Federation as normative in every respect, so that the basic categorical term "the Federation" admits of no actual qualities but only positive valuations. Being an officer, but specifically a human officer of the Federation (or a member of one of the races that is marked as basically human, as is Ensign Ro, though her case itself is telling), means that one is granted the full range of human emotion and, significantly, human potential. Being a member of any "other" race—especially Klingon or Ferengi, or a villainous race like the Romulans or the Cardassians—means that one's character and characteristics are largely determined by one's membership in that race. A human is not anything in particular, and a Federation officer who is human, whatever else he or she may be, is only presumed to be a "good person" unless shown otherwise. A Klingon is presumed to be warlike and overly concerned with "honor," interested in animalistic sex, and a good fighter; a Ferengi is assumed to be unintellectual and greedy, sneaky, and pathetically desirous of sex with people who are too good for him or her; Cardassians are treacherous, cunning, and cruel; and so on.

In its most basic form, this very opposition underlies that logic or economy of race that exists in more overt form in "Let That Be

Your Last Battlefield." In the utopia of the Federation, difference is played down, supposedly because differences make no *negative* difference, but as a reflection of our own present that representation exists precisely to highlight and objectify difference and to reinscribe the notion that "others" have "difference," while "we"—"core" humans who populate the Federation—manifest only "goodness" and heterogeneity. Every time you hear Worf talk about "honor," you can be sure that racism is not dead, that it is written at the deepest levels into the most intimate hopes and projections of even those creative people who believe, earnestly I would guess, that they have the betterment of humankind at heart.

Think, though, about the racial makeup as it has been set up on the *Enterprise*. You basically have three races represented there, although it may appear to be four. The first is white humans, among which we must count most of the personnel who display flexibility in terms of being able to apply their skills other than at their central command station (for example, even though Worf was originally head of engineering, for some reason this expertise is no longer mentioned): these include Picard, Riker, Dr. Crusher, O'Brien, even at times Wesley Crusher and Tasha Yar. Even in this mixed group, it is the women who cannot translate those skills as fluidly as the men can—Dr. Crusher is only the doctor; Tasha Yar is only the security chief; Troi, an alien who is marked by the "sensitivity" and "empathy" associated with being empathic, has been shown to be terrified by the command chair to which she is entitled as an officer with rank (and the actresses who portray these characters have each complained about the producers refusal to give them important and flexible roles). An exception might be Ensign Ro, who has shown a certain amount of cross-disciplinary ability in some shows; notably, though, she is marked by her unacceptably aggressive sexuality, normally coded as a male emotion on *Star Trek*, and which itself may have to do with her being marked as fundamentally "alien," though generically human (in certain ways, an equation much like the one that rules Spock's behavior).

Let us say, these are the "white" people on the *Enterprise*: the more centrally white you are, the greater your abilities and the more your personality is supposed to be able to handle difference and to account for it. As I have shown, at least a tentative gender-oriented dividing line can be drawn that makes ability in this re-

gard highly dependent on maleness. Notice that Picard is in this sense marked especially as a central and neutral exponent of Federation ideology: he is visibly and traditionally English, but his name encompasses French people in general (the ancestral enemies of the English) and a specific French person (so as to mark out that coding especially strongly), Jean-Luc Godard, a notably subversive, creative member of the French body politic. Thus, Picard can at once signal the great heterogeneity reserved only for humans in *Star Trek's* utopia.

Now before turning to the explicitly "not-human" members of the crew, let me turn to the important transitional case, Data. Like Spock, Data might be seen as the ultimate distillation of the Federation's utopian representation of rational-logical control over nature, over ideology. Like Spock, Data can at times serve as a representative of Otherness and at times as the purest and most commodified representation of the self-as-desired-object; he is the essence of the Federation in both its conscious utopian aspirations and in its Imaginary, unconscious underside. And in both cases his overriding need and desire is the same: to be human, not to be Klingon, "alive," Ferengi, even Terrestrial, but to be "human," which means to feel emotion. I will return to this highly provocative point in a second. But think of that desire to be human because it resonates in at least two ways: one is the implicit denial in the very heart of Federation ideology that eliminates vast and important fields of experience and difference so that the representation it makes to itself is significantly homogenized. It also resonates in that what Data most wants, to be human, stands in for what all non-Federation and Federation nonhumans want in the supposedly postcolonial utopia of *Star Trek*: not only to join the Federation (why? answers are rarely provided, and thinking about this produces highly provocative and suggestive speculations), but to "become" the Federation, to lose difference, to become neutral, human, but really white, to exist really outside of ideology.

This leaves us with the blacks on board the *Enterprise*, and here we have to include Worf because he is played by Michael Dorn, who is African-American, and I do not think it possible to argue that this is merely a serendipitous fact. Worf, Geordie, and Guinan are the three blacks onboard the *Enterprise*, and they form a fascinating trio. Worf, as I have already expressed, stands in as *TNG's* chief representative of otherness qua otherness: through

those familiar and ugly tropes of “honor” and “warrior,” to say nothing of the hideous and in some ways demeaning makeup that he wears, Worf is consistently marked as alien and other and is continually put under pressure to explicate or defend his otherness or to capitulate to Federation ways. In a well-known episode where all the crew and the ship’s computer have their memories wiped away by a manipulative alien named MacDuff (!), significantly it is only Worf who guesses incorrectly as to his place in the crew hierarchy, and of course he guesses that he is the Captain because he is a “warrior.” In a moment of true *TNG* condescension, no one wants to argue about whether Picard or Worf is really Captain, but the viewer is consistently aware of Worf’s hubris, and Picard “forgives” Worf fully when their memories return, but the viewer cannot shake the feeling that it is precisely Worf’s race that has inspired him to think too much of himself, and wrongly to perceive himself central in a world where his very difference precludes him from being so.

Significantly, Geordie, who also has some of that “skill-transfer” ability I’ve identified as a mark of the white, neutral ideology of *Star Trek*, has an always-marked disability. Not surprisingly, although his lack of “natural vision” is supposed to be more than made up for with the visor that allows him to see well beyond the normal spectrum, in an episode where his deepest desires are revealed, they turn out to be the sexually fetishized desire to “see normally.”

This leaves us with Guinan. My understanding is that Whoopi Goldberg petitioned the producers of *Star Trek* for a long time to have a character like Guinan introduced on the show, and it is not surprising that in this character, marked as she is in various negative ways, we see at least some hint of a complex response to utopian projections of the “race problem.” The negative markers for her include not being a real member of the ship’s crew, being a bartender, and being consulted mainly when there is some matter of “cultural or historical sensitivity” with which to deal. But the positive markers are significant: she has a deep and long-standing relationship with the Captain, and we are made to know that he relies on her opinions, in at least some matters, quite strongly; her history and the history of her planet are mentioned often; she has a different take on the Federation’s business than most of the other

members of the crew. Guinan's character does not escape the problematic racist Imaginary of *Star Trek* (and neither does Benjamin Sisko, the commander of *Deep Space Nine*), but at least she points toward a more complex and critical engagement with the deep divisions in the controlling ideologies of our time.

Both *Triton* and *Star Trek* demonstrate how the ideological and the utopian are inextricably intertwined. There can be no projection of our own present without a supplement, the Imaginary of that present, and similarly no projection of the future without the Imaginary of that future (that is, in Althusserian terms, the ideological Real of our present).<sup>9</sup> *Triton* gestures toward the critical imagining of real futures, ideals that may help to destabilize our own reified ideologies through the heteroclitic disruption of the naturalizing and neutralizing processes of ideological construction. In contrast, "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" and the character arrangement of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* show how easy and dangerous it is to repeat our own ideological, racist Imaginary when we project our futures uncritically.

### Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania, March 1993. I thank Houston Baker and Stephen Best for providing me with the opportunity to speak in that heady environment. In addition to them and the congenial audience at the talk, I want to thank Rebecca Bach, Herman Beavers, Anne Cubille, Suzanne Daly, Judy Filc, and an anonymous reader for *Cultural Critique* for their helpful comments and suggestions on this essay.

1. The notion of positive and negative hermeneutics is due to Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. This analysis relies specifically on the understanding of the dialectical interplay between ideology and utopia that Fredric Jameson describes in *The Political Unconscious* and elsewhere, and which has precedents in the work of Ernst Bloch and other critical theorists; at the same time, it proceeds from my own interest in science fiction as a genre, which Jameson and Tom Moylan especially have identified as a site for significantly revealing ideological constructions. For overviews of the ideology and utopia controversy, see Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, *The Political Unconscious*, and "Of Islands and Trenches"; Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*; and Moylan, "The Locus of Hope" and *Demand the Impossible*. The following provide overviews of the relationship between science fiction and utopian writing and discourse, all from Marxist-critical perspectives: Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches" and "Progress Versus Utopia"; Moylan, "Beyond Negation" and *Demand the Impossible*; Williams,

"Utopia and Science Fiction"; Easthope, "The Personal and the Political"; and Somay, "Towards an Open-Ended Utopia."

My analysis takes race for its site of investigation and theories about the scenic and screening functions of ideology as its mechanisms, but it proceeds as well from the following: the work of Stuart Hall; Jane Gaines's seminal essay "White Privilege and Looking Relations" and Manthia Diawara's related work in "Englishness and Blackness"; the critical and fictional work of Samuel R. Delany and critical works on him and on the African-American woman SF writer Octavia Butler; recent writings in black cultural theory like those collected in *Screen*, "Last Special Issue on Race," edited by Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, and the *Black Popular Culture* anthology assembled by Michele Wallace and Gina Dent. But, as my epigraphs from Delany and Mercer indicate, my specific goal here is to isolate and analyze structures of ideological normalization, especially racial normalization, and to examine how these instantiate themselves in utopian discourse—meaning, especially, how the structures of whiteness are defined and constructed. This follows from Delany's work, but more so from Mercer's essay and from Richard Dyer's important essay, from that same issue of *Screen*, called "White," where Dyer writes that "the property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power" ("White" 45). For Hall, see "The Whites of Their Eyes" and "Black Popular Culture." Relevant works by Delany include "The Semiology of Silence," "Afterword," "Street Talk/Straight Talk," "Interview," and the articles in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* (in particular, see "To Read *The Dispossessed*" 218–83 in that volume); for articles on him, in addition to the articles on utopian SF already cited, most of which contain substantive sections on *Triton*, see Govan, "The Insistent Presence of Black Folk." On Octavia Butler, see Zaki, "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology," and Foster, "Octavia Butler's Black Female Future Fiction." Also see the Delany and Mercer articles cited in the epigraphs to this essay. For an overview of representations of African-Americans in U.S. SF, see James, "Yellow, Black, Metal and Tentacled."

For discussions of utopia in relation to feminism—a subject too complex to be addressed in the main body of this essay, but which functions with a dynamic similar to the one described here—see Pearson, "Where No Man Has Gone Before"; Barr, ed., *Future Females*; Barr and Smith, eds., *Women and Utopia*; Bartowski, *Feminist Utopias*; Gubar, "Feminism and Utopia"; and Pfaelzer, "The Changing of the Avant Garde: Feminist Utopia."

2. All emphases are Foucault's. I have altered the quoted selection slightly to bring Foucault's writing about the "heteroclitite" into focus.

3. On the role of character, and Bron in particular, in *Triton*, see Massé, "Individual Expectations in *Triton*"; Somay, "Towards an Open-Ended Utopia"; Moylan, "Beyond Negation" and *Demand the Impossible*.

4. Both Moylan and Jameson, among others, make this point about *The Dispossessed*.

5. Cf. Jameson:

The utopian narrative might be described as one which, having come into being by a radical act of disjunction, must then summon up all of its energies into a 'motivation' of that initial disjunction into an elaborate, endless, impossible demonstration that such unimaginable separation from the inextricable totality of Being of that "real" world in which history and indeed the reader himself exist was in fact 'imaginable' in the first place. The ultimate subject-matter of utopian discourse would then turn out to be its own conditions of possibility as

discourse. Yet such desperate formalism, and the spectacle of a genre lifting itself up into being by its own bootstraps, is perhaps only the obverse and the corollary of its most genuine chance for authenticity: for it would follow, in that case, that utopia's deepest subject, and the source of all that is most vibrantly political about it, is precisely our inability to conceive it, our incapacity to produce it as a vision, our failure to project the other of what is, a failure that, as with fireworks dissolving back into the night sky, must once again leave us alone with *this* history. ("Of Islands and Trenches" 21; emphasis in original)

6. For more on mass culture and ideology, and specifically on the place of television in ideological critique, see White, "Ideological Analysis and Television." For a discussion of television theory and race ideology, see Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes." For a theoretically sophisticated discussion of television and ideology, see Ronell, "Video/Television/Rodney King." For discussions of utopia and ideology in relation to mass culture, see Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and Heath, "Jaws, Ideology and Film Theory."

7. For discussions of race in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* that bear importantly on this discussion, see Davis, "Space Is the Place," Minkowitz, "Deeper and Deeper," and Salamon, "Race Men and Space Men." For a suggestive comparison of *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, see Wilcox, "Where Others Have Gone Before." *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is discussed more fully in the final part of this essay.

8. Indeed, the trope of "hatred" is among the most common means for discussing racial difference in *Star Trek*, particularly with regard to the Klingons, which unsurprisingly places the cause of hatred in the Klingons—meaning in this sense blacks—themselves. On this logic see Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes." Conveniently, Klingons, like other races in the world of the Federation, can serve as representations of Mongols as well as African-Americans, just as Spock can represent both Japanese and white Americans. On some of these issues, see Salamon, "Race Men and Space Men."

9. For more definitions and discussions of the Real and the Imaginary, in both ideological and psychoanalytic terms, see Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, and Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* and *For Marx*; for the Lacanian origin of the terms see, for example, his *Écrits* and *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. The reading here has been greatly influenced by feminist rereadings of these materials, such as the one found in Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*.

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