

# Teaching toward the 24th Century

*Star Trek as*  
Social Curriculum

Karen Anijar

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CENTURY

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TEACHING TOWARD THE 24TH CENTURY

*Star Trek as Social Curriculum*

Karen Anijar

TEACHING TOWARD  
THE 24TH CENTURY

STAR TREK AS SOCIAL  
CURRICULUM

KAREN ANIJAR

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# Contents

	Acknowledgments	vi
	Series Editor's Foreword: The Ponderosa and the <i>Enterprise</i> : Go Up, Young Man, to the Final Frontier <i>Joe Kincheloe</i>	vii
CHAPTER 1	Gnosticism Is the Final Frontier: When the Red, Red Trekker Went Hale-Bopp, Bopping Along....	1
CHAPTER 2	The Way, the Truth, and the Light	37
CHAPTER 3	Intermezzo for NASA, Star Fleet, the Armed Services, and Giant Corporations in B Sharp	83
CHAPTER 4	Klingon as Curriculum: Militias, Minstrel Shows, and Other Language Games	128
CHAPTER 5	Resistance Is Futile: You Will Be Assimilated into the Predatory Jungle	156
CHAPTER 6	On Top of Old Mount Olympus, All Covered with Trek; or Mama, Don't Let Your Trekker Grow Up to Be a Fascist	191
	Afterword <i>Peter McLaren</i>	231
	Bibliography	235
	Index	254
	Permissions Acknowledgments	253

# Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to my son Joshua Asher Anijar, a very special and wonderful young man who carries my dreams in his heart.

*Teaching towards the 24th Century* represents not only the longest and largest work of my entire life, but is something that must be placed in context. This book was and is a collective undertaking that could never have come into existence if not for my friends, family, and colleagues who have so greatly influenced my thinking and my life.

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The Ponderosa and the *Enterprise*  
Go Up, Young Man, to the Final Frontier

JOE KINCHELOE

Karen Anijar posits that *Star Trek* is a Space Western with all the cultural and ideological baggage that such a connection implies. Six-shooters are pawned for phasers and the Wild Frontier morphs into the Final Frontier. The Ponderosa evolves into the *Starship Enterprise* and Ben Cartwright is reincarnated as James Tiberius Kirk. In this configuration, Adam turns into Mr. Spock and Hop Sing reemerges as Mr. Sulu. These connections are possible only with a cultural phenomenon that repackages the same ideologies that covertly shaped the American TV and movie Western “shoot-em-up” (as my parents labeled the genre). The amazing fan reaction/production that *Star Trek* has elicited in light of the texts of the various incarnations of the TV shows and movies will keep cultural studies scholars, sociologists, media analysts, and educators busy for decades to come. Anijar brings a subtle and critical eye to these often bizarre dynamics, capturing with her unique “take” profound insights into the cultural pedagogical and social aspects of the spectacle.

**AND THE WALLS CAME A'TUMBLIN' DOWN**

Anijar reads the spectacle in the context of hyperreality. As comfortable ways of Euro-thinking and the stories we tell about ourselves and how we got here (the grand narratives) began to crumble, Western societies embarked on the trek to a new cultural era. Of course, there have been liberatory aspects to this transmigration but the focus of Anijar's work is on the irrationality, the dislocation of the hyperreal. Reading her manuscript one knows that the old walls have crumbled, old certainties are shattered, and a new era of information has dawned with unsettling consequences.



While not a call for an obsequious tail-between-our-legs return to modernist verities, the book documents the postmodern convulsions we must all face. As the old stories in their stale packages leave ashes in the mouths of the new electronicized generations, *Star Trek* assumes the position of an antidote to the loss of faith of the millennial milieu. If we can't look to the old renditions, we can direct our gaze toward the stars for a video-driven salvation. I am not alone, Anijar's subjects tell her. I have Gene Roddenberry, the Star Fleet, and my fellow true-believing Trekkers. Praise God—excuse me, make that Prophet Gene. A new day is coming—the transporters are ready.

As Anijar's Trekkers are transported to a new cultural space, they shed their old identities. In line with postmodern notions of transient identities and Protean selves, many re-born Trekkers enter their new electronic communities, the Roddenberry Evangelical Churches. Here the most zealous practice their hyper-gnosticism with its assurances that the alternatives and the solutions are embedded in Kirk's monologues or Picard's messages to his crew. Like many fundamentalists, the Trekkers from Anijar's perspective seem to speak from a script, reflecting the development of a new canon taken from the show/movies. The power of hyperreality's media is manifest in this canonization process, inducing those who have dismissed the cultural force of the popular to come to terms with the new world that surrounds them.

UFOs, alien abduction, and zealous trekophilia are inseparable from a synthesis of the technological and the spiritual—they have a complex and enigmatic relationship with the rational. Apocalyptic Trekkers have watched and participated in the fall of the modernist—not the Berlin—wall. The wall of traditional reason has succumbed to a new set of cultural logics and ontologies in Trek world. Anijar knows this dynamic holds profound cultural and pedagogical implications.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

As a child growing up in the mountains of Tennessee, I attended Sunday School each week at our little fundamentalist church. As we memorized evangelical clichés about the invisible Jesus and the potentialities of the unseen heaven and hell, our imaginations wandered from the ethereal to the more sentient. To keep our attention on track, hell had to be painted in the most extraordinary and horrible of ways. Even such fearful images were not enough as our concentration escaped time and again to the physicality of our surroundings. Anijar's comparison of Trek to Sunday School while evoking these memories also induced me to think

of the techno-power of electronic media. The Trek Sunday School experiences few of the problems of student attention faced by my rural Tennessee Sunday School teachers. The Trek scriptures are repackaged in high-tech formats designed to hold the attention of the faithful. In the process, consciousness is engaged, as Trekkers interact with these productions to produce new cultures, identities, and theologies.

Anijar's description of the Trek conventions as postmodern revival meetings is an important metaphor. In this interpretive horizon we gain a sense of how new forms of salvation emerge from the ashes of modernist ways of seeing. The zealotry of such new theologies becomes immediately apparent at a Trek convention. I walked through one with my two sons several years ago and immediately felt the air of reverence that permeated the scene. At the Star Trek Experience in Las Vegas I encountered Klingons so enmeshed in character that I found myself unable to respond intelligently. "My Klingon" reminded me of an unpopular, emotionally scarred teenager trying too hard to fit into a new social group, and in the process offending everyone with his overbearingness. The sensitive part of me wanted to reach out and tell him it was all right, he didn't have to try so hard. But my more pragmatic side told me he was just too irritating to engage in conversation.

I listened carefully to the attendees and focused on the demographics of those attending the "Experience." Everyone knew all about Trek; the canonical knowledge of hyperreality clearly exhibited itself. Their expertise on the subject at hand was unparalleled in contemporary culture—the common knowledge of scholars at an academic conference would not come close. By the time we engaged in the obligatory photographs on the fake *Star Trek* set, the reverence had taken its toll on me. I felt that eighth-grade need to disrupt the class/Experience: Instead of using the stunt communicator provided to those being photographed, I kept flipping open my wallet and speaking into it. In the Sunday School of Trek such an act was irreverent. I was back in the Tennessee church of my childhood. Fundamentalism always seems to do this to me.

### **WYATT MANSBURDEN: "I AM A HISTORY TEACHER AND A TREKKER"**

In Anijar's hands *Star Trek* emerges as a postmodern phenomenon that bridges the synapses of technophilia, modernist science, Western mythology, the Eurocentric canon, a politics of order, and New Age

mysticism. Are we studying the remarketing of the modernist Euro-experience? Here we are back to the opening comments about the West and Westerns—the West in hyperreality. As the California sun falls into the Pacific Ocean, Roddenberry and his calvacade of stars resume the old mission. The colonizing force is reequipped, taking the Western truths to new congregations, accepting the White Man’s Burden, colonizing at warp speed. We can debate the terms “man” or “one”—whatever. *Star Trek* goes where no *Westerner* and *his* canon have gone before. Twenty-fourth-century Manifest Destiny says: “Go up, young man.” How do you go west? Turn right and go up.

As I have argued in many different venues, this ideological dynamic exerts tremendous power on the shaping of consciousness. In the *Trek* articulation, Westerners and non-Western “others” are taught that technology—Western technology in particular—can save us. In the hands of Roddenberry and his successors the message is produced so smoothly that doubts are quietly washed away. *Star Trek* is one of the greatest instruments of the New World Order with its velvet doses of liberal multiculturalism—we are all equal. At the same time, however, this equality fades in light of the superiority of Western scientific and cultural production.

We are all equal and pluralism is grand until we challenge the supremacy of nineteenth-century American literature and classical Greece. E.D.Hirsch and a posthumous cryogenic Allen Bloom would be happy crew members of the Starship Enterprise. Dr. Bloom would freeze in peace knowing that only “classical” music—not that masturbatory rock ’n’roll—would play in his *Trek* universe. More alive Star Fleet personnel would read Shakespeare or Thoreau for relaxation and guard the canon much more effectively than they do the Prime Directive. Indeed, one of the most intriguing features of *Star Trek* involves the subculture’s lack of imagination outside of a rather truncated Western modernist technicism. In the cultural realm the great thoughts have been thought, the great insights have been revealed. In the cognitive realm, speed of recall and breadth of information storage characterize the highest evolved state of intelligence. Spock and Data become our cognitive models. What an interesting commentary on contemporary Western views of human potential. Anijar is right: “*Star Trek* is recall performed as prediction.”

## FREEDOM AND JUSTICE FOR ALL... IN A WHITE UNIVERSE

Because of its persistent references to equality and justice, many fail to perceive alternative readings of the *Star Trek* culture. The almost subliminal racialized signifiers of Trek vis-à-vis the protestations of egalitarianism are indicative of the present era. In the Trek cultural cosmos, Anijar tells us, the concept “race” is rhetorically transformed into “species.” In this new context there exist the *rational* species that can evolve and those *irrational* ones that cannot. We’re back in the Western shoot’em up—the rational Euro-pioneers bringing reason (the cornerstone of civilization) to the irrational but noble savage Indians. In the Eurocentric construct, reason is a Western creation, produced by white males for the salvation of the universe.

Thus, reason is whitened and becomes a monolithic creature capable of expression in only one way. Emerging from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, reason was attached to whiteness. In the colonial contexts of European expansionism in the decades and centuries following the birth of reason, encounters with non-Whites would be conceptualized in rationalistic terms. Whiteness was promoted as orderliness, rationality, and self control—non-whiteness as chaos, irrationality, violence, and the breakdown of self-regulation. White rationality emerged as the conceptual base around which civilization and savagery could be delineated.

Anijar observes the galactic extension of white reason throughout her book. Embedded within Trek is a fear of irrationality—alien irrationality in particular. Such fears can be traced in the U.S. culture wars of the late twentieth century as well as in the continuing saga of *Star Trek*. As a student of the Mexican-American border, Anijar connects the fear of the irrational Mexican with Trek fears. Not only do non-White aliens bring irrationality but they breed and carry contagion as well. Borg nanoprobes, alien mutant viruses, and the phage can be “caught” from the irrational other. Thus, a rearticulation and extension of whiteness and Eurocentrism takes place in an ostensibly justice-concerned text.

## **CONCLUSION: TURNER IN SPACE— LIFE ON THE BORDER**

The “Turner-thesis” was articulated by American historian Frederick Jackson Turner a century ago. Turner’s idea was that it was the frontier experience that pushed America to levels of greatness not ever achieved by other Europeans, that is, by other rational white men. *Star Trek’s* final frontier, of course, blasts Turner into space. America carries the torch of European reason to the demands of the space frontier. At this nexus rests the foundations of the *Star Trek* curriculum—a cultural curriculum designed for the entire world. The canon repackaged in the signifiers of the future can save our children; it can prepare them for the twenty-fourth century; it can help them fight off the irrational barbarians at the gate (the Mexican border? Miami? New York City?). Anijar knows that the future is the past and hyperreality is loaded with political landmines and cultural contradictions. We are proud to include this book in our series with Falmer.

TEACHING TOWARD THE 24TH  
CENTURY

# CHAPTER 1

## Gnosticism Is the Final Frontier

### When the Red, Red Trekker Went Hale-Bopp, Bopping Along....

#### PURPLE ROBES, BROWN VANS, AND BONFIRES

*“Star Trek” enjoined us to look beyond the often artificial and petty barriers dividing humanity, and consider our future as a whole.... It encouraged a generation of dreamers to think about our responsibilities as an intelligent species, to be aware of our planetary citizenship, to see the future.*

—HYDE, 1995:11

At the turn of the century Madame Katherine Tingley, also known as the Purple Mother of the Theosophists, stood on a hill in California and *signaled* to her followers. The San Diego hillsides glowed eerily; the luminescent embers from Madame Tingley’s bonfires echoed in a new age (literally) of Gnostic semiotics.

In 1992, when I began to study Trekkers, I was left with the conundrum of finding people who would be willing to speak to me. I thought about sending out smoke signals, like Madame Tingley. How could I spot a Trekker on the street? It isn’t as if every Trekker (especially teachers in public schools) walked around with Star Fleet uniforms on all day long. “Most of our members are quiet, unobtrusive people,” Anne Page, a 41-year-old drama teacher said (Reed, 1991:10). “We try not to call attention to ourselves, but prefer to call attention to Trek,” Lonnie, a Vulcan Science officer who also teaches ESL, stated.

The everyday, the mundane, the we-are-just-like-you mantra articulating a form of static location identity politics, places the Trekkers on a fixed point in an essentialized map of normality. Ms.

Reed's ontological narrative fragment, which was heard so often during my interviews with the Trekker teachers, is not something that is a priori. We understand who we are according to how we understand our place in a social order. Ms. Reed's plea-for-the-prosaic, something that she becomes in relation to where she sees herself on this politicized map, bothered me, and it still does. "Normal" is a disciplinary question related to power relations. It is disconcerting to hear the privileged speak in terms of persecution. "We may be your neighbors, your friends, your preachers, or your teachers," Damian Harrelson said to me. "I wish people would realize that we were normal, that we are just like them," Julia McRoot stated with some exasperation in her voice. "I don't understand why, when I tell some people about Trek, that they look at me as if I have gone off some deep end, but I haven't. I am very normal."

The body is a site of constant contestation, where classification consigns people to their proper place in the body politic. When Bill Cosby's son Ennis was murdered, the newspapers blared headlines suggesting that the murderer was quiet, unobtrusive, and just seemed so normal. Ted Bundy seemed like such a nice guy: a handsome, articulate law student, sounding more like a personal ad than a mass murderer. Susan Smith was not even a suspect in her own children's murder. Despite the rhetoric of racial progress, it was still easy to assign blame to a black man. It is much harder to assign blame to a mother, especially a white married mother (which, despite the oratory of sexual progress, speaks to a naturalized discourse of motherhood).

When I listen to Trekkers position themselves within the normalized matrix, a supremacist plea is made. For the most part, Trekkers are white and are part of an elite group who choose Trek. Not every-body has the choice to choose. Some bodies are invariably marked. The consequences of Trek cannot be tied to solipsistic relativity.

If the Oklahoma City bombing had happened in Los Angeles or Miami, would it have garnered the attention that it did? Of course not. It is expected in "those" places. When a child is murdered in a white rural area, it makes the headlines. But place the same murder in New York City or Baltimore. Murder is expected "there." If thirty-nine people in an obscure tribe somewhere in the Amazon (as if there were such a "thing") collectively killed themselves because they thought they were hitching a ride to a better world, it would be explained anthropologically. Because Heaven's Gate happened in a \$7,000-a-month estate (with a putting green and a Jacuzzi) in privileged Orange County, California, the "members'" deaths are explained



“psychologically.” The words used in the popular press pathologized the adherents: they were “weird,” they had “sex problems” (they were castrated), and thus we can assign their deaths to a case of “Trekkies gone bad,” within the social formation of the psychologized attached to a bell curve of normalcy. The Hale-Boppers ought to have seen the world as the rest of US do.

Even though a large majority of the face-to-face interviews I conducted with Trekkers took place before the Heaven’s Gate tragedy, the Trekkers did know that many of their deeply held convictions would appear odd to those outside their collective subjective. For the most part, however, a Trek body remains an unmarked body. Therefore, many Trekkers engage in Gnostic iconography, in the knowledge that by “coming out” and naming themselves as Trekkers their bodies would then be marked.

“Someday things may be different, but for now people think that those of us who have Gene’s vision as our own are crazy,” Jody K.Low said with a sigh. “Some people, especially here in the South, think we are Satanic,” said Daryl, “which is patently absurd!”

### THE BROWN VAN

One afternoon, I parked my car in a large outdoor parking lot. While walking through the maze of cars, I noticed a brown van. Painted on both sides of the van were pictures of the Starship *Enterprise*, and on the front end a license plate read “NCC 1701.” Bumper stickers placed strategically around the vehicle proclaimed: “Beam me up Scotty... there is no intelligent life on this planet,” “Don’t buy a used Starship from a Ferengi,” and several other Trekker clichés. Instantaneously, I began to make a connection; a gestalt hit me like a brick coming out of the bricolage of New Age religious belief systems. “Bumper stickers and car plaques,” oh my! I thought about the Gnostic Christians and remembered how they used the fish symbol as a way to find each other. The Gnostics, the Trekkers, the Purple Mother of the Theosophists all use esoteric albeit prosaic iconographies that are highly polysemic. If I were driving along a stretch of highway and I saw a bonfire, why would I think that it had anything to do with a religious “calling” (in both senses of the word)? Signs are all around us, but esoteric meanings emerge out of codes in context.

### BIG STAR SHIPS CRUISING THE GALAXY

*I've been an enthusiastic fan...for twenty-five years... I arrive at the first Star Trek convention I'd attended since I was twelve years old.... Marching through the dark, damp concrete of the above-ground parking lot, the rain drips furiously from the landings all around me. I notice license plates from many Northeastern states and provinces. Many cars are decorated with Star-Trek themed bumper stickers and decals. One says: "Graduate of Star Fleet Academy" Another, stuck onto a beat-up old Honda, declares, "My Other Car Is a Starship" I go deeper in, towards the door. There is a strange sense of recognition and elation as I open the portal and it easily admits me to an alternate, yet intimately familiar universe.*

—KOZINETS, 1998: 12–13

*When I first saw Trek... I walked into the student lounge... and there it was on television. The room was so crowded you could hardly breathe. You could hear a pin drop. Everybody there was enraptured by what was presented on the screen. There it was before us. It was all there. Nobody could speak. It was so quiet.*

*And a whole room full of people sat there; under other circumstances, it would be different; there would be noise. But there was no noise, because Trek had bonded us all together. All was silent. It was crowded but we were safe. Sixty-six was a rough time but we could all go into that room together...and nothing would happen. Each week the crowds kept getting larger and larger. People were spilling out into the hallways. They all knew; we all knew.*

—NARRATIVE FROM TEACHER  
IN NORTH CAROLINA

The word *gnosis* comes from Greek. If you say it the way it is spelled (and no, I am not hooked on any phonics), you can hear the meaning, which is “to know,” more specifically “to be acquainted with the divine through personal experience.” Only insiders have access to personal revelation; it is not available to those on the outside. “You cannot know Star Trek by just watching the program; you must live the dream, then you would understand,” Justin, a tenth-grade English teacher stressed

emphatically. Furthermore, “Knowing Trek as we do gives us insight we might not have otherwise; it gives you a special understanding.” Darla’s hands were doing a dance as she spoke in hushed tones for emphasis. “I know things from Star Trek that people outside of this philosophy don’t. Once you know Trek, your life is changed for the better, you see things differently, understand things in different ways, and you are much more tolerant; it is a gift.” Whatever the gift may be, the only thing I ever received from an “official Trek” organization (and no, I am not jealous) was a rather trite Trek novel won at a trivia contest almost 20 years ago, and I didn’t want that either.

### **THE GNOSTIC WALKS AMONG US... SIGNS OF THE FISHERMAN**

*I give you my solemn word, in the new age when the Son of  
Man takes his seat upon a throne befitting his glory, you  
who have followed me shall likewise take your places...  
Everyone who has given up home, brothers or sisters, father  
or mother, wife or children or property for my sake will...  
inherit life everlasting.*

—JESUS

Perceptions and knowledge emerge out of a particular time and place and history. For the most part, perceptions are never introspective. If I had no knowledge of what the fish symbol represented to Gnostic Christians, how could I understand the fish sign placed on cars? If I had no knowledge of the fish symbol how could I understand other symbols placed on cars that parody the fish symbol, (such as the “Darwin” sign or the “Gefilte” sign)? If NCC 1701 meant nothing to me, how could I possibly place letters and numbers within a Trek frame?

Racing rapidly along the highways and byways of the United States, accelerating through the arteries of the expressway driven landscape, a proliferation of signifiers abound. But my perceptions, my knowledge, my ability to read the signs on the road, on the billboards, and on cars, depends on my understanding of the context. Some signs mean completely different things to different people. Some signs are meaningless to those outside the context in which the sign developed. Bumper stickers, the symbols placed on automobiles, become a form of postmodern graffiti. They do not mean the same thing to everyone who rapidly glances at them while whizzing by. From sea to shining sea, the

shiny metal car is also an identifier that frames me and “places” me in different cultural locations contingent on who is looking. My clothes identify me. My hair identifies me. “Who” I am is read and understood through a perceptual prism. Because everything is read as a thing, as an object, it is all part of a marketplace. The commodified object that frames our perceptions, like the billboard, is an integral part of the landscape in post-Fordist America. The car, the clothes, the music are prosaic postmodern allegories, objective markers placed into the maze of meanings. Sharon Harmon (a Wilmington, North Carolina, Trekker) knows exactly who Trekkers are because “you’ll go in their offices, and you’ll find the little action figures on their desks or maybe a Star Trek screen-saver on their computers” (Steelman, 1998:167). Clara says, “I didn’t know that Nancy [her best friend] was a Trekker. I had just moved here and was feeling fairly isolated. One day Nancy walked in and was wearing a pin, I knew right away, and we have been friends ever since.”

The Trekkers know each other through their signs as much as the Theosophists knew that the smoke signals were not just another brush-fire, just as first-century Christian Gnostics knew that the sign of the fisherman was a way to find the church. This is something that Lou Zulli, the “Accidental Trekker,” understood very, very well (reflecting on his trip to Australia):

As we walked the paths of this animal park in search of emu, wallabies and platypi, one of the guides approached and asked “Are you the Star Trek group?”... In addition to their Sanctuary standard uniforms, each wore a Star Trek communicator pin. I knew I was in the presence of true Trekkers. (Zulli, 1994:3)

Philip is a principal in a suburban middle school, in a temperate climate, in the middle of his state, in what he calls a middle-class neighborhood (where he lives and works). His office has several posters and models of the *Enterprise*. On his desk, he had a picture of his “perfectly normal average family,” a blonde wife with wavy, but obviously professionally coiffed hair, wearing a pastel-printed shirt, and three beautiful children (two girls and a boy). There was another picture of his son posed in his baseball uniform. The office to me looked like an exercise in JC Penney’s version of Americana.

Philip feels American schools today lack “family values,” which comes “from our turn away from truth, from God, and sliding into a form of relativism.” He blames both parents and a system of education

that “is not responsive to what people want,” which is discipline, order, and a focus on basics (next to his diplomas and awards I noticed a Klingon Bafleth and a paddle).

He wears a whistle around his neck, which he uses whenever he needs to get students to “pay attention” to him. I wanted to ask him if he knew any Joe Clark tunes; the law-and-order themes were quite clear in his vision of American education, celebrating what is good, decent, white, and right about the United States. Pinned to his jacket, I noticed both the Christian fish symbol and a Star Trek pin. “I am very involved in community activities, and...the church.” I didn’t ask him which church. Mixed messages notwithstanding, I knew he was a Trekker.

### WHICH WAY SHOULD I GO?

A week after my initial encounter with the Trekker-in-the-T-shirt (I never got his name), I saw an advertisement in the Greensboro *News and Record* for a Star Trek convention. With my son Joshua in tow, I went to the convention “seeking new life and new civilization,” not boldly, but meekly. There were hundreds of people, mostly dressed in expensive uniforms or in Klingon, Vulcan, Romulan, or Borg garb. Families attended, not in their Sunday best, but in their Trek best. As William Shatner, who played the lead role in the original television series, commented on these conventions:

I really don’t understand it... I recently attended two of the *Star Trek* conventions in New York—they have them all over the country, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Frankly, it was an experience that was perhaps unique. I was asked to appear in an auditorium of some 8,000 to 10,000 people there just because of *Star Trek*. They were crazed. I don’t know why the fanaticism has attached itself to the show. You wouldn’t believe what they have at these conventions... Why this is happening defies rational explanation. (Jewett, 1977:2)

I met policemen who were Trekkers, attorneys and physicians who were Trekkers, professors who were Trekkers, a minister who was a Trekker, a stockbroker who was a Trekker, several computer and high-tech executives who were Trekkers, and one public school teacher who was a Trekker. The lone teacher told me she did not have the time to be interviewed. As I was about to leave, ready to give up, I decided I would try one last time. I asked for help from several of the convention

merchandisers who lined the convention hallways with a dazzling array of Trek products.

“Torak” the Klingon kept a watchful eye on his wares as dozens of earthlings perused them. Hardly a fitting duty for a mighty warrior decorated with two medals for bravery in the fierce battle at Khitomer against his people’s age-old enemies, the Romulans. (Nelson and Milrod, 1997:A-26)

After I had bought a mug from the 10-Forward Lounge and a pair of shorts from Star Fleet Academy, one very sympathetic merchandiser led me to the Admiral. “What Admiral?” I inquired. “The Admiral of Star Fleet,” he responded. “She should be sitting at the recruiting station.”

Majestically, the Admiral strode into the room and sat down ramrod straight. She was amazing to behold! Her Next Generation uniform was bedecked and bejeweled with medals of accomplishment (from intergalactic battles, no doubt). I wasn’t quite sure how to speak to her or approach her, but I do remember addressing her with the proper “Sir.” I told her I wanted to interview teachers who were Trekkers. She was sympathetic but very official. For a moment I felt as if I were visiting my sister on an army base. As she was citing the “official” rules of contact and engagement, she opened up her briefcase and took out her “official duty roster.” She gave me names, addresses, and phone numbers of teachers who were members of Star Fleet. She gave me her business card (with her name, rank, and ship) so that those I phoned would realize that this was (quasi-)official business.

Josh and I spent the rest of the day at that convention, and we attended several other Trek conventions over the years. I always came out of the conventions feeling the same way. I could never shake the feeling that I had attended a postmodern revival meeting. There may not have been a tent or a cross or even a snake to handle, but space icons were placed everywhere.

I am not alone in my feelings. “Star Trek conventions for me,” said an ardent fan, are “somewhere between a religious experience, actually a revival and a carnival.” Haysom (1997) also experienced the same odd sensation.

It looked like a Sunday religious revival meeting—more than 3,000 people standing, clapping, cheering and hollering while the two men at the front of the hall quietly called for calm. “You’re so emotional,” said Mr. Spock, alias Leonard Nimoy, urging scores

of people in front to settle down. “I know, I’ll say it in Vulcan. Qak-too. That means sit down.” They did. (A:4)

Richard (one of the many teachers I interviewed) cautioned me to listen very closely, for there are several different levels of things occurring at a convention.

These things happen simultaneously. There are those who will see and know Trek and understand what it really means, and then there are those who see it, and it will just escape them. Knowing the real meaning of Star Trek has changed my life!

In the book *The Star Trek Compendium*, Asherman discusses a particular convention she attended. She divided the participants into two groups, the “enlightened” and the “unenlightened” (1989:2). Referring to the *Compendium*, Ralph said, “When you reach the seventh level, you will gain omniscience.” I don’t know about omniscience, but it did seem that when I went fishing in the Trek waters trying to find the Gnostic fish, I found schools and schools of the faithful every where I went.

### ANOTHER WORD, ANOTHER CONTEXT

The word *fan*, which is derived from the word *fanatic*, refers to religious devotees. And yes, there is a special sort of discipleship in the world of Star Trek fandom. “*Star Trek* presents an alternative church,” Ron says. “They don’t have to announce [services] or go to [it], they can have it right in their own little home every Saturday night.” Marla felt that

the show might be like a Bible. When I’m in a situation where I have to make a moral decision, I find myself relating to the show. Well, what did they do?... I think back on an episode, how they handled it, and I say, yeah, and use it in that way. And I handle it in that way! Yes, that’s like making it a religion! But it provides me with the answers that I need.

At one convention that I attended, a Star Fleet officer in formal dress attire gave a speech, that sounded like a sermon:

Star Fleet is a love club...and theory. Star Fleet is an international organization run by fans for 14 years. There are members and

chapters all over the world who enjoy the *Star Trek* world.... We have groups for Klingons, Romulans, and *Star Trek* engineers.... We continue to follow the wonderful themes in the first generation. Through love. Gene Roddenberry put love into his theory.... The beliefs of *Trek* have grown into a cultural phenomenon. I quote from “The City on the Edge of Forever” when I say...“In the world where I come from,... let me help!” This is the backbone of the club. This is the backbone of *Trek*.

We build ships, look at technical drawings, do community service work. We donate hundreds of hours of time. We have a grove of trees in Texas. We go to the children’s hospital. We improve our world...we believe there is a future. If we get through the bickering and fighting, ...we can go to the twenty-third century.

Actress Grace Lee Whitney, who played Starship Enterprise Yeoman Janice Rand 30 years ago, also expounded on the love theme: “The fans are very supportive. They love me unconditionally” (Groves, 1998:1). Unconditionally? Unconditionality remains something uncritical, unexamined, accepted with faith. “Of course it has to do with faith. I have faith that through *Star Trek* we are on the verge of something that is no less than earth-shattering and amazing,” Mandy proselytized.

The authors of *Star Trek Lives!* rhetorically asked why so many thousands of hours have been devoted [to *Trek*] Fans...ascribe it to... the sheer love of *Star Trek*.... By writing stories, they produce the feeling that they are in effect knowing the gods. There is a ritualistic, confessional quality to this writing. The writers’ expression of personal experience is largely subordinated by mythic conventions. In a ritual fashion, the fictional characters are kept alive. They enter into personal relationships with the devotees. They live on in faith. It all sounds very much like the practice of dogmatic theology in a traditional religion. (Jewett, 1977:31)

Danny Lukic, a 24-year-old student at Tampa College, is such a fan. Finding out that Lenoard Nimoy was going to be speaking at a University of South Florida lecture series, he happily skipped his classes. “Just to be in physical proximity to Spock, to breathe the same air,” Lukic said, explaining his decision. Nimoy, 65, received a standing ovation from the crowd of about 1,200 people—some in *Star Trek*



uniforms (Cummins, 1997:1). At the same lecture, Pam Bridges, a fifth-grade teacher at Ozona Elementary School in neighboring Pinellas County,

was thrilled with her pen-and-pencil holder and note pad. Her fifth-grade students...will find them on her desk today, she said. "I'm 38 years old. I've watched *Star Trek* since I was very small. I'm so excited. I never thought I'd meet Leonard Nimoy," she said as her bemused husband shook his head. She said he ordered free tickets from USF as a surprise for her. "I find [the show] intriguing. I like to think that there's life on other planets. I'd like to leave this planet and leave all my problems behind me for a time," she said. (Cummins, 1997:1)

Even though approximately 53 percent of Americans consider themselves to be *Star Trek* fans (Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995:4), "that does not mean that all Americans will be as devoted to the show and its principles, as, let's say for the sake of argument, as I am," Larry tells me. "It is not a church in the traditional sense of the word," John says. "Fan organizations are often loosely knit, although there are some old groups, some highly hierarchical groups, and some groups designed for different kinds of people and aliens; some are really into canon, others aren't, it depends." "But," Sarah feels, "you know you are in a place where you are accepted, where there are people who have the same sorts of hopes and dreams that you do, when you are part of a ship, or when you go to a con." "Starships come and go, but religious impulses are not ever simply a matter of belief or disbelief...but rather a complex interplay" (Jindra, 1994:41) of differing forces and ideas. *Star Trek* is a religion, one that "may have merely changed its theater and neglected to place its name on the marquee. The move from cathedral to the tube, screen, or stereo offers the faithful many of the values sought in traditional religion" (Jewett, 1977:23), which Jindra (1994) sees as contributing to the religious vitality of the *Trek* world.

### **SAVE CHILDREN—FOUNDATION OR FEDERATION**

Marcy wanted me to know "that it is up to us, those of us who have enough faith in the future to teach, to make sure that *Star Trek* is passed on to the Next Generation. That is why I recruit students in my school, outside of school, and that is why I try to recruit wherever I go."

Cythnia Tech, of Millard North High School in Nebraska, is clearly one of those types of students that the Trekkers I interviewed seek to carry on the torch of Trek knowledge. She is “among nine students who also have perfect or nearly perfect grade-point averages (over 3.9), big-league scores on college-entrance exams (above 1460 on her SAT’s) and top-dollar scholarships, named to her All State Academic team. She [also] admits [publicly that] she loves Star Trek” (O’Conner, 1996:7R). Anders Liljeholm also seems to be the type of “exemplary student” who embodies the best and brightest that the Trek world has to offer. His father raised him on *Star Trek*. As valedictorian of his senior class in Oregon, he chose to give part of his speech in Klingon (see Maurant, 1995:C-01). Lillie Futon, an honors student in St. Petersburg, Florida, is a *Star Trek* fan who sees space as the destiny of humans (see Chion-Kennedy 1997:3-B). So does Regina Berglow, who is her school’s Star Trek Club president and an honors student who looks forward to a bright future as an engineer. For her, *Star Trek* has inspired her future career choices. Eartha Lowry is a seventh-grader who models herself after Counselor Deanna Troi. She also names herself as the world’s number-one Trekker. “I hope that my enthusiasm for Star Trek can reach out to other teens who feel the same way I do.” Even if Eartha can’t reach all the children of the world (“some people think it is just weird, they don’t get it”), at least there are other agencies and institutions that do, agencies like Dayspring Outreach Center, which brought a message of hope to the children of Oakland (and the Trek message as well, albeit unintentionally). Dayspring is one of the points-of-light centers, so designated by George Bush during his administration. Dayspring’s mission is to help “youngsters stay out of gangs, off drugs, and in school” (Tachibana, 1998). “In the cafeteria of Goethe Middle School, hundreds came. They waited anxiously for the arrival of Tim Russ—Lt. Cmdr. Tuvok on *Star Trek: Voyager*” (Tachibana, 1998).

“Did you realize he is a Black Vulcan?” Eartha queried. “Do you know what that means? It shows that equality is not a dream. It will happen if we believe it will.” Faith can never be a substitute for political action. Hope may spring eternal, but it does not put bread on the table.

### AND THE TREKKERS SEEK MEMBERS

Recruitment for the various Starships occurs in many manners. As Jane explains,

They go to conventions and they set up a table. Like there is a science fiction comic book convention coming up called— (city’s name)—con and I didn’t find that interesting. I’m not interested in comic books, but they’ll set up a table there and they’ll put in notices in the local papers in—and—saying that there’s a meeting at this library at this date or whatever the building. And then through Star Fleet they get referrals. So that if someone had heard about Star Fleet but not the local ship they become a Star Fleet member. And then there’s a card that they fill out where they live and all that. And then Star Fleet says, “OK, this person is nearby, you are going to contact him.”

Marcy, a very innovative and aggressive recruiter for Star Fleet, showed me her checks, which had the Starship *Enterprise* and the United Federation of Planets logos displayed.

You know what happens when I write a check? Do you know the kind of attention I get with my check? I have a business card for the local ship, and so when somebody is interested, I give them a card. They call the captain and make arrangements to join. I have sent five or six people.

I was in a couple of weeks ago and gave a man a check and gave him a card and said, “You know...you and your local ship will be different here.” He says, “I don’t care, all I want to know is something about Star Fleet.”

You run into people all the time and you think: Well, gee! Shouldn’t they know that there’s a local ship? I assume everybody should know but then I realize I went for five years and didn’t know there was a ship in this area or anything about Star Fleet. So it’s people, strange people, you know, businessmen, attorneys. I have an attorney that picked up one of my cards the other day. I do some public relations work for a local doctor and I had to drop some paperwork off. And I was showing his secretary my checks. The attorney walked over and said, “Oh, I want to get involved.” You know, and I said OK, and he said, “Hey, look, I’m a classic fan. Tell me more about Star Fleet.”

Kali recruits for her ship in “school, and when we do charity works. We also have several other interesting means of recruiting for our ship. Whenever there is a new Trek movie out, we dress in uniform and set up tables by the theater. In that way, when teenagers come by, they sign

up.” “That seems logical,” I countered (I couldn’t resist). Kali kept right on talking.

We believe through Trek we can make the world a better place. It is important to us to make sure that our ranks keep growing. So, we can continue our good public service work.... It is not a television show, it is a way of life. I will recruit anywhere—supermarkets, bowling alleys, you name it—I am always ready to recruit.

Many of the Trekkers who are also teachers engage in membership by utilizing their positions within the public realm. “After all, what is more normal than a teacher?” Kali asks, somewhat rhetorically.

Diane, with exacting technological detail, described how she sponsors after-school Star Ship meetings both in her school and in her home. Her daughter is also a member of Star Fleet,

and we meet after school to study Trek. They question school things from a variety of the characters’ perspectives, coming up with solutions to all sorts of problems through the characters’ perspectives. The students learn Star Trek, and the ideas behind Star Trek. We problem-solve through Star Trek; it gives us so many answers. What is so great about this is that students improve their grades and their study skills, while developing critical thinking skills because of Star Trek.

Katie also uses her daughter to recruit members for  
Star Fleet.

My daughter...recruits [for the ship].... Now we are not talking about a bunch of dumbbells. We are talking about straight-A students, honor society students, who have been recruited into Star Fleet. In fact, we can’t figure out why the dumbbells haven’t figured out what’s going on yet. But we’re not talking about below-average students. We are talking about the sharpest academic science students available in Star Fleet. Because it’s not fiction. It’s not junk. It is something that they think they will see the beginnings of.

Meanwhile, in Washington state, a Russian émigré opened up a Star Trek art gallery. Trekkers “see the world [as] a better place” (Simmons, 1998), Olga Hutchinson proclaimed. Her art gallery provides a haven, sanctuary, and “a home” for Trekkers.

“They are appearing uncloaked.” *Cloaked*, for those who don’t know, is a Star Trek term. It’s a reference to a device that makes ships invisible. Hutchinson’s Russian-accented speech is littered with Trekkisms, which brings to mind Pavel Chekov, the young ensign from the original series. “For us, in Russia, he provided such inspiration and hope,” Hutchinson said. It’s that kind of hope, that embracing of differences, that brings together groups of fans like a new, Tacoma-based club known as Excalibur.... “We’ve gone from little group of people getting together talking about Star Trek to a group with goals. We want to do all sorts of things for the community, for kids.” Now that they have a base, they’ll be better able to do these things. The club has been together only for a month, but has already launched a food and clothing drive, which members hope to continue beyond the holidays. They would also like to create a Scouts-like, science-oriented Star Trek club for kids.... “We got a really good response,” Townsend-Hurk said. Hutchinson couldn’t be happier. “For all this time, I have been alone,” she said. “But I followed ‘If you build it, they will come,’ and they landed.” (Simmons, 1998)

Tad (a teacher in Schaumburg, Illinois) felt that the “SciTek exhibition at the museum was the best recruiting tool he had ever seen. “The turnout was incredible. They asked us [his ship] to volunteer. You cannot possibly imagine how many people have joined our ship since then. It has been astronomical!” “The exhibition was the best way to recruit members. We have recruited a whole new generation!” Dharma (of San Bernardino County, California) exclaimed gleefully. Iliona slowly and deliberately removed her glasses, using them to punctuate her phrases in the air. She told me,

As a reading specialist, I always understood that if you give me a child, and if I can expose him to Star Trek books, he will learn to read. He will be part of the promise in the philosophical [tenants of] Star Trek. His imagination will be sparked...sparked by Star Trek!

Lillian “started a club in school, and you should see the things they do. They are doing things way beyond their developmental levels.” Neesha has her club “volunteer in the community, which brings in more members than you can ever imagine to Star Fleet.” Lyandra’s school-based club has put up a Trek Club Web page. And Sam and Dave and Robert and Julian and Marla and Darla—the list and examples continue on and on into the infinite expanse of the Trekker universe.

Our club meets every Wednesday and views episodes of the program.... After the episode is completed, the group usually [engages] in an in-depth analysis of the scientific and sociological aspects of each episode. The scientific inaccuracies are exposed and corrected.

It should come as no surprise that, to spread the word of Trek, teachers have had students write Star Trek stories, engage in Voyager simulations, and transform their rooms into miniature Star Trek ships, while students debate Star Trek lore and ethics.

Sandra hopes that her whole community would turn to Star Trek.

Once they realize that the Trek kids really excel, and that they are not geeks, there may be a push to get all of the kids in the town involved in the Star Trek group. It is really no different than enrolling your child in a good preschool or charter school.

Perhaps Sandra might be thinking about some of the good Trek schools that have opened up around the United States, such as North Lauderdale Academy High School, the State of Florida’s first city-sponsored charter high school. The school had an incredible party for its dedication. Everybody who was anybody turned up, including Education Commissioner Frank Brogan. Brogan is now lieutenant governor in Jeb Bush’s administration. He lavished praise on the City of North Fort Lauderdale for taking such a bold step. Principal Ronald Renna, introducing his teachers to this stellar assemblage of future-oriented officials, said they “are the lieutenants that are going to be molding the students of today to become the leaders of tomorrow” (Cho, 1998). Citing the school motto (which he explained that the students had written to the crowd of more than 400 people), he said, “The students are the crew members working underneath these lieutenants.... I am [Captain] Kirk” (Cho, 1998). He explained the

mission of the school that boldly goes in previously (un)chart(ed) territory.

What we have here is like Star Trek. Instead of the USS *Enterprise*, we are on the USS North Lauderdale Academy High School"... We are on this journey together, and we're going to a place where no one's ever been before. And we're going to demand excellence in everything we do. (Cho, 1998).

Excellence, like many words used in Educationese or Trekker-vernacular, is an empty signifier. Excellence in what? Garbage cans? Trek lore? Essentialist curriculum? Republican right-wing resurgence? Excellence has no meaning, except in the sense that the unit of measure is obscured. We all want excellent schools, but who defines the word? Who holds the key to how the word is measured, and what the word is measured in relation to? The word *excellent* is a word emerging out of empty spaces. So, it is significant that Renna uses *excellence* as the word to describe his Trekkoid scholastic endeavors. The underlying ethos of Star Trek is continually obscured. The school leases its site from the Riverside Christian Fellowship, which pleases Associate Pastor David Newcombe: "Obviously we believe it [the school] was from God.... We have a number of kids from our congregation that will be going to the charter school" (Cho, 1998).

### **THE FAMILY THAT TREKS TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER**

At the first convention I attended, one attendee told me, "It's safe to leave your son here, and let go of his hand. You're in a Trekcon. Kids are valued here, we love children, Trek is all about love." While meandering through the miles and miles of love and table after table of merchandise at the convention, I realized just how many intergenerational Trekkers were experiencing this Trekker form of multiage, multidimensional, intergalactic love. Families were trekking together, laughing together, and smiling together, almost frolicking together in a Norman Rockwell painting of nostalgic America, with an outerspace flip. Children were running around having a good time; "a young brown-haired woman in a blue and black uniform dashes by chasing after a small blonde male child in a red and black uniform. 'Alex,' she calls out, 'are your ears on?'" (Kozinets, 1998:14). Marilyn started trekking as soon as the first show came out.

Naturally my kids fell into it with me. I mean if I were African-American, my daughter would fall into that culture; if I was Norwegian, she would fall into that culture. I am a Trekker. When my daughter was tiny, she would say, "Capitain Kirk, hunk!" My son goes to cons with us; he goes in Klingon uniform. As for me, I wear my Classic Trek uniform. You could say as a family we are both Star Trek and the Next Generation. I always thought Star Trek was something that I would share with my family. I wouldn't have it any other way.

For the Benvenuttis of Bay St. Louis, Florida, conventions are also family affairs. Dressed in "original series uniforms a la Kirk, Spock and McCoy, Joe De Benvenuti, 43; his two sons, Nicholas, 13, and Benjamin, 11; and their uncle, Benjamin S. Benvenuti, 33" (Vollentine, 1996) embodied a neo-maxim (expressed by Darla, a seventh-grade French teacher), "Trek brings families together. The family who Treks together, stays together."

At a convention in Patchogue, Long Island, New York, an 8-year-old "Vulcan" child named Tibock, who has his own public access weekly television show, looked around as a first-time visitor, "wearing his pointy ears. 'He's at an age where he needs to start going to these,' said Tibock's dad, who would not reveal his or his son's real names" (Nelson and Milrod, 1997). I wondered if the age of eight was the time for a rite of passage, akin to a Trekker bar mitzvah.

"You get people from cradle to grave" (Rosenberg, 1997). In convention after convention, in city after city, where the Trekkers range "in age from an eight-month-old baby dressed as a Number One to a 67-year-old grandmother decked out as a Romulan" (Schaffler, 1995), "we are a community, a brotherhood of Trekkers," Nora declared. "You know, I have a special affinity with other Trekkers, and with my students who are Trekkers, I can't help it." Another member of the Trekker teacher brotherhood, special education teacher Jo Bannister (age 43, of Collins, Mississippi), at a Trek convention "asked William Shatner to give his advice to today's young people. Shatner replied, "To the kids today I'd say that if you work hard enough, there's nothing you can't accomplish" (Vollentine, 1996). Meanwhile, "a fan, dressed in full Star Fleet uniform, nudged his neighbor and nodded toward two small youngsters, also wearing uniforms, and said quietly, There goes the real 'Next Generation'" (Vollentine, 1996).



## MORE FUN FAMILY VALUES: BUT WOULD YOU MARRY ONE?

Dressed with her Bajoran nose bridge and earring, Natalia explained that Trekkers usually feel uncomfortable outside the Trek world. “We feel really most at home at meetings or at cons. We are different, perhaps others see us as a bit odd, but we have this vision.” Her husband, Frank, insisted that “it doesn’t matter if you prefer Classic Trek or the Next Gen or DS9 or Voyager, what matters most is that we are all Trekkers.” At conventions and in the homes of Trekkers, I found Star Fleet marriage manuals, Vulcan ritual guides, Trek cookbooks, and parodies of the “all I ever needed to learn, I learned in kindergarten” posters (except in the Trekker version, it was all I ever needed to learn, I learned from Trek). Even though I have watched Trek since it came on the air, I felt like an outsider. I had no identity within this community. Sitting with Frank and Darla in their house decorated in baroque Trek, watching their daughter Kira play with a stuffed tribble, I had the same peculiar sensation, the same sense of discomfort I get whenever I am in a home where the traditions are significantly different from my own. By the time I had gone to that particular interview, I had heard of Star Trek weddings and funerals (which really did make me feel as if Trek was becoming a religious formation). The latter was corroborated by news stories such as the death of physician and Trekker Merlin A. Kottke, whose family made “arrangements to have Star Trek...music played at the funeral home (Knoche, 1995:4).

I kept hoping that I was not going to make a serious faux pas. I read that there is a line of food that has been designed primarily for Trek and Trekkers. I know that if I am in a house where they keep kosher, I don’t mix meat with dairy products, but what do I do in a Trekker household? In a supercilious, sarcastic, sardonic sort of fashion, I wondered if some of the same food restrictions that applied to Islamic and Jewish orthodox religious groups applied to this self-labeled “typical American family,” too? To break the ice, I asked how they met. Darla told me her story.

I met my husband because of Trek. All the married couples I know have met through *Star Trek*! Now once in a blue moon, I find one person married to another person who doesn’t like *Star Trek*, but obviously that relationship would be a very difficult one, and in most cases, it probably doesn’t work. My mom loves *Star Trek*; my dad says he doesn’t, but he has seen every episode

a million times and everything. He used to say, “Captain Kirk and the jerks are on.” But that was all a front, because he even went to all the movies and everything. But you couldn’t ask him a trivia question and have him get it. But he has watched all the shows and enjoyed them, although he won’t admit it. But my aunt, on the other hand, my mom’s sister, she loves *Star Trek*, and her husband does not even like it one ounce! But, they have one of these marriages that you would really call one of convenience. He goes his way and she goes her way. She is one of the original “Trekkies,” and she is in love with Spock. So you have that type of marriage if you marry someone that doesn’t like *Star Trek*. You don’t have what I would consider a marriage; it’s just existing. You live together in the same house. You’re not really a married couple like you should be, and that has to do a lot with the theologies.

Looking at her daughter playing, she continued to talk.

Now I still keep saying to my husband, that one of these days she’s going to rebel. Because all kids go against what their parents are about. There is going to be a time. I think he dreads that day. He’s hoping that day will never come. The question keeps popping up: “What if she marries someone that is not a Trekker? Could we or, better yet, should we allow it?”

Darla is not alone in her feelings. Another Trekker, Maureen, explained:

I was married to someone who was not a Trekker. I can honestly say that it was one of the major factors in the demise of our relationship.... In the future, any and all prospective mates of mine...must be Trekkers! If you have nothing in common...how can it last? I think I’ve come to recognize that those traits I value from Trek: optimism, tolerance, nonviolence, etc. My ex-husband was from a totally different species and planetary involvement. The only time my ex-husband even remotely cared about *Star Trek*, which caused me a great deal of frustration, was when there was some battle going on. I have decided that dating outside of *Star Trek* is like dating outside of your religion.

The Reverend Cooper-Dowda is the director of religious education at the St. Petersburg (Florida) Universalist Unitarian Church. In her household, the family gathered around the television set to watch *Star Trek*. General Order No. 1 “in the Cooper-Dowda/Sniffen household is no talking during *Star Trek*” (Piscopo, 1996). Cooper Dowda’s husband, the Reverend Sniffen, found out the rules on his first date with her

when they were both students at Bangor Theological Seminary. Cooper-Dowda had invited him to eat dinner with her and Max, her son from a former marriage. She said, ‘We eat during *Star Trek* and we don’t talk,’ Sniffen recalled. “She said, “You have to be quiet except during the commercials.” Sniffen was appropriately respectful and the couple married a year later, in 1990. Their honeymoon destination? A *Star Trek* convention.” (Piscopo, 1996)

“What could I ever have in common with someone who was not a Trekker? I realize that it is not the only thing that one should base a relationship on, but, you have to admit, it is a real issue and a real factor,” Nana, a preschool teacher, stated. Recognizing this, some Starships have become not only community-oriented social groups but also match-making services for its members, couples such as Tauer and Phil Goldman. When they decided to get married, the couple went to a premarital counseling session.

The priest smiled, reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a pair of earmuffs the parish ladies had knitted for him. They had pointed Vulcan ears. “We knew we’d found our priest,” Goldman said. (Covert, 1996)

“We wanted our wedding to express both our beliefs. We wanted to have a wedding based on what brought us together, which is our interest in *Trek*. So we had a *Star Trek* wedding. There is nothing odd about it,” Alexandra said. Jerry, her spouse, was very proud of his wife’s “good work at school, and good work in the community. She also is a great artist.” He showed me her paintings of—yes, you guessed it—*Trek* themes.

## CHURCH LADIES, STARSHIP LADIES

The USS Cochrane is a Chapter of Starfleet International, an organization that has dedicated itself to helping out our fellow man and try to live up to the ideas of peace and long life as contemplated by the father of Star Trek, Gene Roddenberry. It may sound strange, but through the eyes of Star Trek fans comes a view of what the future could be for all of us. Do you think you would like to live in a world that has no poverty, no crime, and everyone works together to reach common as well as extraordinary goals? The secret to our future lies in the fact that future success, in what ever we try to accomplish is the progressive realization of a worthwhile dream. That is how the advances that we have in medicine, technology, and many other facets of our lives started, with a DREAM. It is my dream for the future that we could ever achieve even 10% of the world that is brought forward by the Star Trek Universe. More important is the dreams of our children. Lets work together and...REACH FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN! (<http://www.stcochrane.com>)

In 1993, I recorded an interview with Matt. It was one of the first prolonged and protracted Star Trek interviews I conducted and the first time I heard about the “public service command” surrounding the mission of Star Trek. Matt called it “the do-gooder notion.... Trekker types try to live the philosophy of Trek in my Starship! They’re a bunch of dogooders as they go about living under the philosophical doctrines.” Like other Trekker clichés, the “good works” theme was expressed in every interview I conducted, in almost every newspaper clipping concerning Star Trek Clubs or Star Fleet I read, and on almost every Web page I visited concerning organizations devoted to Star Trek.

“People involved with Star Trek seem to really believe in the world view presented in the show,” says lawyer Lynda Ciaschini, spokesperson for two local Star Trek clubs, the USS Hudson Bay and the USS Toronto. “A view where equality and diversity are not just tolerated but encouraged and celebrated. We want to see the vision come true.” That vision has been growing for 26 years, as *Star Trek* has evolved from the original 1960s series to the movies, the *Next Generation* series and spin-offs *Deep Space Nine* and now *Star Trek Voyager*. Ciaschini, 39, has been a

devoted fan all the way through the Star Trek voyage. There are 200-plus members of the USS Hudson Bay club, she says. Members liken it to a “service club,” she says, and have organized...charity and community service events. (Harvey, 1995)

In 1997, Doreen told me, “Yeah, I think out of *Star Trek* have come how things should look like, sparking our imaginations, allowing ideas to flow, if someone wants to pursue it far enough.” Emma felt that “we have a vision that we want to share, and it is a good and just vision of the world. Star Trek gives you a mission...to boldly go, to seek out new life and new civilization and of course the IDIC is also important. The USS Hudson Bay and the USS Toronto have their members go out on “special away team missions” (Harvey, 1995). The multiple meaning in the word *mission* is something that I did notice. The Trekkers are on a mission, an evangelical mission “to spread the joy and the good news of Star Trek.” Certainly, Audrey Toney, the assistant superintendent of Pender County Schools, does everything she can to instruct the greater Wilmington, North Carolina, area in the ways of Star Trek. In addition to her day job, she also commands of a fleet of Starships and has outlined the primary mission of the USS White Eagle

to resemble a civic club like the Lions, Elks or Rotary. Crew members...work with the state’s Adopt-a-Highway program, march in the MS walk, collect money for the March of Dimes and St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital, volunteer to help with children’s events through the city of Jacksonville’s parks and recreation department. (Steelman, 1998)

In Birmingham, England, “Star Trek fans... led by First Officer Carol Whiston, launched a major fund-raising campaign for the special care baby unit at Wordsley Hospital, Compton Hospice in Wolverhampton and disabled students at a college in Stourbridge” (Johnson, 1999). *Disabled*, which is certainly an ambiguous term, is popularly used in Trek club publicity releases. It is rare, if ever, that any disability is ever specified. Ought I feel more supportive of Star Trek because they helped the disabled? Ought I see their pursuits as normal because much of their “good works” focuses on charity? Shirley Steinberg’s witty discussion concerning Barbie slyly makes an exceptionally important point, highlighting my own ambivalence:

The Love to Read Barbie comes with two children (one black and one white) and a book; for every LTR Barbie Mattel donates \$1 to the Reading Is Fundamental organization. As consumers, we are able to support reading by purchasing this doll. That makes all the difference. (1997).

Am I supposed to be uncritically supportive of Star Trek because they “support” charities and undefined “disabled” people?

Trekkies will take time from their space ship lectures, [and] language lessons to auction off items “For the Love of Children.” The USS Roddenberry—the Elfers-based club dedicated to “Star Trek” and community service—is sponsoring the third annual charity auction at the Trek Time “Star Trek” Convention.... Proceeds from the auction of ‘Trek’ mementos will help buy a van for...disabled children being raised by Maureen and Jim Welch of New Port Richey. (“Trekkies’ Auction,” 1996:1)

Wagar is one of about 800 Canadian Klingons who call themselves KAGs (Klingon Assault Group) and are grouped into various fleets and squadrons. “We do charity stuff.... His 2-year-old daughter, Amanda, already has a Klingon uniform (Haysom, 1997). He is concerned (as are many Trekkers) with their public image (the geek factor). In East Tennessee, Trekkers

are waging their own insurrection these days—against their geeky public image. “We are not a bunch of people who get together in uniforms and pretend to be in ‘Star Trek.’... Just like ‘Star Trek,’ we envision the future to be...everybody working together for a common goal.” Like the hundreds of other “Star Trek” fan organizations around the world, the Tri-Star is affiliated with Starfleet International, an organization stressing community involvement among “Star Trek” fans. Fan club members watch television a lot and talk about their favorite characters. Fan associations do that, too, but they are more pro-active in the community, says Ben Redding, a 49-year-old Pigeon Forge shoe salesman who leads the Gatlinburg “Star Trek” group. Close to 150 trekkers (the term “trekkie” went out years ago) make up the four East Tennessee groups. To retain their status as official branches of the international organization, they must be involved in community service projects. Dressed in Starfleet uniforms

they've either made themselves or ordered, the Knoxville and Gatlinburg associations often participate in walk-a-thons, bike-a-thons and such events as Knoxville Zoo's Boo at The Zoo each year. In Sevier County, the group sends a local student to Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala., each summer. They also fetch bread from the Sevierville Kroger and deliver it to Sevier County Food Ministry on a regular basis "We really depend on what they do," says Shelley Valentine, administrative assistant at Sevier County Food Ministry in Sevierville. "It's critical that we have someone pick up the breads because if it is not picked up then the bread is thrown away." (Morrow, 1998)

Charity is a wonderful thing, but charity that is ordered in service of public image is a marketing ploy, a marketed mission. Lest we forget, the same businesses that defunded public schools in the Reaganesque 1980s were then able to enter into the public schools (the last untapped market that is no longer untapped) with "charitable" services, complete with their own corporate logos and their own marketed agendas.

### STEPFORD SCRIPTS

Sometimes, I get the feeling that Trekkers speak from a script. What the Trekkers say and how the Trekkers express their worldviews all sound almost precisely the same. I know that Trekkers speak of canon, but canon, as it has been defined for me by 9 years of Trekkers, refers to particularities seen on *Star Trek*. Theories surrounding identity in community or collective subjectivity cannot possibly account for such precision. Trekker words seem prerecorded; they remind me of teacher-proof textbooks, done in an essentialist style, slickly packaged, ideologically laden versions of pedagogy, which can be repeated over and over in every classroom in the country. They can be repeated without thought, without critique, and be measured and quantified, transforming while obscuring the relations of classroom production.

The ubiquitous "we are normal" and "we are highly educated" and "there are a lot of businesspeople and a lot of professionals who are into 'Star Trek'" is supposed to make the listener more sympathetic to the Trekkoid cause. "When they talk to us, they realize, 'Hey, they are just normal people' except we wear 'Star Trek' uniforms" (Morrow, 1998). "When they speak to us, they realize that we are no different than they are" (John). "Sometimes they are shocked to find that although we are professionals and highly intelligent, we are normal" (Susan).

The Star Trek sales pitch—or proselytizing in the key of Trek—continues on with “I like the message it sends, the unity of the planet Earth” (Jane). “Star Trek sends us a message that we are one Earth, we are all sentient beings” (Mary). “Star Trek demonstrates that we are one people; there is no black, white, or yellow; we are one Earth united, reaching out toward the stars” (Emma). “Star Trek shows a united planet; after all, we are all sentient beings” (Jamie). The script invariably also invites us to “witness” the good works of Trekkers in the community.

When we go out in our uniforms, we are laughed at, but we try to talk to the crowd.... “Star Trek” fan association members say community service projects will help the public understand them better. (Morrow, 1998)

“Our ship is engaged in community service activities” (Jamie); “the most important part of Star Fleet is community service” (John). But if the organization is only for fun, for games, and for television viewing, why would the Trekkers care so much about their public image? Why should I care what Trekkers do with their free time? And why do the Trekkers (as an organization and as individuals) make a concerted effort to demonstrate to “the outside world” their *everyday-just-like-you-and-me-ness*, as well as their commitment to helping the (ambiguous) disabled and a whole plethora of other charitable activities. The answer in some ways is rhetorical, albeit hyperreal.

It’s nice to live in Gene Roddenberry’s vision of the future: no hunger, diseases, a wonderful future. Since Star Trek fans are so widespread, the group is part of a larger fan community. Such as the International Federation of Trekkers which was created to “promote the humanistic philosophies and ideals portrayed in the Star Trek mythos...to promote a more positive impression of Star Trek enthusiasts as intelligent, socially conscious, active individuals who are aware and concerned about the real world.” (Parker, 1996)

### **DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO TREK**

Diana Renée Morgan was a second-grade teacher and a hardcore Trekker. She was 43 when she died. “She sure loved life and was into kids,”...her brother Gary Stanner [said]. “And she was the ultimate Star



Trekkie” (Martineau, 1998). In Morgan’s other role as the founder of the USS Oberon, she helped raise money for numerous charities. “Trek is above all about service; it is about humanity reaching beyond our present limitations to achieve a higher goal.”

Peggy Mackey is 72 years old and seems to be a perfect model of the all-American grandmother. Through her children she became a Trekker. Exposed to and enlightened from Gene Roddenberry’s vision, her “idealism breeds hope for a better tomorrow” (Bentley, 1998). Her enthusiasm has gotten other elderly people involved in her energetic embrace of Star Trek, including 81-year-old Vivian French, who makes little badges for members of the ship. Mackey lives

at the helm of her Starship, the Visalia-based USS Constar 71827-4. Her ship of 64 crew members includes 45 who have mild degrees of mental retardation and live at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Home, an independent living center. The club holds its monthly meetings at the home. “All of the ‘Star Trek’ clubs are open to everyone but to my knowledge Peggy’s club is a real rarity,” Ed Nowlin, Redding-based Fleet-Captain and Region Coordinator, says. (Bentley, 1998)

“I know,” Anatoly (a student teacher) said, “we can prolong life and cure diseases and disabilities. Then we can attack all the problems of mankind. I got this vision, as do we all, from Star Trek.” I said I was not sure if everyone gets their vision from Star Trek. He was a bit disturbed by this. I could see it on his face; he grimaced, the muscles in his face tightening up into a deeply furrowed frown. “OK, then hypothetically, let’s say that Star Fleet is not known to everyone in the world, it is known by millions of people, who can join together and make Gene’s profound and deeply humanistic vision a reality.”

I was sitting with Diane on a football field somewhere on the border between Georgia and Alabama. She articulated the same theme as Anatoly.

You see these children who have multiple sclerosis and different things like that, that are handicapped and will be all their lives. To see these kids.... They have a dream that one day there will be a world in which multiple sclerosis or any of the others will be gone. They will walk! They will talk! They will read! They will move on their own! And they believe this because of *Star Trek*. *Star Trek* has given them a hope that there will be no handicaps.

That there is a way to regenerate a recalcitrant limb that doesn't work now but will work in the future by regeneration.

"How do you know this?" Diane was somewhat impatient with me. "I know it because Gene showed it," Mark said. "We don't see much in the way of disabled characters on *Star Trek* because modern Trek medicine has found cures for most illnesses and diseases. For example, with genetic therapy we could deal with most things before birth." Katlyn felt that "if *Star Trek* could make Stephen Hawking feel good enough to go on television even with his wheelchair, we must be doing something fantastic for the handicapped. Hawking probably does understand that in the *Star Trek* world disabilities will disappear." Much in the same manner, Ray's words sounded to me like those of a telethon host.

*Star Trek* gives [these] children hope that one day they will talk and will walk. It is what everyone wishes the future would be like. It represents all our hopes and dreams. And if more people understood *Star Trek's* message, I think the world would truly be a better place. We are only beginning to see the miracles that *Trek* has given us in the way of technology; think what it will be like in the future.

"Once, I went to this school," Martica said.

While there, I saw teenagers, and I saw children, and I saw people of every walk of life: handicapped, mentally, physically, every way that we're finding something in *Star Trek*. I sat down and I decided that I had to find out more about this. So I started looking into the fan club, and I started collecting the classic TV series. Then, I started with the books, and I read every one of the books. I spent \$200 on books. *I found peace in Star Trek: a reason for going on.* I find that *Star Trek* has given me a way to look at life that is far more satisfying than all the money, jobs, education, and security that you can buy. I look at people out of *Star-Trek-colored* glasses!

I asked this award-winning first-grade teacher to please be more specific about what was going on at this school.

Well, it wasn't exactly a school...you see I went through a bad marriage and then I went through trouble with my son. I began to look for help. I went to this little tiny out-of-the-way rehabilitation center. It was a fishing lodge, and this guy took it over and made it a place for people who just needed to get away and put things in order. I went up there, and the guy who ran the place was a *Star Trek* fan. Up there, he couldn't get *Star Trek*, so he ordered the films directly from Paramount. (This was before it was popular to go into a store and buy a video.) He had all these *Star Trek* films, and every Saturday night he was sitting there watching his *Star Trek* show. I thought, "What has *Star Trek* got to do with all of this?" He said, "You need to find something to hold on to."

The therapist gave her an unusual prescription, since the therapist was also a Trekker. He wanted her to view episodes of *Star Trek* for meaning. "*Star Trek* had given these people peace, salvation, and a positive, optimistic outlook. It made me also begin to consider how I could apply this wonderful message in my own classes, for the children I teach." "Which means?" I inquired.

When you finally understand what Trek is really about, then you will not just have the answers, but you can and you need to transcend the mundane! You just gotta believe that it will happen and then, as Picard says, make it so! You have got to be prepared for the future when we do meet with Vulcans, or Romulans, or other creatures from up there!

As I was driving home that evening along a stretch of I-85, the stars were shimmering in the skies. I did not see any ships coming for me, nor did I see any Vulcans, or Romulans or Cardassians or Ferengi or Klingons, but I did pass a billboard advertising the time and channel for *Star Trek Voyager*.

### **MUFON AND ME: HOW I GOT TO DEFEND THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

*We believe that there is more to Star Trek than just the action. The greatest drawing card is the continual search for something beyond.... A friend of mine said to me a while back: "People are searching, more than you would*

*imagine.” To me, Star Trek is an outer and visible symbol of the inner and invisible searching that is going on in most of our hearts even right now. Most of us wonder from time to time what life is all about. We wonder where we came from. We wonder where we are going to.*

—REV. ED HIRD, ANGLICAN CLERGYMAN

This fall, I went to a MUFON (Mutual UFO Network) exhibition in Phoenix and walked around exhibits where UFO pictures and UFO lore abounded. Phoenix is a major UFO center. There are sightings constantly. The people walking around, looking at the pictures, picking up pamphlets, and asking questions seemed like everyone else I come in contact with daily. There wasn't a single person who stood out in my memory. I have a disdain for the bell curve of normality, so why does the word *normal* keep popping up in my mind? Who am I to attribute false consciousness to anybody? Normal is a measurement. I keep on expressing my disdain for positivism and for eugenics, and I keep saying to myself, “Is this normal?” It seems odd that I am placed in a position where I am almost defending the Enlightenment. Could it be that we are slipping into a new Dark Ages (Noam Chomsky would think so), where magical thinking, metaphysics, New Age theological constructions, spirit worlds, alien abductions, and angelic visitations reign supreme? Are we being tantalized and comforted by a form of “transcendental temptation” (Kane, 1996:28)? A form that would divert our eyes away from the injustices and very real social concerns in this world?

Has the subject-object dichotomy that remains at the heart of the Enlightenment project and its attendant search for truth ultimately led to mysticism, a commodity-mystic fetish? Or is this more of the same old, same old, another “cover,” a different take on what has always been? The first telegraph message ever was a biblical quotation: “What hath God wrought?” Charles Babbage (the father of the modern computer) believed that advances in technology always were arguments for religion. In the medieval world, monasteries were spaces of invention and innovation; technology was not seen as an adversary to religion but as instrumental (both in the instrument itself and as a catalyst) in fostering a return to paradise. The scientific method emerged from monastic experience.

Where does Star Trek fit into this peculiar model? Does Trek act as a bridge between the technoscientific and the mystical-political? Stephen Hawking in his best-selling *A Brief History of Mind* speculated that

physics (well, actually a unified theory of particle physics) would let us know the mind of God, which is “an intriguing statement coming as it did from an avowed atheist” (Horgan, 1996:50). Could it be that our visions of the future are “distorted by the Star Trek factor” (Horgan, 1996:50)? Science itself contributes to this medieval interplay (which is also informed at a basic level by millennialism, apocalyptic fears, and the political swing to the extreme right) (Horgan, 1996, Stenger 1996). Brian Josephson said physics will never know everything. It can never be a complete body of knowledge, at least until it can account for extrasensory perception and telekinesis. But Josephson abandoned real physics for mysticism and the occult many years ago. When scientists and the-ologians get together to discuss their mutual interests and ideas as if their disciplines were concerned with the same concepts or constructs, something is changing, or maybe it has always been that way. When the Scopes monkey trial is being refought again in schools and word games transpose the ideology, talking of “creation science” as opposed to “evolutionary theory,” there seems to be metaphysics in the air. When Roger Penrose hypothesizes that quantum gravity may be related to self-consciousness, when the mathematician Prigogine speaks in Eastern philosophical terms, when we conceive of a Tao of physics, and when scientists speak of Gaia theory, I continually need to ask myself, What is going on here?

Astronomer Allen Sandage (whose work focused on the expansion rate of the universe and the age of the universe) did not find the answers he sought in the scientific method. So, at 50 years old, he found God. “It was my science that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science,” he says. “It is only through the supernatural that I can understand the mystery of existence” (Begley and Westley, 1998:46).

### **FAITH IN THE SUPREME ORDER**

Dion was an enthusiastic Trek cheerleader who showed up for our interview in downtown Atlanta in full-dress uniform. We spent about four hours together. There was a lot more he wanted to say and a lot more I wanted to hear. We arranged to meet again. At the next interview, he arrived again in uniform, but he came bearing gifts (not of the Magi but of Star Trek).

Star Trek commanded us to look beyond the exceptionally artificial and petty barriers dividing humanity, and consider our

future holistically. At the time, the Vietnam War was raging and nobody had landed on the moon. Star Trek's outlook, envisioning the planet as a whole, encouraged an entire generation to think about our responsibilities as an intelligent species, to be aware of our planetary citizenship, to see the future as more than technological marvels. That doesn't mean that technology is not important. It is. It is a very important part of the Trek vision. I don't think you can have Trek without technology.

"You just have to have faith, "I was told, not just by Dion, but over and over and over again as part of the Trek script. As Dion continued in his narrative, using words that I had heard far too many times before, he put a slightly different twist on things. "I read somewhere that the stock market is a lot like a religious impulse. You have faith that the stock will rise. And sometimes it does just that." I don't know why Dion would think I knew anything about the stock market at all. Frankly, I do not know how to balance a checkbook. Further, the very use of the stock market metaphor made me understand he had a particular kind of cultural-economic capital. So, his comments did highlight what was to me a very significant portion of the Trek universe. Who has the capital to enter the market? Technological-capitalistic faith may be part of the emergence and meteoric rise in technology stocks over the past couple of years (such as America Online or Amazon.com). But the faith placed in those stocks is tied to a virtual manifest destiny, part of a profound capitalist desire. I pray to my god, because I know that my god ultimately is better than your god. Or I pray at the altar of capitalism and imperialism, because the more I accumulate, the more I am worth (in more ways than one). This form of imperialism is cloaked (like a Romulan warbird) but is tied to the same impulse of conquest that manifested its destiny in the conquest of the Americas. God is on our side, not yours. Good families (with unmarked bodies) have values, and those (other) families don't; we are more advanced because we have the truth.

There is God and Satan. There is gloom and doom. There is technoceleration and Y2K. Framed in this manner, the Y2K problem is nothing more than a technological apocalypse, a rapture of the machine, a mechanical form of millenniallism tied to Western religious anxiety. Walking in a shrine to consumer capital (the Peachtree Mall), while drinking our freshly squeezed designer juices, I felt familiar enough with Dion to ask him: "What am I supposed to do?" I figured since he was one of the many Trekkers who told me Star Trek would give me an

answer to all my questions, he would immediately give me an answer. “Should I start everyday with a prayer such as *Give us this day our daily dilithium crystals* (something I co-opted from Mattingly’s 1994 article). I thought Mattingly’s expression was funny. Dion continually used Trek puns when he spoke. But he didn’t laugh, and it wasn’t because my timing was off.

### **THE HILLS ARE ALIVE... WITH THE HUMMM OF SAUCERS....**

The hills around San Diego, and the mountains out of which they were forged that go up and down the coast of the Americas, have been a magnet for UFO spotters for well over 50 years. On June 24, 1947, while a businessman-pilot named Kenneth Arnold was flying over the Cascade Mountains, he reported that he saw nine objects flying rapidly (at speeds of up to 1,600 miles per hour), and thus the modern rendition of the flying saucer was born. In 1947 (year one of the saucer), we were still recovering from World War II, and the atmosphere was highly charged, booming with all sorts of changes. Satellites and rockets were on their way to becoming realities. The transistor was introduced, and the sound barrier was broken. The atom bomb had already been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Cold War froze solid. Technology seemed to be spiraling out of control, taking on a life all its own. Considering the history of the times, the very religious nature of the nation, the impending sense of doom, and the very real possibility of worldwide destruction, people looked to the heavens for answers. In the modern industrial world, God coming from out of the heavens to speak to any of us would seem absurd (we often label people who have conversations with gods as schizophrenic). The flying saucer embodies a technological metaphysic.

Caleb became a Trekker in the early years of the show, when they were still called Trekkies. “In the late 1960s,” Caleb stated, “Americans were dealing with the Cold War. It was frightening.” Caleb had his daughter with him, who was five years old and sporting a Star Fleet uniform. (She was eating gummy bears and chocolate. The chocolate was getting on her uniform, and Caleb was not too happy about that.) “You might think I am crazy, but I saw a flying saucer once. It really shook me up, it made me begin to reevaluate my whole life. I thought to myself, Why are they here now? I realized then it was either to protect us or destroy us.”

Estimates are that anywhere from 70 to 75 percent of the U.S. population believes in flying saucers and aliens (which is about the same percentage that believes in angels and approximately the same percentage that believes in the Second Coming of Christ). By the 1980s and 1990s, several new religious movements had emerged that used Christian beliefs intertwined with UFO lore. Suffice it to say, although the impulse behind the sightings and number of sightings varies with time, place, circumstance, and *X-Files* episode, people all over the globe report UFO sightings. President Carter saw a UFO. So did President Reagan. Neither president attributed his respective UFO experiences to aliens. But Lord Hill Norton, who was once the chief of the British defense staff did. (To be fair, I ought to point out that Lord Norton also believed in fairies and spirit mediums.)

Forty-six percent of Americans believe in “personal angels,” also part of a highly individualistic, made-in-the U.S.A. Gnosis (which kind of makes me want to change the title of Grant Wood’s painting from *American Gothic* to *American Gnostic*). Entering a new millennium, Americans are increasingly caught up in apocalyptic visions, a form of hysteria that includes a trust in angels, a belief in prophecy, articulation of near-death experiences, and cataclysmic visions. The editor of the *UFO Gazette* (dedicated to the modern study of UFOlogy) expressed this tapestry of interrelated metaphysical manifestations very clearly in his October, 1998 letter to the magazines’ readers.

One year behind us. And another before we see all of our hopes and dreams, our plans, dashed upon the rocky shores of calendar madness. We are sitting on the roof of my New York City high-rise. We’ve got a weapon in our hand and we are trying to determine from which direction it will come...—The Apocolypse, the Reckoning, the Rapture, or whatever. The Millennium. We’ve seen a proliferation of phantoms, sightings, and other strange weirdness—Not just in our pages, but all around us. We’ve witnessed the climax and aftermath of the Pine Bush saga, we’ve seen subculture blossom into pop culture. And we’ve seen the signs of the approaching Earth changes, the End Times, Armageddon, the Quickening, what-have-you, emerging and taking form before our very eyes. Art Bell has abandoned ship, and is it any wonder that “New Jesus’s” abound and 95% accurate predilectors are crawling from the woodwork? Is it any wonder that FSG has moved its offices? The time for preparation is upon us, and our new fortified digs reflect, we feel, the solemn



uncertainty, the dark conspiracy, and the volatile lunacy emerging all around us. Look around you, folks—Can't you see them? The zombies shuffling about in the shadows—The saucers zipping about our skis—The shadow government filling our brains with garbage, feeding us chemicals, vibratory rays, and radiation—Controlling our minds and playing with our DNA? Can't you hear the rumbling of bombs exploding deep beneath the earth? The shrieking of the aliens invading our dreams and our media sensibilities? These are frightening, terrible, uncertain, wondrous, dangerous, eclectic, dark, and mysterious times, indeed. And the first half of the next Century will be spent trying to sort them all out. So we will here for now and watch the sky. We're armed with a pen, but we've also bought a gun—And if we can spot it trying to sneak up on us, we will sound the alarm in our pages. The Millennium is closing in, and we'll either see you then or we'll see you in Hell. But before that, we'll see you next month. —  
Editor

What does matter is that since the first “flying saucer” craze of the early 1950s, interest surrounding UFOs has been closely tied to matters of spirituality and religious experience. What does matter is that, on account of the millennium, increasing numbers of people will find differing ways to act out their esoteric apocalyptic interpretations. Some people will say this is (above all) a crisis of faith, others will anxiously await the rapture, and still others will look to the stars for UFO's or for nuclear weapons. And many people will look to Star Trek.

Behind all these movements and beliefs lies a mythology of creation which rejects evolution as a scientific concept but which, except in the case of the fundamentalists, cannot accept a biblical view of creation. UFOs are regarded as the vehicles of creation, providence and final salvation. This spiritualized universe resembles early gnosticism in its emphasis on escaping from earthly existence into lost worlds and other civilizations that provide a higher (nonmaterial) realm of existence. (Hexham and Poewe, 1997:439)

Trekdom is one of the many cultural sites where this Gnostic formation and hyperreal image-ology converge. Treklure has been part of the American popular vernacular for 30 years, and it is far too easy to trivialize. The American-Gnostic worships at the altar of mediated

culture and globalized capitalism. Perhaps, if I was a functionalist, I might say that the Gnostic impulse is characteristic of a separation of vocational experience from private life (see Stone, 1978). In many ways, meaning is found in consumption rather than in production; as the mode of production gets more and more obscured, material transformation somehow becomes metaphysical transmortification.

Erik Davis, author of *Techgnosis* (1997), contends that Gnosticism is the logical result of the technological revolution. For me, logic remains at best “highly illogical,” tied to a radically individual “I” for myself, a peculiarly white, male, bourgeois concept. The ardent arrogance of Gnosticism also expresses itself in the social fatalism that accompanies the omniscience in “light of knowing” that arises “from Trek” or any other form of Gnosticism (hyperreal or not).

Gnosticism surrounds us. It is in talk shows with pop-psychobabble, tabloids, television, political campaigns, churches, and schools. It is in our liturgy and our literature (in everything from the Bible to Stephen King). Gnosticism having the answers diverts our attention away from boring and difficult questions, such as social justice, civic responsibility, the meaning of citizenry, and globalized multinational capital. It is much easier to have faith that something will provide us with answers than to do anything to ameliorate sticky little problems like hunger, homelessness, and poverty.

Star Trek “provides a vision of hope” (Jonathan Frakes, Lieutenant Commander Riker), in its morality and attendant redemption from the prosaic problems embedded on more Earthbound terrains. We may be horrified at the Hale-Boppers. We try really hard to prove that they are not “normal,” at least “normal” like US. After all, they seemed to be happy going to their graves. They sang, they made jokes, they cleaned the house, they made sure their bodies were easily identified, and they made videotapes. We need to ask ourselves, if we think the Heaven’s Gaters had difficulty in negotiating reality (whatever that unit of measure is), can we?

## CHAPTER 2

# The Way, the Truth, and the Light

### DEUX OR DEUS EX MACHINA: DUKING IT WITH THE MACHINE GOD

*Gliding swiftly through the dark,  
Sailing now in starry space,  
Silently and free you fly,  
Traveling midst time and place.  
Like a quiet thing, alive,  
Though your engines hum and roar,  
Faster than the speed of light,  
High above the sky you soar.  
Oh! To be aboard you now  
As between the stars you roam,  
To be once more upon your decks,  
The Enterprise—my home.*

—FROM A *STAR TREK* FANZINE  
QUOTED IN TYRRELL, 1977:721

*TNG is like Sunday School. Every episode involves some moral issue or decision. It teaches us to respect all life, etc. The moral topics are contemporary, and meaningful to its viewers. There seem to be life lessons in each show, if you listen for them.*

*Beyond the substance of the messages in the shows, we tune-in each week with the same regularity as going to church. We respect the program, defend it against blasphemers, and sing it praises. Face it. TNG is a religion itself.*

—TREK POSTING ON AN INTERNET  
BULLETIN BOARD

Pope John Paul II blesses his computer, stating in no uncertain terms (to a group of students in Switzerland), “The computer has changed my world and certainly has changed my life” (Kennedy, 1998:2226). Bestowing the miraculous onto the machine, the Pope certainly has put a new twist on the technological. I am sure the world’s hardware and software companies were overjoyed that (perhaps a capitalist eschatological expression) his holiness bestowed a blessing on his machine. Meanwhile, in charismatic Catholic churches, discussions continue surrounding a variety of visions and stigmata, including statues of the Virgin Mary that weep. Apparitions of Mary crying, apparently, do not receive the same papal benediction or attention as the papal computer. The Pontiff has never posited weeping virginal material manifestations of faith in miraculous terms commensurate with the devotional bestowed upon his hard drive (or motherboard).

With the advent of the industrial revolution, technology became endowed with subjectivities, informing an intersubjective process of eschatological experience. The machine endowed by its creators with transformatory power became a thing transpositioned, a peculiar object-subject relation having either catastrophic cataclysmic consequence or as the vehicle of providence and salvation.

**SPIRIT IN THE SKY(SCRAPER)**

*I think God is as much a basic ingredient in the universe as neutrons and positrons... God is, for lack of a better term, clout.*

—RODDENBERRY, QUOTED  
IN SWEENEY (1995:8)

In theory, we choose the technology that we adopt. Technology is nothing more than a tool. It is neutral; it doesn’t have a life of its own. It is nothing more and nothing less than “embodied human action” (Wengenroth, 1998:755). Technology is not governed by immutable, unchanging natural laws. “Technology is not a single historical phenomenon, progressively developing, but a crazy quilt of discontinuities, ruptures, and breaks...that could happen in many different ways” (Wengenroth, 1998:755). Situated within the

discontinuities and ruptures is Treknology, which becomes a conduit to the divine, presenting morality ensconced in an exceptionally detailed technological jargon (see Blair, 1979a). Technology in the Trekkoid world is the key opening the gate to a spiritual existence.

There are no real supernatural entities that can appear. Everything in the world can be explained, if not now, at some future date through science. For example, I might say look at the ghost, but of course it isn't a ghost, it's a subspace tachyon particle entity! (Kenneth McRone, a high school business teacher)

The organic and machine worlds are reconciled and rationalized in a symbiotic machine spirituality.

The human soul is scientifically explained in *Star Trek*. Wasn't Spock's Katra, which he had McCoy hold for him as he regenerated down on the planet, a soul? We are both mind and body. Let me give you another example. How could any one of us forget all those transporter accidents? Remember when the transporter goofs up and Kirk is beamed up twice? His soul is divided between both bodies. It would be unscientific and technologically unsound to say that all the good molecules were moved to one body and the bad molecules to the other. The duality had to be something that occurred independently from the original malfunction. When Tasha Yar died, why didn't Picard just shrug and say, "Beam her up alive?" Or why doesn't the transporter keep a record of your old pattern, so in case you happen to fall into a plasma stream, they can just scoop a blob of protoplasmic goo onto the transporter and rearrange it into a new you? Why not keep a record of your pattern when you were 21, so when wrinkles start to appear you simply rewind your body? Because the idea is blasphemous! Because the duplicate, your clone, would be soulless. Remember also that incredible and fun time warp episode when the Starship collision kept on rewinding time? Well, since every atom of the Enterprise was reset exactly the way it was, then the only way for the crew to have déjà vu was if the mind was separate from the physical makeup of their brains.... Clearly demonstrating that there is a mind and there is a body. In other words proving beyond the shadow of a doubt the existence of a soul! (Maria Louisa Mariposa, an elementary school dance teacher)

The Trekkers' explanations certainly give new meaning to the Latin expression *Deus ex machina*. Bonnie Rieff, a middle school physics teacher, described with certainty that "there are different truths. Not that truth is relative. But there is religious truth, and then there is mathematical truth... If I was to run a statistical study and analyze the data, the data would definitely show and favor that there was a God. The point is that we have no definition for who or what is God."

### OCHAM'S ELECTRIC RAZOR

Stuart demanded that I look at an Internet post referring to Ockham's razor. It said, "God is love, love is blind, Geordi is blind, therefore Geordi is God. But which God?" (The author expressed his or her apologies to anyone who would read the post in any serious state of mind.) "I really like Descartes, you know. He tried so hard to find proof of God and in doing so really did find the soul." I nodded my head, knowing he had more to say. "Descartes did not find out God did not exist. When Descartes thought, Could God make a rock he couldn't lift? He answered, yes!" I decided to ask (feigning ignorance) "Who asked God or Descartes?" Stuart pursed his lips, growing impatient. "Descartes asked. What this means ultimately is that God can only be known subjectively with faith, and truth can only be revealed objectively. Thank God, Star Trek has figured this out!"

KAREN: I see.

STUART: Of course you do. Human beings see (perceive/conceive) things in certain categories, Kantian or otherwise. We are wired in a certain way—both in terms of sensory input and how sense-data is processed. We have a mind, but we also have a soul.

KAREN: Stuart, I want to ask you a question. Are there bigger problems that we need to deal with, other than existential angst?

"Oh, yes," Stuart answered, teasing me, "warp drive and keeping my hard drive from crashing! Did you ever think," he said, continuing with his playful philosophical banter, "that when we die, the world dies too? So, logically, when my computer crashes, does the world end?"

KAREN: Are you talking about Y2K?

STUART: No, but there is a cataclysm involved. I couldn't live without my computer. Can you hear one hand clapping in the forest?

Can you hear me speak when I don't have my computer?  
How could I possibly deliver the message?

I didn't bother to ask which message. After years of listening to Trekker stories, there are some metaphors that are ubiquitous. Even in the gaps and silences of narrativization, Star Trek was always present.

**TRANSPORTING OR TRANSFIGURATION OF  
THE KITCHEN KNIFE: INTERVIEW WITH A  
TREKKER**

*Contemporary physics supplies...appropriate metaphors, metaphors that correct the impression (created in part by classical Newtonian physics) that the Holy One is a static "thing," a kind of remote, super spy satellite "way up there" orbiting Earth, that might be defined by a noun. No, transcendent Spirit—essentially verb, not noun—is better imagined as the Great Initial Conditioner and Ultimate Strange Attractor of this or any other universe, and hence as limitlessly charged energy, bonding force, vibrant field, and creative chaos—none of which, like wave-particles, can be pinned down and defined. Our Hebrew and early church ancestors knew this—that God is no idler but the great Energy Field in whom all creation lives and moves and has its being.*

—TOOLAN (1996:437)

Sherry was cutting vegetables while describing what Star Trek meant to her. "The beauty is they are so meticulous in detail! Watching the way everything operates in *Star Trek* gives me hope, tremendous hope." "Hope for what?" I asked. "Hope that we can progress beyond the limitations of what we have now. Hope for the children I teach, knowing the world they will inherit might be way beyond our limited human imaginations." Sherry's answer was *enlightening*. I began to reflect on cyborg beings, on wetware (e.g., humans) versus hardware (e.g., the machine), and on having a personal revelational relationship with a machine. I was going to ask her several philosophical questions related to cyborgs, the Internet, and transformation, but Sherry took me on a different path.

Stories like Moses splitting the Red Sea. What really happened? From the story we get, was there a miracle? Did we perceive it a certain way? So today, we think he just went poof? But it is easy to see it was some blockage of water or a machine. That wouldn't negate it to me; others would be devastated. It wouldn't bother me.

There is a God! Of course! I don't think that God is God like we think. I really think God is another race, existing in another area. I mean if you had the powers of "Q," wouldn't you be tempted to go to a planet and make yourself a god, and wouldn't you be concerned about the welfare of the people? God is not the only Superior Being, and humans are not the only people that exist in the universe.

Sherry's narrative is neither remarkable or extraordinary but part of a larger Trek philosophy and praxis.

The real question is can we "capture" this "soul" with technology? In *ST:TNG*, the transporter seems to be able to do this. Remember Scotty came back, and Dr. Pulaski in "Unnatural Selection" was saved of death because the transporter kept her initial "DNA pattern." Resurrection can be explained with cloning, which provides for the physical aspect and "memory download" for the "Spirit," as in, "The devil you know." Of course, someone can choose not to live again and become "One" with the energies of the Universe, and accepting to lose all identity, which exists only in a "material" body.

Nevertheless, as Sherry wiped her hands on her apron un-self-consciously (yes, she wore an apron) and sat down at her kitchen table, she engaged in a litany of mechanistic explanations for biblical occurrences. While slicing beans, she framed her theories within autobiographical terms. She was clearly highly skilled and talented. I was rather amazed and amused, watching her think about so many complex ideas while completing fine motor tasks with a sharp ginsu knife. It might not have been Stuart's Ockham's razor, but I wondered if she was going to cut herself.

SHERRY: When I use logic, I rectify the Baptist church. A church, which I was raised in, that was filled with horrible imaginary images. That is so different than the real world.



KAREN: Isn't the Baptist church part of the real world?

SHERRY: No! I live in the world. And through Gene's vision, which guides all the good things in the world.

KAREN: What was his vision?

SHERRY: The IDIC. It is really a humanist view! The inherent goodness of man. Given the opportunity that goodness will come out! It is really a very positive, very upbeat kind of philosophy!

KAREN: How does that differ from Baptists? How is that more "real"?

SHERRY: In many ways. As Trekkers, first of all we are involved in the community. We do lots of volunteer work, in service to the community. We don't evangelize. We help. We really help. We recruit others to join us. We speak of science, not of religion. We realize that everyone is our brother. The problem here in the South is that Southern Christians, they'll live and die in that church with that one religion, with the one view. And that's all they care about. They don't want to find anything else.

KAREN: So?

SHERRY: Being raised in the South, religion has always been black and white. You live in this box. You don't dance. You don't go to the movies. You don't watch television. And this guy over here is going to hell, and you're not. And that's the only difference in the world. And this guy over here, he's living in this little box, and he's got the same kind of beliefs, and you're going to hell. And, this one over here says that you can't cut your hair and can't wear short sleeves and you can't wear this and you can't wear that, and you're going to hell. In Star Trek now there are Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Jews, Protestants...all sorts of strange aliens....

KAREN: Really....

SHERRY: Star Trek has made a difference in my life in the way I handle people and live with people across the board. Strangely enough, people who are totally involved in Star Trek are not prejudicial by race, by religion. In fact, how would you put it?

KAREN: Put what?

SHERRY: The differences...for me, the differences are really important. Star Trek makes you question your own religion.

I think anything that makes you question your life is good! Anything that makes you search for truth is good! Especially in the South! They go through life, “This is what I believe, this is what my parents taught me, there’s nothing else!” They don’t question one word! Star Trek tells you to seek out...and I do! I think that people never find the answers if they go through life thinking, “This is correct,” “This is correct,” “This is correct!” Star Trek makes you look at the world differently. Makes you even look at miracles differently. For example, was it really a flood? No, it was a meteorological disturbance. Did God appear to Moses? Or was it a projection off of a large screen that is beamed from space? And was Jesus resurrected? No way, he may not have been human, so therefore he could not logically have died.

KAREN: I see.

SHERRY: In Star Trek, one of the teaching goals is helping people to get along with people. Now, in our society we have not done a very good job of that at all! We have not really changed anything in our society as far as the treatment of people who are different. We have not done anything in that area. We very carefully call them African-Americans now, rather than niggers. Bring somebody from Israel over here, the minute they’re known that they are from Israel, if somebody’s even slightly intelligent, they’ll ask them if they are a part of the Begin regime; otherwise, they are just a Jew, and Jews are no good! Of course, now if you want to buy a wedding ring, you’ll go to a nice Jewish jeweler but, you don’t want Jews living next door to you. You don’t want them opening a store down the road from you.... After teaching for 25 years, I think the only thing that education is needed for is to teach people to live with people, and with aliens. Star Trek is the only place to find it! Star Trek is the only place where you can go for reasonable explanations to difficult problems and get something more than racist mumbo-jumbo and pie-in-the-sky unreasonable ideas. Science will answer our questions. Gene knew that! Gene always showed us that miracles could always be attributed to machinery. You know, like the one with the Greek Gods. Or Q, Q is not God! He just has really advanced technology, and he is more highly evolved.

Part of me wanted to tell Sherry that Menachem Begin was “history, both literally and figuratively.” I started to speak, then thought twice, and decided not to say a thing. I gathered all my belongings together. Sherry wanted me to stay for dinner. I told her I needed to get back to Greensboro, which I did. “Too bad, I really want you to meet my son. We are doing something that I know Gene would smile on.”

I didn’t realize I was wearing a chai around my neck, and as I bent over to get my tape recorder, it slipped out from underneath my sweater. Sherry asked, “Are you a Jew? Gene liked Jews. He hired Jews, like Leonard Nimoy. You know that?” “Yes, I do.” “Well,” she interjected as I was walking out the door, getting ready to close it, “We are related you know.” I didn’t get to close the door. Sherry matched me step for step; I picked up the pace, walking faster down the hill to my car; and Sherry speeded up, while continuing her narrative. “We are related in the same way as Messianic Jews are to you.” I didn’t want to engage in a discussion—that was not why I had come to see her—but her intuitive rhythm was simply amazing. “You know that Jesus was a Jew, and some say Roddenberry had Jewish blood.” Groping for my keys, trying not to be impolite, I couldn’t find the lock while keeping my eyes on Sherry. “Do you think Bejorans are Jews or Palestinians? What about the Ferengi? Do Cardassians seem like Nazis to you? Do you think that the Federation represents the New World Order?”

### FLUID BOUNDARY

Marcella is a Trekker who is committed to environmental causes, the local chapter of the teachers union, and her five children.

I think one of the nineties movements besides environmentalism is the return to spiritualism. We have gone away from God, or were so caught up in our daily lives that you run and do this and take the kids to do that, and you have no time to sit and think about who you are and how you fit in our universe, our plan. Now people are sitting down and saying, you know, now I need some spirituality, and I think with the revival of *Star Trek* on TV, I think it has revived that.

Continuing in her narrative, she began to speak about the young people she teaches.

I have noticed that a lot of teenagers from 13 to 18 really love *Star Trek*. I think they have grown up seeing their parents just so busy, not touching or reaching God and spiritualism. They go to church and they just get preached to, and they feel like there is nothing here. Then they see this spiritualism on *Star Trek*.

Getting in touch with who you are and feeling you know more than just things—because you get bombarded with things, things, things! Buy me, buy me, buy me! You have to have the right sneakers, the right clothes, and the right toys. You know what I'm saying. Their life, they feel, is like "Is this all there is?" So when they are presented with *Star Trek*, they say, "There is more to this!" There is something for me to attach myself. I could be part of this. They are seeing possibilities! They could go to space and be part of this family, and the closeness on the bridge.

They are seeing more to life! So it is a religion.' Cause they are getting what we used to get through church when we were young. Through the TV show, they are seeing camaraderie, how you are supposed to be nice to people. Certain teachings from the Bible they present in *Star Trek*. They don't just go up to something and kill it. They want to be treated like you want to be treated! *Star Trek* has changed the tide!

Changed the tide of what? The boundaries between science and science fiction, between reality and hyperreality, between technology and religion, are never paradigmatic. Everything is situated in process, intermingling fluidly, in spaces, gaps, power formations, and articulations. Ultimately, however, there must be (particularly in a hypercapitalist world) some form of political economy present. But what I hear is the machine, the machine God, and a complex discourse that conceals a sacrament to the creations of capitalism while vesting it with transformative power.

Science fiction and religion both investigate the unknown. They both look at the phenomenological, and the transcendental. *Star Trek* would never advocate any specific practice. But what *Star Trek* did do is make us ask questions of souls. So many episodes required us to already believe in the existence of a soul. Remember when Data was brought to trial for not having a soul? Machines have souls, as long as they are sentient.... The soul is an immaterial vital essence that has nothing to do with matter in the normal sense. The fact that machines can have souls to me

proves the existence of a higher order, a higher consciousness.  
(Joel Navarro, a high school humanities teacher)

Time and time again, in different states, in different times, in face-to-face interviews, and in cyberspace, a “progressive” empiricist formula was woven into a religious tapestry, and God was transported or transfigured into the machine, spirituality was wedded or welded with the machine world, and two seemingly disparate cultural impulses became one.

*Deep Space Nine* is nothing but what Elijah saw in the sky so many thousands of years ago. It is a wheel with a center in it and spokes. Which is nothing except what *Deep Space Nine* is. Which is what the space station that was proposed would be like, because that’s how we could establish gravity; it must move! (Stanford Gordon, a high school music teacher)

Didn’t you ever think that God was really a more advanced being from a different planet? All of the miracles, where do they come from? If you look for logical answers, the Bible begins to make sense. It makes sense because you need to take a rational look, and ask yourself, How was this made? Then, you will find an empirical answer. (Carol Corea, a sixth-grade English and social studies teacher)

*Star Trek* portrays real scientific theory. After all, God encoded the laws of physics into the universe. Let me explain this to you. Adam is created out of primordial goo, the English translation being “clay.” Considering how much water is in the human body, that clay must’ve been pretty gooey. What’s to say that the clay that God used to create Adam was, in fact, amino acidic soup? (LeeAnn Graubard, a first-grade teacher)

According to Nelson (1996:144), “Technology as savior has two important points: first, it is created by humans” (so we can assume we can control it), and “second, it has the vocabulary to sound convincing” (whereas traditional Christian language for the Trekker teachers no longer does). But, I also begin to wonder if there is any agency behind the machine. I begin to think of the Wizard behind the curtain in Oz. Yet, technologies don’t disappear once the human agent does. In the Trekker world, on innumerable occasions, I heard a biblical form of determinism translated through the technological, at the same time as I heard the

inverse, a form of technological determinism translated through the biblical.

Stuart is friends with Marcella. They have known each other their whole lives, teach at the same school, and serve as Star Fleet officers on the same ship. Stuart chomped on a carrot, like an chubby Bugs Bunny, and did what he seemed to do best, challenging me to see if I could understand the nuances of his philosophical discourse (he told me he was a member of Mensa). Whether he was trying to impress me with his rational and philosophical knowledge or engaging in some kind of patriarchal philosophical one-upsmanship was never quite clear to me.

Is it Q...or is it Memorex? One of Descartes' little conundrums was whether or not his phenomenological universe was a construct created by an evil genius just to jerk him around. In space, this is something more than a scholastic brainteaser, as those who've been Q'ed can testify. I think one of the things the show explores (going back to TOS and Roddenberry's original concepts) was the limits of an anthropomorphic perspective. There are other paradigms you see—on a basic hard-wiring level.

“And...?” I catechized, compelled to make sense out of his rather cryptic response. Marcella answered for him.

There is an order to things. An order, which can be seen statistically, a random pattern, but a pattern nevertheless. It is mystical. It is ordered. We are ordered. I mean, free will aside, there is a direction we are going. There is something known as progress. And we will progress until we cannot anymore, and then, like George Carlin would say, we go to the cockroaches. But, there is an order to that, too.

Despite my discomfort with Stuart's intentions, I do hear (once again) something inherently generic in the discussions with Trekkers, which to me does not seem random. There is a pattern, a collective subjectivity being articulated, which is not unlike the garden variety of conservative Christian groups who remain similar in terms of doctrine and dogma. Conflated Christian ecumenism could be renamed panconservative Christianity. Theoretically, where ecumenism exists, so does dialogue. But dialogue is actually subsumed into the conflation of the overarching pandoctinal. So Joe, who lives in another state than Stuart and Marcella's says:

Gene would have approved of what I am going to do with my own children. I am going to take them out to a synagogue and to a whole host of different religious denominations to give them a broader view, and then sit down and ask what's common, and then ask, How does that compare with *Star Trek*? How does that compare with a positive view of the future? How does that open some channels of discussion. I see *Star Trek* as a very incredibly positive view of the future! For me, *Star Trek* is more advanced! Society in the future has advanced beyond the need for sexual conquest, for demonstrations of macho prowess, and all that! That is the positive view for me! Society will evolve beyond the need for all that!

And Sherry, who lives at least 800 miles away from Joe, states:

Of course, my children know about right and wrong, know about truth and lies. Know that religions, especially religions as traditionally constructed, are not real or rational or scientific. They know that *Star Trek* has its base in traditional theological beliefs and it is important to listen. To be able to speak to believers in a way they can understand.

The Trekkers all seemed to be marching to a religious beat. *Trek* has been described as pantheistic and humanistic, but it seems to be far more mimetic, borrowing the language of science to discuss religious impulses. The Trekkers insert themselves into a spiritual, blandified, generic form of secular Christianity, in many ways reminiscent of something that Tammy Faye Bakker said to CBS News (in 1987) and I am paraphrasing, "You don't need to have a denomination to be a minister." Nor do you need a church to preach to the choir, or to unconverted masses. If you can have creation science, you can also have *Trek* spirituality.

### **BEAM ME INTO THAT GREAT FUTURE**

Bruce Forbes teaches religious studies at several area colleges around Sioux City. He feels that, for many people, "You can look at TV as a religion many of us organize our lives around. It does what religion does: provide a symbolic system through which you interpret the world."

Betty Caprio, in her religious curriculum based on *Star Trek, Star Trek: Good News in Modern Images* (1978), not only criticizes the dichotomy between fundamentalist Christianity and Trek. She emphasizes that ethics of Christianity are brought into the twenty-first century by *Star Trek*. She passionately proselytizes,

Questions...and the way Christianity—the Good News answers the questions...draw inspiration from the visionary world of Star Trek....

As a Christian, I could best write about religious matters from the vantage point of the “good news”; both on the Planet Earth and...in some remote corner of the universe.... And from what we know of the Vulcan code, we would have to say that the peaceful rational ordered Vulcan society is more Christlike than the cultures of many nominally Christian nations.... Star Trek is the message of good news of all faiths....

Conservative Christians may be offended with the liking of their faith to a “space opera.”...I hope...[they] will reconsider....

My own view of God’s worlds includes all things—monsters, torn shirts, the works, and insists that the “good news” is found in just such mundane things. The Christian churches, especially have a long tradition of plugging into the secular loves of people and showing how they reflect God’s glory.... To tell the message of Jesus...the popular art (of a finely crafted TV show)...reflects the same teaching and should offend no one; certainly no offense is meant....

Both Christianity and Star Fleet Command are concerned with bringing about a better world. I’ve tried to bridge the gap between the first century and the twenty-third—drawing on the common beliefs.... The message from Israel has changed history for two thousand years...it’s still very much the good news. (Caprio, 1978: ix-xvi)

Messianic messages and recurring resurrections are a common thread woven into the teacher’s narratives. Loreli knew:

Gene Roddenberry died, but I use the word “died” loosely here. Gene Roddenberry died with a group of people present. He had written beyond his time. They, well, everybody thinks he wasn’t of this world, of the sixties; he was not just beyond his time. Gene



was from another world. He was put here to prepare us for other worlds.

She then very forcefully insisted, “I think that Gene Roddenberry was used as an instrument. I don’t think all that he did was his own.” Victor explained:

Matthew records that “wise men from the East” followed what they thought was a star to the place of Christ. The Bible says the wise men followed the Star “till it came to rest over the place where the child was.” Stars do not move like this, nor do they move and then suddenly stop. After the wise men initially saw the “star,” they had to pack up, prepare for the long journey by camel. So there is no reason to believe that Christ would still be in the manger by the time they arrived, and they came into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother. This verse says they came into the “house,” not stable, and saw the “child,” not baby, with Mary. One of the most spectacular aspects of the story is the “Star.” The Greek word for *star* in the Gospel account can mean “any luminous heavenly body.” What was meant was that Mary saw technology, she might have even seen the *Enterprise*; you know, I believe that Gene Roddenberry was in the prophecies, as well as being prophetic.

At the end of a different (six-hour) interview (which took place in a truck circling around the town where the teacher resided), Carlotta, with abandon and ardor, proclaimed:

I do firmly believe that God gave us *Star Trek* and Gene Roddenberry and all of Trekkdom because I have never seen anything that would serve us better than *Star Trek* has.

When Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount and when he dealt with the Pharisees and the Sadducees or the religious leaders of his day, it is exactly what you face today with religious leaders and their prejudices against one another. The Pharisees wouldn’t talk to the Sadducees, and neither would talk to the Essenes, and none of them had anything to do with Jesus because he was so different from their lifestyles.

Now in *Star Trek* we have the fulfillment of all what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Because we believe in the brotherhood of mankind. And doing good to our neighbors,

developing our relationships with each other, and this is not Gene Roddenberry's philosophy. It was two thousand years before him!

I am as convinced as anybody can be that two thousand years ago the Lord foresaw *Star Trek* and Gene Roddenberry. And that there would be those of us who would follow this belief even though it did not coincide with the beliefs of those around us in the religious world.

I think our religious world.... What do you call them... Pharisees or Baptists, whatever.... We still have this little cubbyhole that we have to fit everything in. And *Star Trek* doesn't. *Star Trek* says, you're my brother whether you're black or white or red or yellow. Whether you believe in my lifestyle or a different lifestyle. And that comes from a Bible scholar!

First of all, I read avidly, and there's not enough of Gene Roddenberry's writings available by any means. It's funny, but do you remember when you first learned that Gene Roddenberry was ill? No. You remember only his death.

Nobody, even the fan magazines, didn't publish that he was ill. So, isn't it strange that a man who is as popular as he is, you never knew that he was sick, never knew that he was ill, and all of a sudden he was dead and gone? Unrealistic...unscientific.... Probably he is not dead! He will come back; he wasn't human, you know.

### **TINKERING ON THE YELLOW BRICK... I MEAN BRICOLAGE**

The word *bricolage* denotes tinkering. Sherry Turkle would argue that bricolage is housed in the "graphical-user interface (embodied by the Macintosh and Windows operating systems).... [M]ost computers users, male and female alike, use bricolage: they cannot see the engine under the hood of the car" (Turkle, 1993). In other words, everything is superficial, no instructions are necessary, you take what you need, you play around, and you tinker around. But you don't think beyond. You may deconstruct, but you don't reconstruct. Bricolage can be hazardous; it can be a danger zone when it is seen as a model for everything, when it becomes a metamodel for all understanding.

It truly is warm-blooded computers, because in cyborg technology the boundary between you and the machine disappears. It becomes a true prosthetic, which is to say, an invisible,

impalpable, and unconscious extension of your own agency, where you no longer struggle with the keyboard, and you no longer think about this barrier between you and what it is that's going on. It becomes part of your presence, and that's what ubiquity is all about. It becomes invisible by changing shape, not being a box on the desk any more, just the way mainframes stopped being big things, and shrank to the size of a box on the desk. (Stone, 1993)

The transformation and rearticulation of life through the fetishized artifact of the machine also transforms our understandings of and interactions of what life is, how we get along, and what life means. Objects such as *tamagotchis* signify a different form of technical relation because the object has become something to nurture, love, and care for. "The new hook... is nurturance instead of control and mastery" (Stone, 1993). I would tend to think that the machine made to be cared for and about is a double-edged fetish (both Freudian and Marxist). The object-to-nurture is a hook, an advertising ploy. Yet, our relationship to the object is fetishized as it becomes endowed with subjective and highly personal meaning.

My son Josh and I were watching television last night when the advertisement for the new i-Macs came on. We both exclaimed: *Oh, they are so cute!* I thought to myself that I want a purple one, and Josh would want a blue one, and Shirley would definitely want a lime green one, while Joe would need an orange one. The cute machine, which is anthropomorphized, means that I can purchase a higher consciousness for about \$1,500 each. The word I used, though, was *cute!* Cute like a child, cute as in cuddly, cute as I would really like to have one, to hold one. But, as we vest our machines with human characteristics, such as catching "viruses," we change the meaning behind the machine. What does it mean to humanize the machine and objectify human beings?

Jeremiah believes that "traditional religions, philosophy, and ideology always speak about fear. It is a way to bring about social cohesion and control. The ideas behind *Star Trek* are grounded in science and therefore in technology; no fear need enter."

For the Trekkers (as for many other people), technology is tantalizing, it is seductive, it embodies the miracle of scientific progress. Technology is the treasure chest that provides universal salvation or rampant destruction. There is nurture and care in these eschatological expressions of the machine world and the machine's creators.

The medical bib that was invented, also the medical scanner that McCoy used, and the diagnostic bed that is used, which is wonderful, because instead of being poked and prodded, you find things out in a flash without pain. You see, one thing about *Star Trek* is that the technology that they present is not impossible! It is something that we could get that makes people begin to sit and think about it, and then they make it! So you see it on Trek, you get that vision, and then science invents it 'cause Roddenberry showed it!

Like, for instance, Gene Roddenberry told a story once in one of his interviews, after *Star Trek* aired, after the first three weeks, NASA came to him and said, "How do you make those phasers?" He said, "Well, of course, it's special effects," and they said, "Is there a technology behind it now?" Of course, we do have lasers; they don't work like the phaser does yet, but I'm sure someone will perfect it. Because there is someone out there who wishes we did have phasers, and they will learn to make it happen.

I think that the shuttle that we have is a prime example. I mean, it's called a *shuttle*. Why do they call it a shuttle? Isn't that something off of *Star Trek*? I mean, they could've called it anything! To tell you the truth, they could have called it a capsule, like they called the other things on top of rockets. But, yet they called it a shuttle. And when everyone heard that the shuttle was being made, the overwhelming response by *Star Trek* fans was to call it the *Enterprise*, and they did accept it! In our society, *Star Trek* pops up all the time! Why? Roddenberry knew it would happen and he showed it and the scientists followed his vision. (Alan Corea, high school social studies teacher and head football coach)

The presentation of the technological as the truth precludes critique and speaks to dogma. "I would never violate Trek canon; I hate when some people do." At best, Trek offers a dogma that is wholly (or holy) uncritical. "Look, Gene showed us what we were going to do. Now we just need to get off our asses and do it!" *Star Trek* "offers pseudo empiricism, an empirical veneer of gadgetry...applied to a mythical superstructure" (Jewett, 1977:19). There is a consistent, mutually interdependent symbiosis between machine and human in this superstructure. The relationship is much more than mere technical relation.

You know what the greatest moment of my life was? After all that time, they showed us the *Enterprise*, and I sat in the movies crying. It was so beautiful to see her again, in all of her glory. I am glad they took so much time to show us the ship. It was orgasmic, it was better than sex. I mean she was just so magnificent, so powerful, so much more incredible than I remembered her. (Lourdes Rankin, high school Latin teacher)

The dazzling spectrum of possibilities and impossibilities, coupled with intensified technological production, gives rise to a sort of techno-simulacrum expressed unambiguously in the phrase the *rhetoric of the technologic sublime* (Marx, 1964). We become who we are, we advance to a higher state (of being or of production) because of the technology that warp-drives the machine.

The pervasive expansion of the technologies that inform, intrude, and interface into and with human lives elicits response. The response is never objective (although the machine itself ought to be). Nevertheless, cybernetic subjectivity remains (at this juncture) in the hands of those who can afford it. It is a subjectivity that is marketed and mediated, a prepackaged corporatized subjectivity brought to you by “the apparatuses of production of globalized, extraterrestrial, everyday consciousness in the planetary pandemic of multisite, multimedia, multicultural... U.S.-dominant...conglomerates (Haraway, 1997:13). “Technology takes us to the future,” Mary-Anne states unequivocally. “If we trust ourselves technologically, we can progress eventually to the world we see on *Star Trek*” Robert said. *Star Trek* may be a polysemic text with multiple readings and multiple meanings, but above all else, *Star Trek* is a television program brought to all of us by Paramount. Techno-prophets (or profits) like psychics, or Gnostics, have special knowledge of the direction of the future, and like a hot stock tip, it is something they clearly profit (or prophet) from.

**THE PROFIT.... I MEAN THE PROPHET...  
NO, I MEAN THE PROPHETIC... OH, JUST  
BUY IT**

GENE RODDENBERRY  
JUNIOR:

Unfortunately “STAR TREK” is now in the hands of Paramount. Roddenberry gets to say very little!

INTERVIEW: Your father said it—I made you money. I deserve more than a building named after me.

GENE RODDENBERRY Yes he did and yes he does!

JUNIOR: (Roddenberry, 1999)

I can't help thinking of the old Walter Miller science fiction classic, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In the novel, the hero Brother Francis's diligent labors came to fruition with the discovery of the several of the relics left behind by the blessed martyr Isaac Leibowitz, including the blessed blueprint and the sacred shopping list.

**Flame:** The Ten Commandments of Trekkdom. It being noted that Trekkdom shares many similarities with fundamentalist Christianity (the Original Series taking the place of the Old testament, latter series likened to the Synoptic gospels), below are listed the covenants and commandments without which NO Trekkie can achieve a state of true grace:

1. Thou shall not think too much. Less is better.
2. Thou shall have no TV shows before me.
3. There is but ONE prophet and his name is Berman.
4. A heretic shall not be suffered to live. Thou shall go to the houses (and boards) of the blasphemers and disrupt them by flame and false post, all the days of their lives.
5. Thou shall not enter into intelligent discussion with disbelievers. The flame is the sword by which we are known. (see Commandment 1.)
6. Do not be deceived by the false doctrines of logic and intelligence. (See Commandment 1.)
7. Thou shall purchase no graven images not sanctioned by Paramount. ALL images by Paramount are sacred and should be purchased regardless of cost.
8. Thou shall accept techno-babble without question. It is the Deus Lingua of our religion and answers all questions.
9. Go ye, and spread the WORD, even to those who do not want it. ESPECIALLY to those who don't want it.
10. See Commandment 1.11,12, etc. See Commandment 1. (<http://www.lpgb.com/wgb/wgb>)

**Response:** I take offense when you describe Trek fans as morons or losers. Star Trek fans, as opposed to many other organizations, are friendly people just out to have a good time. Whether or not they dress up in the uniforms is not the point.... Trek fans, nearly 99.9% of them, are very nice people and willing to help others, either through charity or fund-raisers, or just talking to someone. It has been determined (in a logistical sense) that Star Trek fans are, for the most part, bright, have higher than average intelligence, and read frequently. Star Trek fans also come from the broadest spectrum of humanity on the face of this planet—doctors, lawyers, NASA engineers, teachers, school children, poor people, rich people, black people, white people, Indians, etc. Star Trek fans very rarely engage in things like bigotry and normally accept others for who they are. Tell me one other group of people out there (other than priests or the like) who are as varied.

You may think that learning to speak Klingon is foolish nonsense, or that wearing a Starfleet uniform makes one a geek. Well, I'll tell you something—if this entire planet were populated with nothing but Star Trek fans, it would definitely be a much better place—something that Gene Roddenberry imagined and hoped that one day it would come to pass. THAT is a kind of world that I would love to live in—one of peace. This does not mean, however, that Star Trek fans don't also live in the real world. There isn't one Star Trek fan out there who doesn't realize that the world right now is a messed-up place. Wars, famine, riots, bigotry, etc. However, they all would love to change that kind of thing. If wanting all that means that we Star Trek fans are geeks, then I guess I can proudly count myself as one of them. I am not ashamed to be a Star Trek fan. I see that there can be hope for the future. After all, people never thought the Berlin Wall would fall or that the Russians would be working with us—but both have happened and have taken us one step closer to there being peace on earth.

To paraphrase William Shatner, *it's a television program!* Nevertheless, the mystical corporate relations in the Trek world invests the program with powers going way beyond the divine box.

When it is seen on Trek, it is then invented. You see, Trek determines what the future will be like. And, that is a good thing,

because I know this is not going to end in a big giant fireball... because after the nuclear war, we will go on and get together and seek out new life...in the stars. Just as Gene showed us we would.

Prophecy, in *Star Trek*,

Comes right up and hits you! You can't ignore it! But, I think some of the subtle stuff will become evident later. You cannot know it until there is a proper passage of time to really see the prophecy!

Amelia, who teaches near the coastal islands of Georgia, felt that the proper passage of time had already transpired. She contextualized the prophecy of *Star Trek* historically.

Just to go through and remember some of the social things that *Star Trek* attacked...or addressed. I think attacked is good. We were facing the same problems at the same time in our society. In "Let This Be Your Last Battlefield," the guys were half black and half white. When I saw it, I didn't think about the racial incidents here on Earth. But, then in paying closer attention to it, I understood what going on. When I saw it the first time, I didn't think about that. But, after seeing it several times, I understood.

I can imagine after *The Next Generation* goes off the air, and people start seeing that over and over and over again. They might see some of the same things.

I think in *Star Trek* is *how to live*, and *the way to live properly*. I believe there is a way that would help make sure that we have a future. I think that the two are closely tied together. That we treat each other with respect, that we don't interfere with other people's wishes, how to run their own business, that we try to be logical, but we also recognize the importance of intuition and action. I don't know what Roddenberry was. I guess you have to be prophetic and lucky for your prophecies to be apparent.

Peter proclaimed proudly, "Roddenberry could see just like Nostradamus!" Using history as prophecy, he sought to demonstrate to me the indubitable truth of *Trek*, by citing example after example of recent world events.

The part with the Soviet Union in "The Undiscovered Country" was so remarkable! You know, I don't know when they started



that movie, but, it had to be before Gorbechev started dismantling the Soviet Union; he was prophetic! I hope we learn how to live long enough “to go where no man has gone before.”

“It is not just a television show,” Janna said, “It is a humanistic vision, it is my way of life! I believe because whatever Roddenberry said has already come true. Why would he lie about what happens next?” So, Marla can declare:

There are certain people who are born and they are special in ways that everybody else isn't. God or whatever it is puts a special person in our midst, and it could be somebody as simple or as complex as Gandhi or Mother Teresa. Somebody who has done special work that is recognized worldwide. Like Gene Roddenberry.

And Mindy can state with absolute certitude:

Gene Roddenberry was put into our midst to make us sit and think. Jesus and Muhammad and all the others that we have claimed as prophets give us the same word. Gene Roddenberry was one of those special people put here. Because he said he didn't even really like science fiction. So it was all a medium to get his word across to the people. That is the same as any other prophet. He had to get done what he had to say.

As Verniere (1996:S03) wrote:

Let's face it, “Star Trek” is now a completely self-sustaining, self-referential mini-universe that does not need to acknowledge the existence or relevance of anything outside of itself. It is no longer even a form of entertainment; it is now a kind of religion, and like a religion it has its own commandments, vocabulary (a virtual Tower of techno-Babble), clergy (Pope Spock, Archbishop Picard and Sister Superior Guinan), high holy days and slogans (although the venerable Vulcan greeting “Live long and prosper” has begun to sound like the 1990s equivalent of “Greed is good”). Moreover, its followers are often as myopic, fanatical, irrational, unyielding and unforgiving as any fundamentalist sect.

It really is not surprising then that fans continually report “personal redemptive experiences resulting from their encounters with the program” (Jewett, 1977:29). A large majority of Trekkers I interviewed attribute their own personal redemptive experiences to (in their own words) receiving the “Word of Roddenberry,” or “*Star Trek*” or “*Star Fleet*.” Marla told me a story about her friend who was dying of cancer.

Her greatest wish in the world was that she meet George Takei. So he came here, he went to see her, and they talked privately. Nobody was allowed in, just the two of them for about an hour. When he left, he was crying, and she had the most beautiful smile on her face! I said, “Sally, what did he say?” She said, “Oh, he said a lot of important things. But, to my mind, the most important one was that I’m not going to die. I am just going to be transported to another lifestyle.”

She said that’s all it took! Because she said, “I’m not worried anymore, because I know when I go, I’ll just be transported into another lifestyle. I’ll warp in space and there I’ll be!” She says, “George promised to see me on the other side....”

Now she’s young; she’s like thirty-two; she has two children. If she sees the end of the year, she’ll be lucky. They give her no hope at all, but the idea that death isn’t a dread. It’s just being transported into another universe, another lifestyle. That’s what Gene Roddenberry has given us, as far as our time, as it is spent here on this Earth.

Jaci Hibbert is a lifelong *Star Trek* fan. She also suffers from a fatal illness (cystic fibrosis). For her, *Star Trek* represents “a future in which there is no more illness and people like me don’t have to spend a lifetime fighting a losing battle against a chronic disease. I love the concept that someone can wave a tricorder over an injury and it’s healed, or limbs can be replaced.” The Make-a-Wish Foundation is sending Hibbert, her boyfriend, and her nurse to Las Vegas, to the *Star Trek* Experience. “I’ve been there,” Marantha chirped. “It is sort of like a Catholic making a pilgrimage to Lourdes.” “The theological message of *Star Trek*...relates to world redemption in general and redemption of individual audience members in particular” (Jewett, 1977:32). It is not surprising then that actor John de Lancie (who plays Q in the *Star Trek* saga) recounts an incident in New York City when he saw:

an approaching figure who looked vaguely sinister. Convinced he was going to get mugged, de Lancie said he braced himself for what he thought was going to be the inevitable fight. Instead, the man came up to De Lancie, and asked: “Are you Q?” De Lancie answered in the affirmative; he plays the other-dimensional character featured on three separate “Star Trek” television series. The man then asked: “Can you bring back people from the dead?” De Lancie said he answered, “Yeah, but only the ones I like.” The man replied, “Cool,” and walked on. (Cole, 1998)

### THE MIRACLE OF THE SCIENTIFIC

*I do not belong to any church, but I do consider myself a religious man...part of the creative and intelligence behind life. Therefore, if we are part of God then our lives are not brief meaningless things, but rather have a great importance and significance.*

—RODDENBERRY, QUOTED  
IN ALEXANDER, 1994:423

Forty percent of American scientists believe in a personal God. They are not speaking of an agnostic or ambiguous presence, but a “real” deity, to find solace in, to go to in times of trouble. Although the epistemology of science (a very peculiar sort of ontology) has no possible way of measuring God as an independent variable (and I would also include other forms of divine intervention such as aliens, devils, and angels), God is present—you could say “he” is omnipresent—in the scientific community. “He” never left.

Nobody ever said that social reality was not filled with tensions and paradoxes. What does matter is that the United States is a notoriously religious nation. In some ways, our belief in science is truly a religion. We want proof, and we want *the* truth. We need evidence. Is it any wonder that scientific dating has been used on both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Shroud of Turin? As if by proving their ages we can prove faith (an oxymoron to say the least)!

And let’s not forget: who knows exactly how long that first “day” was, when God separated darkness from light, since we define a day as one full transition from light to darkness to light again. That first “day” could’ve been two billion Earth years. And what

is time to God? Maybe that's why he really needed a rest on the seventh day!

Modern evolutionary theory is not contradictory with the existence of God. God works in mysterious ways. Why couldn't God have given us a metaphorical creation story, one that Abraham and his contemporaries understand, while in fact "Let there be light" was actually the Big Bang. Just because I evolved from single-celled organisms does not mean that my whole existence and place in the universe was not planned by God.

I have also heard the notion (not in church, not in synagogue, not in a mosque, but from scientists) that there is a real design and real purpose to the universe. Design in this construction proves divine intent. Design in this techno-spiritual construction exists prior to consciousness. The universe is manufactured, it is engineered, and Stuart's philosophical meanderings all of a sudden do not seem to be that far-fetched.

KAREN: So what comes first, language or consciousness?

STUART: Does it matter?

Karen: You're kidding.

STUART: There is a design to the world. Chaos theory is not anarchy, it is ordered.

### **HANGING WITH THE HIGH PRIESTS OF SCIENCE**

I was invited to a lecture by a professor, who wants to remain nameless, and who didn't even want me to give her a pseudonym. I went to meet her on her campus, knowing—or actually hoping—that the discussion probably had nothing to do with *Star Trek* (which was a naive leap of faith on my part). Actually, I thought it was a political treatise utilizing chaos theory as a metaphor. Yet, as I listened, I realized that the speaker (who fit my vision of what a professor ought to look like—so much for stereotypes!) was illuminating the audience (literally). For the speaker, chaos theory demonstrated the proof of God. The patterns were (are) a means to provide an opening for God to act in the universe. So, if God intervenes in the chaos of quantum particle theory, is this liberation theology for the molecular set? If God can intervene in physics (a higher-ordered science), I wonder what force intervenes in critical pedagogy? "What did you learn from the lecture?" asked the Trekker professor. I was about to tell her my limited (not

liminal) understandings (which I described before), when she said, “God is present in the wormholes, which is what the Bejorans knew all along.” Dumbfounded, I had no quick or witty retorts. We both buttoned up our coats to face the divine winds that blew outside. And I listened, and I heard:

Everything is real—yeah. Everything is reality; in other words, there is no “unreal” universe next to our real one. It’s all real—tautologically (or analytically) real—contained in the definition. (Or, as we are reminded in the *Book of Python*, “the beast is molting, the fluff gets up your nose”). Where it gets really muddy is looking hard at the word *real* itself—or *being*. It’s such a ridiculously big word hiding lots of different and (sometimes contradictory) concepts inside it. There are different kinds of reality: waking experience, dreams, hallucinations, etc. The problem is knowing which is which. Putting Descartes before the horse, there’s the problem of knowing whether your experience is a dream or normal waking reality. Dream and reality seem the same when you’re going through the experience—so how do you know which is which? A wolf is chasing you. In the real world, it’s going to eat you. In a dream it’s a symbol of unresolved father issues. Solution A—run like hell. Solution B—wake up. So, in practical terms, the problem is “what kind of reality is this?”—not “Is this reality?” (because everything is). “What is reality?” boils down to “What do I do?” Run...or wake up? Seeking out new life, etc., the inability to nail down exactly what kind of reality they’re dealing with, is a nice little engine for driving plots. *Star Trek* is best when it gets to this level—which is why discussing TNG and God is not...a loony idea.

### **GRANDFATHERS CALLING OUT FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE**

Three evenings later, I was back in the tiny living room of my apartment in Greensboro, North Carolina. I had transcripts strewn all over the floor, looking and searching for God (in the narratives). I remember the moment well because I turned on the television and QVC was selling the *Trek* bible. I flipped the channel to hear Whoopie Goldberg (on her now-defunct talk show) speaking about the influence *Star Trek* had on her life. I settled in for an evening of televangelists. I saw God on TV, I saw proof of God all over the transcripts.

“Oh, no, you can’t prove the existence of God. But you can prove the existence of a cell, or something tangible. It is in that cell that you find something that is really spiritual,” Janna explained. Clarissa said, “Look, you know who the preservers were. What is the difference between them and God? God codes DNA.” Mike said, “Trek is the same as the Bible; you can find the way, and the truth and the light in the program.” Clarissa knew that “Roddenberry was a humanist. He didn’t believe in religions, but that didn’t mean he didn’t believe in the Higher Order.”

I fell asleep on the floor, my head buried in paper, to the sounds of a bad imitation of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker coming from a local UHF channel. When I woke up in the morning, I left the apartment without even having had my coffee (one of my sacraments). Putting my Mazda in first gear, a voice (in my head) intervened, saying, “Get thee to—not a nunnery, but the library. What I found did provide me with eternal consternation. For example, in 1991, the researchers Levin and Vanderpool reviewed more than three hundred articles demonstrating a link between religion and physical health (Wuthnow, 1976).

In Connecticut, *espiritusitas* have been employed by hospitals. Studies correlate prayer with healing. There is even a successful (at least commercially) diet program in which people pray themselves thin. Several years ago, an anthropologist associated with Yale University documented the existence of zombies. Ethnographies of the miraculous throughout academic literature focus on everything from snake handlers (who drink poison and survive) to infirmities cured at revival meetings. There was an abundance of material on the subject. Two seemingly disparate discourses wedded and became one.

As conferences continue to take place for theologians and scientists to discuss their mutual interests, as connections between the applied sciences and ecclesiastical expressions continue to be forged, different realities emerge. Having been placed in the paradoxical position of defending the Enlightenment, once again I find myself in a peculiarly unreasonable position, defending reason. It has been almost impossible for me to rectify it theoretically and ethically. Reason needs to be reconceptualized. Not everything can be thrown into the semiotic stew of relativism. Reason may be unreasonable, but mystic physics combined with the reactionary product of postmodernism breeds a machine-fetishized version of reactionary conservatism, a postmodern pornographic display on a virtual screen. If Foucault could objurgate “enlightenment blackmail forcing one to take a stand for or against rationality” (Best, 1995:264), we must also consider postmodern blackmail, or holistic blackmail, which is just as totalizing.

I began to think of my grandfather. Everything for him was reduced to political economy; a rose for him by any other name was social class. I thought of the sloganeering and sound bites that proclaimed that Marxism was dead, as dead as my red-faced, red-diapering grandpa.

When Reagan entered into the public sphere, a crusader for all that is ahistorical, he sought to have us all forget what he could not individually remember. So, the Cold War was over, prosperity loomed. Ideology was divorced from discourse, and discourse was certainly divorced from social class. "Discourses are never tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy" (Foucault, 1981:10). Trek is not a weird version of the religious; science is not divorced from the religious; they are both tied to the same hegemonic strategy. They both speak of a search for truth, a truth that continually privileges hierarchy. In these "classic" Western epistemologies, forms of truth enlighten only a few and serve only a few.

The divine wind I felt on leaving the lecture on the campus, with the anonymous Trekker professor so long ago, was not divine. In a globalized terrain of demoniac, furious capitalism, it was the phantom of globalization that loomed on the horizon. Globalization brings differing religious spheres into contact. Certainly, through the mystical, the problematics of ecumenism are crossed (the pun is intentional), as elements of different worldviews and traditions are incorporated in a supermarket sweep, where meaning is encountered through constant consumption. The rise in new religious movements is something that is much more tied to political economy than to spirituality. Religion, which previously was imposed by authority (by birthright or by nation-state), now needs to be marketed to a target audience, sold to clientele that can choose to buy it or buy into it if the religion fits their worldview or their lifestyle. Religious institutions have become marketing agencies, and the religious traditions are consumer commodities. A competitive market for religion has emerged.

In the mall of the religious, I can take elements from Christianity and combine them with Zen and with science. I can pray to a personal god, where immanence may well be stressed far before transcendence. I can use what is appropriate for me to feel good (for desire means everything in the commodified world) and gives me meaning (more than a tad bit narcissistic). I can reject those elements that have no meaning for me at all. Therefore, angels are fine, aliens are fine, and *Star Trek* is fine, too. The spiritual zeitgeist of post-Fordism has us all worshipping at the altar of consumption. A world in which there is no big difference between

what is real or hyperreal—is it ephemeral or eternal? Each word in the endless data stream of information consumption is tangentially related to every other word, and each word at least ostensibly carries the possibility for equal weight, or equal air time (provided it fits well, and fits me individually like a comfortable glove). Critical reading (which would seem to be what is needed to make sense of the competing discourses screeching in constant crescendo) is silenced under the confusion of capitalist expansion with democratic justice. The endless variety produces a pan-nihilism, a new fundamentalism in which the customer is *always* right (and, yes, that was another intentional pun). “The religion of Madison Avenue is a slickly packaged and well researched blend of doctrine and sacrament” (Laurel, 1983:141). I may not have to go to Lourdes, but I can turn on my television set and watch my daily devotionals.

Network TV has the same problems as the public school system. Anything created therein has to please a broad-based audience (which usually means it gets watered down). On subject of religion, *Star Trek* isn't a secular-humanist forced march into a godless future. First of all, *Star Trek* is always moral. Secondly, I believe in morality because I see how immorality is destroying us as a society. Religious people always get something out of *Star Trek*. So, it goes after nonreligious people and deals with religious issues in nonreligious ways, making nonreligious people religious in the moral sense. On our journeys on the *Enterprise*, they need to remain nonpartisan and secular, so that everyone is included, and every possible belief system is included. That is the basis of the IDIC. The IDIC is the Vulcan philosophy I live by, and much of the IDIC was Gene Roddenberry. (Lillia, a preschool teacher)

As I turn on my computer and see my dogma played out on a hyperreal terrain, I can pray at the altar of consumption of electronic chimeras. “I get the answers from *Star Trek*; it functions like a Bible for me, except it is not the Bible, it is not hocus-pocus or mumbo jumbo, it is real, it is science, and it is truth.” “Why don't you just turn on your modem and listen?” I did. “I watch the seventy-nine episodes for scriptural understanding. Have you seen them all? Do you know what they mean? ... *Star Trek* asks us to listen closely to the words that are so important. It is through them that we can reach real human understanding. And if that is salvation so be it.”



## PAPA, DAD, AND THE GREAT BIRD OF THE GALAXY

Twelve thousand teens converged on Willmar, Minnesota, in July 1998. They dressed the same as teens do anywhere else, with clothes ranging “from grunge to punk, complete with tattoos and navel rings. Some... had Christian symbols such as crosses and fishes cut out of their hair, or wore T-shirts with a Generation X spin on crucifixion: Body piercing saved my life” (Hogan-Albach, 1999:50). “Jesus is the icon of choice on T-shirts and tote bags on Toronto’s Queen Street West” (Nolen, 1999: 2). In Fort Wayne, Indiana, kids whooped and shouted for the rock band DC (i.e., Decent Christian) formed by three young men who met while students at Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University. “It’s in cities like this—Ottawa, Iowa; Becton, Texas; Kearney, Nebraska—that a low-intensity cultural revolution is taking place. And while this mission to post-Christian America has thus far stayed below the radar of the nation’s cultural and political establishments, it is hard to fully understand the late-twentieth-century USA’ (Scott, 1996:49) without recognizing that residing in this “hard core music for hard core Christians” (Hogan-Albach, 1999:50) is the same impulse as *Star Trek*.

Christian music makes it “not so nerdy to be a Christian” (Hogan-Albach, 1999:50), much as *Star Fleet* makes it “not nerdy to be a Trekker.” There is a sense of community, breaking through layers of anomie in a mass-marketed religious celebration of iconography and identity.

In Mexico, the pope received a not too holy nickname, “the potato chip pope,” because of the level of marketing that surrounded his fourth visit to the nation. Sabritas, a popular snack company (a subsidiary of Pepsi-Cola), created “special commemorative bags of chips wrapped in a yellow ribbon emblazoned with the Vatican’s coat of arms” (Ferriss, 1999). The faithful can collect lilliputian photographs of the pope, as well as nine other religious figures, for the price of a bag of chips. If I want God, I can eat the chips (a mass-marketed form of communion). “A cartoon in the Mexico City newspaper *La Jornada* lampooned the campaign with a caricature of the pope asking, with so many commercial messages, will I have time for the divine word?” (Ferriss, 1999). *Papa* in Spanish means both “potato” and “pope,” so it seems the divine word is not only spread but deep-fried.

The Mexican archdiocese admitted looking for ways to reach the Mexican people, and they approached Sabritas. Sabritas was honored to spread the word (it was good for business). Pepsi (the parent company of

Sabritas) erected billboards in Mexico City to promote the pope's visit, declaring "Mexico, always Faithful" (Ferriss, 1999). An interesting twist on the Pepsi Generation. Indeed, what papal visit could be complete without commercials (it's good for business) one of which features a

truck...driver [whose] tire blows out during a rain storm. He slams the door of his truck...his rosary beads fall from his rearview mirror.... A hand in vestments calmly retrieves the rosary beads.... The camera cuts to the back of a bent, almost ghostly figure obviously supposed to be the pope walking along the road. (Ferriss, 1999)

Cardinal Norberto Rivera explained the archdiocese's position: "We live in an era of publicity, and we are men of this era" (Ferriss, 1999), which might explain why monks have left behind their quill pens and (like Hale-Boppers) have entered into the world of high technology.

The Electronic Scriptorium is an agency based in Leesburg, Va., that contracts with nuns and monks to create computer archives for newspapers, libraries and museums. While providing a small income on a flexible schedule for the often reclusive religious communities, the jobs also take advantage of the monastics' 1,000-year-old reputation for accuracy and intelligence. "It really appealed to us because it seems right in line with what monks and nuns have been doing for centuries," said Sister Zita Wenker, a nun at a priory in this town outside Philadelphia and one of 60 monastics from around the country who helped computerize captions for some 2 million photos in the New York Daily News archives. "To me, it felt like going full circle...in having the monks using this tradition in transmitting to the future," said Rodica Preda of the Frick Collection in New York City. (Brown, 1998)

At one point in time, monasteries did not need agents or agencies, but they are finding that there is competition from larger commercial entities. Anachronistic marketing techniques just did not fit in, and so, "being men of the era," they contracted with others to provide the publicity for their labors. As one Protestant minister explained, "Our culture doesn't have much to say, but they know how to say it! The church has everything to say, but we don't know how to say it" (Dooley, 1996).

What is the difference between a Jesus shirt and a Spock shirt? Between *God: A Biography about Jesus* and the biography of the Great Bird of the Galaxy: Gene Roddenberry? Jesus sells because “he’s really big,” and Trek sells because it is very big.

Star Trek fandom is like religion in another important way: It’s generated fabulous wealth for a chosen few. More than \$500 million worth of books, magazines, T-shirts, Spock ears and assorted Trek drek have been sold in the past 25 years. (Morin 1994)

Because the United States has no state-sponsored religion, there are no secular benefits to be gained from membership in a particular church. Religious subjectivity is a commodified illusion influenced by highly individuated and personal desire. There is no coercion (inquisitions) to believe, so churches market to the masses, becoming “salesmen for the Lord” (Scott, 1996:46), looking out for that bottom line, that hook that will bring the faithful into the fold. God may be the answer, but “for religion to exist in contemporary life, it has to exist in the media and public spheres” (Stewart Hoover, a professor of media studies at the University of Colorado and author of *Mass Media Religion*, quoted in Apodaca, 1998). To successfully spread the gospel, “marketing and PR principles rule the day” (Apodaca, 1998).

### DO IT MY WAY

*Had he lived a thousand years ago, Gene would be as revered by society then as he is today, for his special genius would have been recognized in any culture, in any time. Gene held up a mirror for us to examine ourselves, to see the best and worst, to understand that we could be better than we are”*

—DAVID ALEXANDER,  
*STAR TREK CREATOR*, 1994

Religion also provides an identity within community, something that addresses the anomie and ennui of an increasingly isolated world crowded with people. “I found a community of people who understood me; I realized that I was not alone.” “Star Trek has given me a sense of identity, a purpose. I see the meaning of my life from my work with

Star Fleet.” “What a joy it was to find intelligent people who could discuss the world in an intelligent fashion without the nonsense of traditional religion, which does not provide the answers.” The answers were provided on the screen, the electronic chimera of salvation.

Copious numbers of religious sites exist on the Internet. There are so many religious sites that they rival the number of Star Trek sites, hate group sites, and pornographic sites. Actually, if I were to add Star Trek sites to the religious sites, there would be quantifiably more Websites devoted to that “theological formation” than to sites of naked women (or naked women to please every fetish imaginable). Religious Websites on the net address everything from techo-spirituality and “loving your computer” to methods for integrating theology into cyberspace to the use of the Internet as an evangelical tool. Kent L. Norman, on the Concerned Christian Website, (<http://www.concernedchrstian.com>) writes that his essays “are offered, as it were, to any passerby Christian or atheist, Moslem or Jew, Cyreian or Vulcan.” *Diakona* is a theological expression in which the word is brought to the people, where the people are (Rogerson, 1998). “We go where we know we will be seen. Maybe the uniforms carry it a bit far, but they know who we are and they know the good works we do, and if not we explain to them what Star Trek is about.” When Paul (the apostle) presents himself as a *diakoni* (servant) he conveys the idea that God has trusted him with a message (Rogerson, 1998). It is his responsibility, his calling from above, a duty given by the divine to act as an agent for God’s words. For *diakoni*, the medium is not the message (aka McLuhan), the medium is the messenger. For a generation “conceived in the sights and sounds of media culture, weaned on it, socialized by the glass teat of television, used as a pacifier, baby sitter and educator for whom media culture, was a natural background and constitutive part of everyday life” (Kellner, 1995:36), only the media can carry the message. “What the Bible does in 66 books, *Star Trek* does in 79 episodes,” says Jeffrey Mills, who has taught courses at several colleges on the cultural relevance of *Star Trek*” (Morin, 1994). “I think all of the characters, all of the actors recognize that they have a special responsibility to the fans, and to *Star Trek*. It is not a responsibility taken lightly,” explained Tom Eroba, a history teacher in Colorado. Clara Fielder maintains that “the actors do understand that they are there to provide inspiration and show us what Roddenberry wanted. If they cannot accept that responsibility, then they shouldn’t have the honor of being on the program. They are messengers, after all.”

At Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a seminar in 1995 focused on the religion of and in *Star Trek*. Robert Bowman explains:

Star Trek offers a new myth, one tailored for scientifically minded Westerners.... Star Trek has a lot to say about God, humanity, war, sex, ethics, and similar topics.... Star Trek does well is to ask good, penetrating questions about truth, God, man, and the world. It forces us to look at ourselves in fresh ways by taking the questions of life that we face daily and addressing them in a fictional, futuristic cultural context. If it is too much to ask that it should also supply the answers, we may be grateful for the entertaining way in which it asks the questions. (*Christian Research Institute Journal*, 1991:20)

The questions or parables ask profoundly theological questions, framed in an allegorical fashion. In a world where the medium is the messenger, digitalized diakonas spread the gospel to nomads searching for something or somebody. “What is all this cosmic circuitry for? What, if anything, is the message of the Ultimate Dispatcher?” asked Katlyn. “Can’t our spiritual existence be more expansive? After all, if God is the force of universal process and is in every molecule, every atom, why shouldn’t God be in Star Trek and why shouldn’t that be in my computer?” Apparently *he* is. He has to be, but merely coming to you from the computer would be senseless. The message *he* sends needs to make sense culturally, historically, and materially.

### SERMONS FOR THE MASSES

I am coming to you today as a Director of Religious Education, a Unitarian Universalist and a Trekker. On this 30th anniversary of Star Trek, it is as a religious educator that I want to talk about Star Trek.... First, my Star Trek credentials: After my missionary parents retired, I returned to the United States at the age of 14 only 2 weeks after the last new show of the original *Star Trek* series. I found *Classic Trek* after it went into syndication in the 70s. Eventually, I became hooked. Two of my son’s first words were “Captain Picard” of the second series. After I married the second time, my husband, son and I honeymooned at the first Star Trek convention the state of Maine ever had. I have taught Star Trek to all ages, from elementary school children and earnest

seminary graduate students to our beloved elders. Star Trek's... vision has covered a lot of ground in its 30 years, from race riots and Watergate to U.S./China détente and the fall of the Soviet Union. Now, instead of mentally arguing with my definition of theology here, take a rest and just add your definition to mine. For me, theology is whatever belief system you use to get you through dark times. That's all. For me then, Star Trek Theology is how Star Trek illustrates humanist and UU experience that will get you through your nights. I can easily tell you what Star Trek Theology IS NOT. The Star Trek trivia kings and queens can tell you how to remodulate main reflector dishes, how to reconfigure lateral sensor arrays, how to decompile pattern buffers and how to verify Heisenburg compensators. Those folks tend to love the trees, but miss the forest. Star Trek theology is all about the comfort to be drawn from that forest. Gene Roddenberry, the father of Star Trek, saw it as a political, social, racial and human philosophy.... Let me share with you some of what Roddenberry said about that. In response to a question about fundamentalists, Gene said that to solve our problems we do not have to rely on simplistic answers. We could, instead, see things through. His grandmother greatly influenced his ethical growth by teaching him this: If you believe in humanity, you have to be patient and give ALL the chance to realize who they are and what they can be.... In an interview before his death, he was asked how he would like to be remembered. In response, he talked of the "fierce pride" he had in who we were as humans and what we could do if we set our minds to it. He really did believe that we humans were pretty special and had great potential to solve our own problems. For Gene, Star Trek represented what we could be if we believed in ourselves and our abilities to problem solve. Part of this vision involved turning from violence to respect, negotiation and compromise in the face of conflict. To make a long story short, our goal is to choose logic over violence. In Roddenberry's cosmology, to be a human and a humanistic means to strive for honesty, the acceptance of imperfections, and the goal of a better world. Finally, the lessons of Star Trek have had a profound effect on the generations involved in religious education. Gene Roddenberry and his Star Trek vision provide a common language for religious education in a society with a shrinking number of common icons and experiences.

On May, 4, 1997 a Sunday Sermon online read

One of my favorite movies is *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*. For those of you who haven't seen it, it's about how the earth, in the movie, is being critically damaged by an orbiting space probe. After consulting with Spock, Captain Kirk theorizes along with Spock that since the probe's transmissions are being directed towards earth's oceans that the probe, when the humpback whale became extinct, came to earth to find out why they lost contact with the whales. Then Kirk told Spock to calculate for time travel. McCoy argued with Kirk that it was a stupid idea to go back in time, pick up two humpback whales, and bring them forward in time to tell the probe what to do with itself. To which Captain Kirk replied, "If you have a better idea, now is the time."

Later in the story, as Kirk was talking with the present-day marine biologist, he said that man's shortsightedness, when he was hunting the whales to extinction, was causing his own extinction. It's amazing that the things that could make life better for us are right in front of our faces and we don't even realize it. The Bible and our faith in God. God has taught us that if we look upon him in our times of need and strife, that he will heal our affliction and blanket us in the warmth of his love. We are often so shortsighted that we spend large amounts of energy trying to attain a happy state, when all we really have to do is look deep within ourselves and we often find that the strength, comfort, and security that we are so desperately searching for is right there, in our hearts. God gave us a life and how we choose to live it depends on us. If we run from here to there, not paying any attention to what is right in front of us, we often lose sight of what we are really trying to attain. And what is that, you ask? Well, what is it that we want? We want security, comfort, we want to retire early, and we want our kids supported financially through college. But is running around like chickens with our heads cut off the answer to all this? I don't believe so. I believe that we have to ask the Lord for the answers to what will make us happy, because there is no one better to tell us what we need to do, in order to enrich our lives. God is the answer.

The Reverend Scott McClelland of Orange County, California, refers to his sermons as "Beam Me Down, Scotty," and calls forth by way of time warp Luke of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John fame (McGraw,

1994). Down the highway a bit, at Christ Church by the Sea, the church-sponsored day care center has a Starship replica built by Steven De Lacy, a long-time fan, to allow the children's "normally active imaginations to soar" (Laviola, 1989) to greater heights. Fiametta has been a public school teacher in Costa Mesa for more than 25 years. She is proud of her garden, proud of her "kids" and really proud of the vacation Bible school based on *Star Trek* she began at about the same time she began an elementary school science program that was entirely *Star Trek* based. When I met her, she was fretting over a report coming from the United Kingdom, where "some questioned a school's *Star Trek* Nativity play," wondering if it was in the best taste to beam up "the Christ child like that" (French, 1995). "Especially with all the diversity stuff coming from all of the immigration, I was going to make a *Trek* Nativity play for the holidays at my school this year; therefore, it would be entirely secular."

On the other coast, at Temple Sinai of Hollywood, Florida, the sermon for Saturday morning (*parshat vayislach* 5757) focused on—yes, you guessed it—*Star Trek*. I was told by several *Trek* teachers that there is a prize given out in the Anglican church for the sermon of the year. The Trekkers beamed with pride, knowing an Anglican minister used the example of Mr. Spock from the original *Star Trek* series, with a mention of the USS Enterprise, to illustrate the main thesis. Proudly, the speaker extolled, "As a result, *Star Trek* will now be in the official record of the Anglican church for as long as the archives exist." I asked May-Lynne if she liked that idea. "Oh, yes, I do!... It gives *Star Trek* the legitimacy that it really really deserves." "For me," Doreen sighed, "as someone who suffers from a disability which causes me a great deal of pain, tremendous pain that cannot even be helped by medicine, *Star Trek* has been the vehicle for my escape. I find hope there." Doreen got up slowly and deliberately as if to accent her physical agony.

Indeed, when in this world I find myself with little or no hope, *Star Trek* is not just entertainment. There is always a message, important messages, which redeem us always. He had a vision and so much more. (Claudia)

"I wanted something to believe in and found *Star Trek*. We're going to be part of a greater event. We're not just stuck on this little ball in space forever," Marantha explained. "The philosophy of *Star Trek* is what spoke to me," Harmon said. "Infinite diversity and infinite collaboration" (Steelman, 1998). Mike Wagar, who prefers to be called



Klingon Commander K’Logh Vstai K’Agar, has been a *Star Trek* fan since the original series “because I like its point of view. To boldly go where no man has gone before. That’s a good metaphor for the world. Rather than fighting one another, we should come together and explore new territories. People laugh at me sometimes, but I believe in this stuff, but maybe we’re the ones who are right and everyone else is weird” (Haysom, 1997). “Look,” said Jenna, “I respect and tolerate your beliefs; now please be so kind enough to tolerate mine.”

### TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR

During the evening on the same hilltops as both the Theosophists and the Heaven’s Gaters, you can see twinkling lights in the sky. It is the headquarters of the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Conceived from a “divinely inspired” vision in its founders den, the headquarters looks like a cross between “Disneyland’s Sleeping Beauty Castle and a Middle Eastern Palace” (Apodaca, 1998). As you ascend a vast marble and brass staircase, there is a fifteen-foot-tall “statue of Michael the Archangel stomping the head of Satan. Behind is a high-definition video theater with a 48-channel sound system and a state-of-the-art television studio” (Apodaca, 1998). The headquarters also touts a “virtual reality recreation of Jerusalem’s Via Doloroso, where Jesus is believed to have taken his final walk” (Apodaca, 1998). Richard and Marion Alf made a pilgrimage to TBN. “This is just lovely... I’m sure the Lord would be pleased with it,” Mrs. Alf said. Her son Dan, who lives in Long Beach, California, added “It’s very Versace” (Apodaca, 1998).

Several hundred miles away, in the glittering lights of Las Vegas, stands the Star Trek Experience, a 65,000-square-foot, \$70 million mecca for Trekkers. The attraction celebrates “the rich history, traditions and values inherent in Star Trek” (<http://www.startrekeperience.com>). As you descend into the hallways of “The Experience,” your voyage begins with a self-guided “history of the future.”

With this attraction, Paramount Parks is bringing to life the one “virtual” adventure millions of Americans have shared for more than 30 years—Star Trek,” said Jane Cooper, president of Paramount Parks. “At Star Trek: The Experience, visitors will be “beamed up” to the world of Star Trek where—for the first time ever—they can dine, shop and play in the 24th century. It’s a 20th

century dream come true 350 years ahead of its time. (<http://www.startrekexperience.com>)

“For me,” said Clara, “it was a special experience; it was much more incredible than anything I had ever seen. I could sense I was there, it was different than a con, words cannot describe how it felt to be there.”

## HUMANIST MANIFESTOS AND DIVINITY

*To me the whole joy and glory of Jesus is the fact that he is one of us.... The whole statement of the New Testament is, “Hey man you can too, because I was born like you, I died like you. There’s nothing special about me that’s not special in you. And I’m offering you both.” ... The divinity thing is bullshit because they’ve taken away from the glorious divine message that he kept saying over and over again. Divine, yes. But so are we.*

—RODDENBERRY, QUOTED IN SWEENY (1995)

*The last interview that “he” [Roddenberry] did on the 25th Anniversary tape of the show is considered gospel by hard-core Trekkers. It is the word from “the Mount.” Of course, he died several months after he made it. Captain Kirk or Leonard Nimoy, all the original characters are considered prophets. Then you have the disciples on the Next Generation. That is the way the hard-core Trekkers see it. And you don’t want to get into a conversation with them unless you really know what you are talking about ‘cause they’ll shoot you down in a minute*

—FROM A TREKKER TEACHER’S NARRATIVE

*I perceive everything through Gene Roddenberry’s eyes; his vision is mine!*

—FROM A TREKKER TEACHER’S NARRATIVE

People do construct meaning from and through *Star Trek*. Gene Roddenberry, the Enterprise’s creator, is a central focus in Trekllore. He is inserted into the Trekttext, and interpreted by Trekkers because *Star Trek* was Roddenberry’s idea; the show emerged from his imagination. During his lifetime, he carefully constructed the program and his image

(see Kozinets, 1998; Engel, 1994; Alexander, 1990) ensuring that the thrust and tenor of the show would be attributed directly to him.

The image of Gene Roddenberry as a contemporary social satirist, prophetic visionary and futuristic philosopher has had a remarkable impact on the *Star Trek* culture. While fans acknowledge the collaborative aspect of the show's production process, they still ascribe primary responsibility for the genius of the show to Roddenberry. (Kozinets, 1996: <http://www.clo.com/~rvk>)

Gene Roddenberry nurtured that vision, adapting and fixing his autobiography to fit the emerging text surrounding the program. It was brilliant marketing. If something in the program "text" is incongruous or problematic, "using Roddenberry as the principle of explanation directs fans to displace their discomfort with aspects of the series ...or aspects of the artifacts" (Kozinets, 1996) onto other agents, who can be anyone that surrounded "the creator," ranging from Paramount to the new producers.

They took this great vision and squashed it. This is not Rick Berman's philosophy, it is Gene Roddenberry's philosophy, and he did not remain true to what he was trusted to do. What if I did that with the kids I teach? What would happen? But this is really even worse 'cause it has to do with a way of life, a philosophy of the world that can change the world.

You need to get beyond the factors of the program which are not Roddenberry. It might require a deeper reading and tremendous insight and knowledge. You need to know enough *Star Trek* to separate out the noise that comes from those who took over *Star Trek* and made it just a money-making machine for Paramount. That had nothing to do with Gene.

Roddenberry always identified himself as a humanist. He was a contributor to *Humanist* magazine and a donor to humanistic causes. The irony is that for years fundamentalists have considered secular humanism a religion that is "preached" in public schools. Given the interpretations of *Star Trek* I heard throughout the interviews with Trekker teachers, the fundamentalists are not entirely wrong. The Trekker teachers use the word *humanist* as one of their mantra expressions:

It is humanist. *Star Trek* celebrates all humanoid life forms. We are all one race really—the human race. Roddenberry’s humanist beliefs are apparent every time I turn on my TV. (Trekker teacher)

Marantha asked me a question that was clearly rhetorical in tone. “Did you ever notice that the Humanist insignia and the Star Trek symbol are the same?” She took out both pins from her jewelry box, “See! They are the same! Star Trek is humanism.” As she continued to speak, she also kept touching her pins and pointing to the pictures of varying *Star Trek* characters and of Roddenberry on her wall. “It is not really hidden; it is very apparent. In *Star Trek*, you see an accurate portrayal of our society, and you see the truth of life; it gives you answers.” Well, I found my answer to Marantha’s query on Gene Roddenberry’s son’s Website Philosophysphere.

I wore my Happy Humanist pin again today and once again somebody said it looked like a Star Trek symbol. Would somebody please take a crack at my question? Whenever I wear my Happy Humanist pin someone says, “Where’d you get the Star Trek pin?” OK, Gene Roddenberry was a Secular Humanist and the British Humanist came up with the Happy Humanist symbol one year before *Star Trek* started but is there any connection beyond mere coincidence? (anonymous posting)

I decided to call Stuart and ask him.

KAREN: Stuart, is humanism a religion? Is humanism the expression of *Star Trek*?

STUART: Yes and no! Do you need a God for religion? Of course not. Does humanism imply a faith in human beings? Yes. Are there Trekkers who are humanists? Of course. Remember Gene Roddenberry was a humanist. Are there humanists who are not Trekkers? Well, obviously they have not been enlightened.

### FROM THE GREAT BIRD HIMSELF

As for Gene Roddenberry, he always spoke ambivalently about religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Every Sunday we went to church—Baptist church.... I listened to the sermon, and I remember complete astonishment because what they were talking about were things that were just crazy. It was communion time, where you eat this wafer and are supposed to be eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood. My first impression was, *“This is a bunch of cannibals they’ve put me down among!”* For some time I puzzled over why they were saying these things, because the connection between what they were saying and reality was very tenuous. *How the hell did Jesus become something to be eaten? I guess from that time, it was clear to me that religion was largely nonsense—largely magical, superstitious things.* (Alexander, 1991:6)

Roddenberry was born in a particular time (1921) and place (Texas) and worldview (fundamentalist Christianity). His reaction to religion is tied to the ethos out of which his reaction emerged. He did not shed his history as a snake would shed its skin. He did not disregard his background; he reacted to it! The use of the communion metaphor is very evocative of this dialectical relationship. Roddenberry understood communion as a form of cannibalism, not a joining or bonding of people. His literal interpretation seems somewhat serendipitous because he was a writer, self-proclaimed philosopher, and creator of the Trek universe, who (I was told time and time again) used metaphor as a way to bring his message to the people.

I was born into a supernatural world in which all my people—my family usually said, “That is because God willed it,” or gave other supernatural explanations for whatever happened. When you confront those statements on their own, they clearly don’t make sense. They are clearly wrong. You need a certain amount of proof to accept anything, and that proof was not forthcoming. (Alexander, 1991:8)

Roddenberry’s proof becomes a textual commandment of “the word” when reinterpreted in the eyes of the Trekker faithful. “The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy puts it: Holy Scripture being God’s own Word written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit of infallible divine authority in all matters which it touches.... Being holy and verbally God-given, Scripture is without err or fault in its teaching” (Nord, 1995:50).

Marantha states, “I have lived a life that strives to live up to the ideals that Gene has presented us with; his vision has shaped my life and made it and me what I am today. I adhere religiously to the principles he set forth.”

*Star Trek* speaks to basic human needs. We have things to be proud of as humans. No, ancient astronauts did not build the pyramids. Human beings built them because they’re clever and they work hard. The power of Gene Roddenberry’s vision was that humanity achieved on its own; we could obtain it and see it as real. He saw it, he wrote it, we watched it, and now we live it. Roddenberry as a humanist didn’t believe in God. Neither do I. I see him as a philosopher. That is different. He knew the truth. So we follow. (Trekker teacher)

And Roddenberry (the lifelong humanist) proclaimed: “As nearly as I can concentrate on the question today, I believe I am God; certainly you are, I think we intelligent beings on this planet are all a piece of God, are becoming God.”

When Kirk behaved in a way the inhabitants found peculiar—such as stammering out his ignorance of every cultural norm on the planet—they inquired with great politeness: Are you of The Body? This ought to be the standard greeting of one “Star Trek” fan to another. “Trek” fandom is The Body. It’s a strange and insular place of slavish devotion, peopled with earnest nerds in cheap homemade costumes. It’s a religion, complete with a fully stocked pantheon: Series creator Gene Roddenberry is the Great Lawgiver; Kirk is the Angry Prophet who prepared the way for the Most Serene Captain Jean-Luc Picard. The episodes are Epistles, the seasons spell out the dogma. There is even a group of Trekkers who regard the animated series—a horrid jerky thing Roddenberry sanctioned to keep his myth, and hence his speaking fees, alive—as a sort of apocrypha, stories that should be incorporated into the canon. It borders on the pathetic. I should know. I am of The Body, and have been since childhood. (Lileks, 1993)

“Star Trek shows that we made it! We made it past all the predictions of Armageddon,” Loreli smiles. Amaranta explains,

If you take Star Trek out of our society right now, we don't have any answers to the future, we have nothing! With Trek, we can change the nihilistic tide, that is, if we believe in the possibility. There is possibility...there's a Vulcan someplace running around who is going to show up here with a friend and crash-land in the lake. And somebody's going to say that he'll come back in 40 or 50 years with a ship full of them. Now that's a possibility, and that possibility can make the difference between death and life in some people!

Julia believes that "Gene is an alien and will come back for us." She worries that with the nihilism that surrounds us, which is pushed upon us all by a "new world order," Roddenberry might "not like what he sees."

I called Stuart and asked him what he thought.

STUART: Apocalypse always equals desire. Lots of dialogue and diatribes about portentous signs foreboding the apocalypse—you know, black helicopters, universal barcodes, Nostradamus, the Age of Aquarius, and European unification. Modern conspiracy theorizing is another metanarrative, one big giant unified apocalyptic fable, ending in thermonuclear extinction followed by redemption.

KAREN: And what does that mean in terms of *Star Trek*? (I also thought to myself that I had read this somewhere, in an article. I begin to wonder if this Trekker philosopher king was doing some philosophical plagiarism.)

STUART: You can embrace the apocalyptic or embrace the nihilistic, the choice is yours.

As an undercurrent of history, apocalypticism is always with us. It is present throughout civilization, just as much as spiritual expression is always there. *Star Trek* discusses how people should behave. It puts an order to the chaos, or it readies us for apocalypse. We misdefine *apocalypse* anyway. Why don't I e-mail you? I want to send you some quotes from *White Noise*.

KAREN: Fine. (I go to my computer and turn on the modem.)

STUART (writes): Delivered to you via the holy modem...(quoting from DeLillo's *White Noise*): "Give yourself up to

it, Believe in it. They'll insert you in a gleaming tube, irradiate your body with the basic stuff of the universe, or you can always get around death by concentrating on the life beyond," or one can put oneself under one spell or another to help one forget death...

The vast and terrible depth.

Of course.

The inexhaustibility.

I understand.

The whole huge nameless thing.

Yes, absolutely.

The massive darkness.

Certainly, certainly.

The whole terrible endless hugeness.

I know exactly what you mean (285–288).

KAREN (*writes*): I don't know what you mean!

STUART (*writes*): "Watch this week's *Deep Space Nine* and you will, but meanwhile stop taking the apocalypse so cynically.

KAREN (*writes*): Stop playing *Waiting for Godot!*

STUART (*writes*): I'm not. I am waiting for Roddenberry. Actually, there is a choice. You will always have spirit, you will always have apocalypse, or nihilism. Why not throw your chips in with Trek? It makes more sense than anything else.



## CHAPTER 3

# Intermezzo for NASA, Star Fleet, the Armed Services, and Giant Corporations in B Sharp

*Will the Gulf War be the likely prototype for the battlefields of tomorrow? asked a recent episode of Nova. If you can't wait for the next crisis to find out, for now you can play G-Police in the comfort of your living room.*

—CORSON, 1998:11

*Trek shows us the military as it should be, as it can be. Star Trek is a way for me to accomplish in my living room what I couldn't do in Vietnam, and I certainly cannot do in today's Air Force.*

—MATT, TREKKER TEACHER

*Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have wont to call war a game.*

—JOHAN HUIZINGA  
(IN CROOKALL, 1993:149)

Flashing unremittingly and rhythmically on “Brian Popken’s bright green computer screen is the future of Army training. Call it the silicon drill sergeant” (Moniz, 1997:5). Computer simulation and virtual reality are now a requisite part of military training. In an era of night-vision goggles and smart weapons, graphics-packed, virtually based “computer programs are starting to stand shoulder to shoulder with crew-cut, muscle-packed drill sergeants as the purveyors of the skills and ethos of the U.S. military” (Moniz, 1997:5). There are reasons that the Gulf War was also known as the Nintendo war. Pentagon pictures showing the effects of smart weapons led people to think that we really could win with technology. It made war clean, it made war sanitary, and for a nation whose young people gratefully had not experienced the

horrors of World War II or Vietnam, it made war seem like fun. Just another arcade game. Another silicon drill sergeant, with flashing lights on a computer screen.

Technology—or Treknology, as Trekkers prefer to call it—is essential to the Trek vision and the Trek universe. “Miss a detail, and hardcore Trekkers will go for the jugular,” Marcie explains. Video game after video game takes place aboard one of the Enterprise’s fleet. A CD-ROM with blueprints of the ship’s schemata is a best-seller. Web page after Web page is devoted to very detailed Treknology. There is such an infusion of Trek in professional fields where having more than a modicum of knowledge surrounding high technology is essential. James said the technology “has to be real, it has to seem real, it has to work within the realm of scientific probability.”

Gene Roddenberry and the *Star Trek* writers created a consistent, detailed, compelling, pseudo-scientific basis for their universe. It’s compelling enough that viewers can become obsessed with figuring out how everything works, just as if it really existed. (Boutin, 1997)

“Gene,” Rhonda stated, “always employed scientists and people who worked for NASA, to make sure it was all real.” Scientists like Andre Bormanis joined Paramount (to work for *Star Trek*) after he completed a NASA fellowship at the Space Policy Institute of George Washington University. “He boldly goes where no astrophysicist has gone before, far beyond advising on comets or warp drives” (Highfield, 1996:12). His job, as he describes it, is “everyday, pretty much, I get scripts and revisions for scripts that I read over and check for technical and scientific terminology.... I ensure it is as accurate as we can make it” (Highfield, 1996:12). The accurate technological order parallels the corresponding virtual Treknological terrain. Reality in cyberspace is whatever you want it to be, and those who have access to the workings of the machine in essence become masters of their universe. Trekkers (techies) are in command.

### **TREKNOLOGICAL TRAINING MEETS IN A DESERT STORM**

Trekkers train for Star Fleet in a world that simulates and emulates the military. Trekkers take Star Fleet as seriously as other uniformed branches of military service. I want to make this clear. I am not saying

that Trekkers think of Star Fleet as something imagined because it is not. Trekkers have brought the organization into existence. They are officers in Star Fleet, and they are profoundly loyal to their “service.” Trekkers hold meetings, they move up in rank, and, yes, they even wear uniforms. “Even when I work at the net, on Star Fleet technical manuals and things, you can be assured that I do so in full dress uniform,” John states. “Star Fleet is the future of the military and all of the respect that goes behind the military. There’s a certain amount of dignity that goes along with it.... I’m a commander. I have an attitude that I adopt out of respect to the uniform. The uniform’s respect comes from Gene Roddenberry’s dream...we’re working to make it a reality” (Witham, 1996:11). Laura pushed her glasses down her nose and declared:

Of course, I respect Star Fleet, and believe in it. It is the future. You can see the beginnings of it now in some sectors. That is what we work so hard to accomplish. I do work very hard at this. It is not a joke. We are not crazy. We are respected, able-bodied, fully employed members of our communities. Trekkers are not dweebs or nerds. I am an officer in Star Fleet.... Yes, the future is military. There is nothing wrong with the military. It is a world where respect prevails, and where everyone can rise to his or her ability. But to make it happen, you need the tools to drive the future. That is where technology comes in.

At the same time as Star Fleet prepares us for the future,

Trekkers have reverse-engineered and documented everything from the dilithium crystals to the holographic doctor, while forgetting to change the oil on their real-life cars. Even people who don’t give a hoot about the internals of the office laser printer can explain the Picard Maneuver in detail. The reason is simple: It’s not technology that turns people off—it’s boring technology. Boring technology is why teenagers run screaming from high school chemistry labs and study halls to pursue careers in premarital sex, narcotics wholesaling, and corporate law instead. If the youth of America think that corporate law is more exciting than colliding particles, colliding supernovae, or even colliding with Janet Reno over market share, they obviously need a new image consultant down at the supercollider lab. That’s why Star Trek’s powerful vision of a promising future for mankind is so important (Boutin, 1997)

“It is also up to our students,” Don wanted me to know. “That is why I work with young people. That is why I also work with a junior version of ROTC as well as with Star Fleet. We can develop in students a sense of respect, respect for the uniform, respect for Star Fleet, respect for the IDIC, and give them what their parents oftentimes don’t.”

Especially today with the fall of the Mayberry family, Mom and Dad living together, keeping up with what you’re doing, that really doesn’t exist anymore! My number one rule in my class is do what’s right! I don’t care what anyone else does, if I call you down for doing something, they know not to say: “Well, so and so was doing that.” They know not to say it. I’m not talking to them. I’m talking to you! And kids really like that. They really like having someone to put a sense of order and discipline in their lives, because a lot of them don’t have that.

You know, we are in the what is called “the big butane society.” Maybe it was Paul Newman who said it. This is the throwaway society. That’s one reason I like *Star Trek!* You can’t throw it away. It keeps coming back. And it’s really hardest on our young people. They don’t really have anything solid to hang on to. And if my fifty-minute class is the one solid thing they can hang on to, fine, let ’em hang on to it. They know I’m gonna be here everyday.

My motto, Laura says, is “give a kid information on the IDIC, show him, encourage him, then you can change the whole world.”

### **RED, WHITE, AND FEDERATION BLUES: IT ISN’T BLOOD, IT IS KETCHUP**

Technology and American know-how could conquer all, in much the same way as the Federation fights for truth, justice, and the American way. In a world of warfare, where display, spectacle, and dazzle are of infinite importance, and where computers and information are the single most important element of battle for (Western) armies, our version of warfare is a *Trek* display. During the Gulf War, we were removed from the bloody situation, while we watched what transpired on our television sets. What we saw was the beginning of the age of video game warfare, enjoyed vicariously via remote control on CNN. It was a war to be savored, while you could grab a beer out of the refrigerator and some chips to munch on from the kitchen for the really

*hot spots*. The events mediated through computer graphics often gave us the bomb's-eye view, which in its surreality somehow further insulated US from any engagement with the victims of our smart bombs, or precision targets. It all seemed like one big game. A slam-bam-bang-up send-up, whose purpose ultimately may have been the spectacle or the game itself. "Actually," Mavis said, "it is like a chess game. Strategy is everything." Rhonda tells me:

I have one boy [in my class] who's eight years old and he loves to play chess. Of course, he loves to play Nintendo and all the rest of the junk, too. But he's very good at chess and there is a book, one of the sixty Star Trek pocket books, about a Klingon game that is very similar to chess. Now I read the book, I read it, but it is so far up here, it's like no way on Earth! But this kid has read this book four times! So he went to a Vulcon and saw a three-dimensional chess set like Spock plays. So, he got interested in that, and he is now helping to develop a Klingon gambit game. Now this is this eight-year-old. He has that kind of intelligence. He is simply brilliant, just brilliant, I have a lot of hope for him. I also hope I am not living vicariously.

"That is why Vulcans play chess," Carl explained. "That is why it is important to put on one face and then do what is necessary without giving your hand away." The allure of the game, the illusion like Star Trek, is part of a Trekkoid power formation. As General Schwarzkopf said many times while engaging the Iraqis, "It's hard to read the enemy." I may read my opponent in a poker game (as many of the characters on *Star Trek* do; poker is as big a game on the fleet as chess), but I don't need to read a damn thing during a war, I need to fight. I need to kill. Reading is too polite a metaphor for what I do in armed conflict. "It really all comes down to strategy," I am told by more than one Trekker. It doesn't seem that targets are real human beings, so it isn't a real war. It seems like a video game or paintball or laser tag.

### **PAINT MY DEAD MEN RED**

Paintball expert John Strzepek had warned me of the inherent dangers of the sport, specifically its addictive nature. "You're gonna feel like you're 12 again," he said.

Every sense was heightened as the foghorn announced the start of our first game. Crouched in the desert brush, it was easy for me to understand why some soldiers rush into battle while others are paralyzed by fear. (Morgan, C., 1998).

It is hard to understand why or how soldiers react the way they do in each and every given situation. (Human beings are notoriously unpredictable.) It is particularly hard to know how a soldier feels when you know you can return. You may die in paintball or in laser tag, but you wash it off and live again. Yet, even in the armed forces, laser tag and paintball have become training tools.

They spent the time on “force-on-force” training, engaging enemies with the MILES laser-tag equipment. The 116th was gaining more from the force-on-force exercises...fire would not have been as beneficial. Still, it was a missed opportunity for many of the soldiers to prove their skills with large-scale marksmanship. There was a caption that read “Killed in action” (Clavert, 1998:26)

This is something very different from playing with purple plastic pistols in a backyard. The settings and the way the games are structured are designed to emulate “real battle conditions.” However, in reality, “real battle conditions” oftentimes are not real. This game is really war without mess, empire without casualties, a trope of power.

The moment you arrive at a Leading Concepts Boot Camp, you know you’re screwed. You know it when the only sign of civilization you see at the campsite you will call home for the next four days is a row of Porta-Johns. You know it when a cloud of mosquitoes starts gnawing on your flesh as though they like the insect repellent you’ve sprayed all over your body. And you know it as soon as Dean Hohl and Shane Dozier, the former Army Rangers who own Louisville-based Leading Concepts (LC), start barking orders at you.... When I went through the program with eighteen Domino’s Pizza managers earlier this summer, our days began at the crack of dawn and ended around 2 A.M. We spent much of the intervening time running through the woods and hurling ourselves on the ground to avoid being hit by paint balls, which hurt like hell. We wore Army fatigues and combat boots

and ate Army rations, which have a shelf life of five years.... There's a reason LC clients such as Domino's and Honeywell pony up \$2,300 for each employee they subject to all this. After all, scores of CEOs, ranging from Citicorp's John Reed to NationsBank's Hugh McColl, attribute much of their success in the business world to lessons they learned in the armed forces. A few days in a simulated boot camp, the reasoning goes, might help civilians pick up some of the same teamwork, leadership, and communication skills—TLC in LC lingo—that are routinely engendered by military service.... I'm hard-pressed to find anyone who doesn't give the experience a thumbs up. "From a business standpoint, I'd say I learned as much as I did during my first couple of years in the military," says Chris Crowe, who spent six years in the Marine Corps before becoming the manager of a Domino's in Lacey, Wash.... "In the military, if you're not understood, well, that's when people get killed," he says. "During a boot camp, I see people go from assuming that they're understood to assuming that they're not understood, and taking the time to make sure everyone really hears them." (E.Brown, 1998:291)

The idea of Domino's (a particularly reactionary corporation, headed by Tom Monaghan, who, according to rumors, joined the Michigan Militia, a paramilitary group) and Honeywell Corporation (clearly part of the military-industrial order) sending their executives to boot camp evokes a plethora of images in my mind (some more comical than others). Who are our men in gray flannel suits waging war against? Which corporations, for what reasons, would find military-style war games beneficial for civilian personnel? James said, "In the real world, it is a battle of wits.... The United States military defends us, and protects us from hostile aggressive forces." Who are the US? Corporate capital? Enemies within? Forces like a newspaper reporter in Arizona who wrote:

With so many bullets—or balls—flying in every direction, the difference between living and dying can sometimes seem a random stroke of fate. That's when you find out what you're made of. The field of play at Peoria's Cowtown was a rough rectangle bordered to the east and west by hills and to the north and south by washes. In between were bunkers, desert brush and rows of dark huts with open windows on both sides. In the middle

and on either end of the playing field were three sets of flags, blue and red.

It was an odd feeling to exalt in the figurative killing of another. But my take on the matter was slightly different from a Republic intern, who had this reaction after unloading on my wife with multiple shots at close range. “I was just overcome with kill, kill, kill!” she said.

Coming from a wholesome Iowan, the statement was both funny and disturbing. But I also knew I could relate. Once enveloped in the game, my mind had also wandered to that dark and distant place. When the opponent is in sight, pity takes a back seat. (Morgan, C., 1998)

### **OH, SAY, CAN YOU SEE...MY TELEVISION SCREEN**

Few Americans will have forgotten the remarkable video footage released by the Pentagon in the opening days of the Persian Gulf war in January 1991. Precision-guided munitions (PGM's) performed their tasks with seemingly perfect accuracy, descending chimneys, threading their way through the air shafts of bunkers, and striking the center spans of the narrowest of bridges. In the technology of warfare, it seemed, our military had leapt dramatically ahead of enemies and allies alike. (Bernstein & Libicki, 1998:27)

The Gulf War was entertainment, “total television, a form that merged military and media planning. The Pentagon and its corporate suppliers became the producers and sponsors of the sounds and images, while the ‘news’ became a form of military advertising” (Robins & Levidow, 1995:28). The architect of the Gulf War’s air campaign, Colonel John Warden, said, “Smart weapons revolutionized warfare more than the invention of the rifle” (Corson, 1998:11). And the military continues to revolutionize (itself), in more ways than many of us would care to imagine: playing war games, playing video games, and conflating the real business of war with the virtual world of cyborgia, a cyborg world that is exceedingly Trekklike. The interface between Trekkoid dreams and the prosaic day-to-day life of military service seems very blurry. It becomes even blurrier when branches of Star Fleet have emerged that



are designed and designated exclusively for Trekkers who are in the military. Such as:

The STARFLEET Marine Corps is a component of STARFLEET, whose members include veterans and active duty military as well as people who just prefer a “military flavor” to their Star Trek fan activities. It is in no way a military or paramilitary organization, despite its use of common military terminology.... Members of the STAR-FLEET Marine Corps are dedicated to the very same principles as other members of STARFLEET, to include community service and charity fund raising. However, because so many of our members identify with the real world military and their families, a significant amount of our focus is on organizations that associate with or assist veterans and their families. Good examples are the Army Emergency Relief Fund, the Red Cross, and the annual United States Marine Corps “Toys for Tots” holiday drive. (<http://www.sfi-sfmc.org>)

The bewildering boundaries have become all too real on the virtual war game terrain.

Many Trekkers nonchalantly recounted incidents in which people have mixed up their uniforms, putting on their Star Fleet uniforms rather than their police or military uniforms. During the Whitewater trial, a Trekker was removed from the jury for wearing her uniform. Barbara Adams wore her Star Fleet uniform as a (self-described) act of resistance. The incident highlights a very public version of the uniform (versus costume) obfuscation of the real/hyperreal desert-storming onto the Trekkoid terrain.

BARBARA ADAMS, Former Juror:

[video clip]... I only did it on the same reason or the same way any other officer in a military branch would wear their uniform.

ANNOUNCER:

[voice-over] Why is a Star Trek commander-of-ship off the jury that will soon see the U.S. Commander in Chief on the stand?

GRETA VAN SUSTEREN:

What about if she were a police officer and came in, instead of with a Star Trek uniform, she came in

with a police uniform? Would that be OK?

PAUL ROTHSTEIN:

It holds our country up to ridicule in the world that now our trials—First we have the O.J. case, and now we have a trial where Star Trek seems to be the rule of the day in the trial. It makes it laughable, like Americans cannot tell the difference between what is a television program and what is entertainment and what is a trial....

ADIAM BERHANE, Law Student: Listen to her statement. You know, that's what's really astonishing is the things she has said, like, "This is standard procedure on the *Enterprise*" What *Enterprise*? The one on television? (From CNN, *Burden of Proof*, Transcript Number #119, March 15, 1996)

One thing that I did learn from the Gulf War is that soldiers' uniforms are no longer uniform. I watched a fashion show on a military runway (or airstrip). I saw Department of Defense uniforms, United Nations uniforms, Army uniforms, male uniforms, female uniforms, uniforms for different agencies, for different militaries, for different organizations that were both national and international. Watching it all on CNN, I imagined Elsa Klensch coming in and dictating the uniforms for summer on her *Style* program. "Star Fleet uniforms are the only true universal uniform. They transcend borders, they show a united front of sentient beings," Carol deadpans. Then I realized she was not kidding.

Susan Eastgate brings her sons Tyler and Ryan to conventions and Star Trek functions dressed in uniform: "It is good for their self-esteem" (Witham, 1996:12). Nancy Armitadue also brings her children in uniform to conventions and has them wear their uniforms on national holidays, important Star Fleet holidays, and "special occasions like going to the theater or to family reunions. The uniform gives them a sense of respect, a sense of pride and order. It is less expensive than sending them to military school."

Ruth McClintock beamed with pride concerning her daughter's decision to have "her annual picture taken in a Star Fleet uniform. She

has recruited about eight students...for Star Fleet.” James is in his fifties, and “I am a tad bit more conservative than most Trekkers.”

Then, on a typical sunny Georgia spring morning, I attempted to wear my little Vulcan IDIC pin to work and was chastised for it! And was told that was not appropriate, that it was not professional! In other companies and schools I have seen people wear those things! I wear it more now. I don’t want any one to degrade my uniform and what it stands for!

I’m not ashamed of wearing it at school. But, like I said, I don’t think I’d go to a job interview wearing my uniform. People who don’t like *Star Trek*, it kind of scares them.... Often I wear it just to make my point. Now... I wear my uniform. And if they ask for me by name, I say “No, I am the Captain!” I made a *Star Trek* day in class and everyone came out dressed in Trek garb, in uniform. Well, I mean all my students did. It was the most fabulous moment of my life and my teaching career to see all of these students dressed in uniform.

“Once I realized that there were so many Trek enthusiasts among the young people that I teach, we formed a branch of Star Fleet,” Laura stated. Brad, a retired Air Force officer who became a teacher, said, “At first, I had one idea about teenagers, and now I have a totally different one. You would be surprised at the number of students in high school who are rabid Trek fans, who have Trek uniforms, who read Trek books as soon as they come out, who go to every movie they can see, and who join in Trek club meetings.” Brad continues, “With these teenagers, you know, it makes a big difference in the way they behave, in the manner in which they conduct themselves with other people. These are kids with “A” averages and high IQ scores, you know, the best and the brightest. Trek sparks an inventiveness in them, and then sparks inventions. But these inventions now are only a shadow of what the actual *Star Trek* will do!” Laura thinks that “*Star Trek* and Star Fleet give young people a sense of commitment and responsibility they would not have otherwise.”

Starfleet (according to their Website) was “founded by Star Trek enthusiasts in the year 1974, [and] has become an international fan organization whose members are united the world over in their appreciation of Star Trek: The Greatest Human Adventure. Hundreds of chapters worldwide link members into local fandom as well as the International organization” (<http://www.sfi.org>). Mavis is gratified that

she has played a pivotal role in her students' lives. "The future is in their hands. There is a whole new generation of young people who watch *Trek* and may someday become Trekkers. Who knows what they will see on the program and then invent? Who knows what Star Fleet may become?" Nancy feels that "duty and honor are the most important things and values we have. I really think, if you look at it, the command structure in *Star Trek* is our naval military structure, and in that structure you will find the values of exploration, discovery, and the 'we!' For me, that's the beauty of *Star Trek*."

"What I see is a society, a military organization, that has transcended being just military, which is something that the U.S. Navy is attempting to do now," Dane explains, while erasing his blackboard. "I remember when I was in the navy, we were told that 'you folks as sailors are ambassadors.' That was drummed into our heads constantly! The attempt was made to inculcate that idea. That you are more than just military."

"Oh, yes," Brad comments several months after I spoke to Dane. "I think what you see in *Star Trek* is a positive view of that evolution, where the military has gone beyond being just military. There is still a chain of command and you notice that nobody salutes and you notice that whole business of saluting that *Star Trek* espouses is an anachronism, a throwback to a much, much earlier time, a better time, and certainly a better time for the military." David wants me to know "there is mention in *Star Trek* and there are some references in the literature to something called the Space Marines and you see them, some of the security people, dressed in this particular uniform. That's the marines, the army, the more militaristic area. As far as the NASA people, well, they exemplify this as well!" Brad shows me a table of contents from a role-playing game he is currently involved in.

Subject	Page #
Purpose of FMFM 9426-1	4
General Description	5
History and Evolution	6
Rank Structure	7
Military Occupational Specialties	8
Weapons	11
Equipment	14
Tactical Methodology	16
List of Sources	18

“Wow, that is one very complicated game of military maneuvers,” I comment. He then showed me another set of documents, all which he had neatly filed and color-coded in a cabinet in the corner of his classroom.

Welcome to the Academy. You have either been accepted as a Midshipman in the Academy’s Basic Program and are just starting your Starfleet career, or you may be an experienced officer on Starship duty returning for training in one of our advanced examinations. In either case your acceptance here is due to your abilities and accomplishments which have elevated you above your peers. To the Midshipman who has left the civilian life behind for the adventures of Starfleet duty, I envy you. At the threshold of a new way of living, with all the rich experiences and successes yet to come, your time at The Academy will provide you an opportunity to form relationships with fellow classmates and seasoned officers which will last a lifetime. Your studies here in The Academy’s Basic Program (EJG) will not be easy, but with dedication and perseverance, you will leave Starfleet Academy ready to take your rightful place among the elite graduates who have enriched our ranks and contributed so much to the United Federation of Planets and its members. If you are an Officer who is returning for additional study in one of our advanced level examinations, your responsibilities are two fold. On the one hand, you will be engaged in supplementing your Fleet experience with specialized knowledge which will return dividends not only to you, but to the U.F.P., your ship, and your fellow crew-members. In addition, you are expected to share the experiences and knowledge you have gained through active service with Midshipmen just being introduced to this special and exciting life style we have chosen. You will be a basic part of their acclimation. I strongly encourage you to actively seek out and mentor a Midshipman. In this way you will contribute to the camaraderie and esprit de corps which is basic to the success and reputation of the U.F.P. Australian. On a final note to all Academy students, I would like to remind you that learning does not stop or start here. It is a continual process. No time spent learning is ever wasted.

“It sort of sets things up for the kids, and makes them take it seriously. Of course, I hope someday at least some of the kids go to West Point, or Star Fleet Academy.” The Academy is comprised of:

#### THE COLLEGE OF COMPUTER HISTORY (COCH)

Topics cover computers from their Terran beginnings to *Star Trek: Voyager*. There are three degrees: Bachelor (History—mundane), Masters (Modern—Star Trek), and Doctoral (Artificial vs. Organic Intelligence—mundane and Star Trek).

#### THE COLLEGE OF FEDERATION STUDIES (COFS)

Designed for the serious Star Trek student in mind. The CoFS has three “schools” in which students may study in: The School of Star Trek Studies; The School of Political Science and Diplomacy; and The School of History. Each school has a number of disciplines in which a student may major in.

#### STARFLEET ACADEMY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE (SACOM)

Welcome to the Starfleet Academy College of Medicine. Our goal is to help you become familiar with the basic aspects of medicine. Please understand that his course does not replace any professional schooling or training. It is only meant to be an introduction to medicine. Though, I would like to encourage you to expand your medical education by taking CPR and First Aid classes.

#### COLLEGE OF SURVIVAL STUDIES (COSS)

This Starfleet Academy College is designed for Starfleet members in their Teens and older. This College has 2 schools: Basic Survival School and Mapping Survival School. Both schools offer four courses of study: Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate. Instead of exams, the student completes a research project (mission report) for each course.

#### SCHOOL OF TACTICAL OPERATIONS (SOTO)

This is a course intended to cover the following areas which as a Tactical Officer, would need to know or would be beneficial to know. They are: Basic Starship Recognition, Advanced Starship Recognition, Covert Operations, Starship Strategy & Tactics, Shuttlecraft Recognition & Operations...which will cover questions on shuttlecraft recognition, stats and operations.

#### VULCAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE (VAS)

The Vulcan Academy of Science is designed to answer those questions you may have about a particular science which has

piqued your interest enough to learn more about it. VAS offers degrees in about a dozen major sciences and at least 27 electives from many of the sciences that exist in our world today.

I asked one of the Trekker teachers with whom I felt quite comfortable, "Are these people serious?" She responded, "Quite, they don't run around wasting time or anything. It isn't a game." Nancy told me, "The exam was harder than passing my comps for my masters degree!" Carl stated, "After the academy of history, I joined the Rangers!" I was beginning to feel a bit tenuous again. "What?" "The Rangers." I found the Rangers on the Internet:

The Rangers are an elite group of STARFLEET members geared to helping people within and outside of Starfleet International with additional personnel needed to get a job done whatever the reason. We also help in any way possible our country's law enforcement agencies, whether that be by helping in a neighborhood block-watch or just doing what's right.... Rangers are the law enforcement and colonial protection arm of Starfleet. Just as Starfleet Security is charged with the protection of the Federation, the SFR is charged with maintaining all Federation laws and customs of her members. Missions are similar to those done by Texas Rangers of the late 1800's and today, FBI, NASA, US Marshals, and of the US Army Airborne....

The real life goal is to provide needed help to others when no one else wants the job, or there is a need for additional help. We try to be involved in projects that will have a positive impact on mans future, whether that is helping on a local chapter's food drive or supporting groups like Earthwatch, NASA, or the Red Cross in whatever manner possible.... A Ranger usually has the following personality: a real go getter, a problem solver, takes jobs few will or can take on to do. A Ranger also faces up to their own mistakes even if it costs them. If you have this type of character traits, then your good Ranger material. Rangers are proud of who and what they are. The black uniforms we wear at cons and club functions are worn with pride, for a Ranger uniform means "ACTION"!!!! (<http://www.halcyon.com/dyer/ST>)

One of the teachers, Robert, sensed my consternation concerning the academies and tried to honorably discharge them. "Hey, it gets people reading and studying. What's wrong with that? And since they are

studying something positive and good, which is all Star Trek is, I see this all as a very positive force.”

Call it virtual vertigo, the images, the simulacra crisscross at a staggering rate of speed. There is so much confusion and so many shades and layers of meaning. Boutin’s provocative article in *Wired* (1997) kept echoing in my mind.

Bill Clinton can tell us we need a bridge to the next millennium, but it’s Gene Roddenberry who made us believe without a doubt that we’re going to cross that bridge and love it on the other side. There aren’t any government incentive programs driving Roddenberry’s future space nerds. Federation geeks go to Starfleet Academy and sign up for deep-space duty for the most compelling reason of all: because they really want to learn.

Learn what? For what purpose? Love what? What other side? The other side of the modern-postmodern divide? The other side of reality? I turn on the television, and a commercial for the army drones, “Be all you can be....” *Deep Space Nine* came on. I really felt confused and compromised. Borders, which I could not cross (even virtually), seem to be breaking down. The real, the hyperreal, the military, Star Fleet, video game violence, war as video, games on television—all spun an ideological web. As Star Fleet tried to defeat an unseen enemy known as the Dominion, it all seemed to turn into a new convergence, a new military, a new weaponry, a new type of vision.

### **HONEY, PLEASE PASS ME THE GRAPHIC INTERFACE**

Sophistication regarding both the graphics hardware and the software is of the utmost importance in the games that are played on Nintendo or in the military (U.S. or Star Fleet). In *Star Trek*, exacting technology is the scaffolding upon which their universe is constructed. Ralph is a Trekker who teaches at a middle school in the Southeast. He met me at my motel room, sporting a suit with a *Star Trek* tie and communicator watch. He asked me if I wanted to see something “cool!” “Sure,” I replied. We went in his car, which he called a classic Trekmobile, in deference to the car’s age and size (it was a big old Chrysler New Yorker). We went to his house and into his basement. (I’m sorry, it’s true.) He showed me his computerized Trek war game. We spoke as he shot down Romulan birds of prey. “What is so amazing about this game



is that it is so lifelike! You feel as if you are really there! Want to kill some Romulans?” “No thank you,” I replied. “What is important,” he continued “is that we stay current with what students are into,” as if to chastise me for not playing or knowing about his game. I agreed with him; we need to know what our students are interested in. “Good! Now, play the game with me,” he commanded. It looked as if he was having a blast zapping enemies into the dust. Students, at that moment, seemed to be the last thing on his mind. Maybe it was something that he needed to do, to fulfill his Star Fleet military functions. “After all” writes Greg Keizer:

Some of us are simply adrift in space. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* has retreated into perpetual reruns, its cast and props heading for a bigger screen, bigger paychecks probably, too. The wrinkling crew of *Star Trek* has seen its last new script. What’s a Trekker to do? Play games with *Star Trek*, that’s what. (Keizer, 1995:10)

It used to be fairly common to “hear military commanders dismiss high fidelity and visual acuity as unnecessary luxuries. They insisted that trainees would accept green cones as trees and gray squares as vehicles” (Wilson, 1998:15). I began to realize that the discourse of war was an electronic conversation, which was the same conversation as the Trek conversation. Quincy Wright wrote, “Modern war tends to be about words” (Gray, 1991). Postmodern war is about electronic interface. “You have got to get the Sony Playstation,” Robert told me. “It makes the games so real, as if you are really there. It gives you a really good feel for things.”

Our school district is rich enough to have lots of computers for the classrooms. We get a *Star Trek* quote each day on the computer. Here’s Spock, he comes out and does all kind of weird things and he beams up and analyzes. Nomad comes out.... Fascinating! He shoots his phasers, he is going to walk around, there are a million screens...it’s in all stores, they beam up messages, and it has all the sound effects that they have in real Trek.

Well, so, I made an exam. The screens help. Because on the screen you get five seconds. This is the exam that your supposed to do from the computer. It asks you questions and you have to answer them; it keeps asking you all these questions... The program is like an encyclopedia with all kinds of stuff, Trek stuff.

The kids are interested, and my principal thinks this is such a creative tool for the fourth-graders to learn to love science!

Today's military men and women are products of the same televisual media-ted environment as most of us. Military uniforms do not make people less human. Should visual expectations be lowered or ought military personnel expect any less from the games they play as soldiers than from the games they play in the arcade? "Today," one critical military observer says, "we're recruiting from the MTV generation" (Hughes, 1998:19). The MTV generation was weaned on video games, which keep getting more and more complex. The military has tried to have their games keep up to pace with the private sector. For example, the new smart display system designed by Interstate Electronics Corporation has begun to employ new graphical interfaces, changing the dynamics of what was previously labeled "tedious operations.... With the MTV generation taking over the controls...today's user wants—no, ex-pects—graphics, color, sound, and interactivity." The operator sitting at the helm "has grown up in a sensorially stimulated environment, and has come to expect being fed information in an easily assimilated format" (Kalansky, 1998:20). Early games were one-dimensional, with a very simplistic graphic interface. One-dimensional games, flying saucers held by string, or robots made out of tin cans would make sense to young people only as a kitsch artifact.

### CALIFORNIA WAR DREAM FACTORY

*Gene Roddenberry's creative genius opened the imaginations of hundreds of millions to the fact that the remarkable achievements of NASA are only the first step in an advancing technology that will carry humankind away from humanity's birthplace and out to the stars—perhaps to join the even larger and more diverse community of intelligent life in the Cosmos.*

—HUGH DOWNS AND ROBERT JASTROW,  
LETTER TO NASA A ADMINISTRATOR  
DAN GOLDIN, SEPTEMBER 24, 1992

The aerospace industry and the defense industry were once the backbone of the California economy. Things changed in the postwar 1990s. The industry morphed "like a rock star in an MTV video....

Many of the workers with PhDs and secret clearances, who once designed jetfighters or top-of-the-line tanks, are creating arcade simulators and animated movies” (Wood, 1998:3). “Yes, of course,” Amanda confides in me, “isn’t that wonderful? That is really Gene’s doing. They convert war weaponry for peaceful uses.”

Bob Jacobs used to design “virtual-reality simulators for the U.S. government: tanks, helicopters, and ships for use by Marine, Navy, and Army troops-in-training” (Wood, 1998:3). Today, Jacobs, “the veteran aerospace designer, who began his career at Hughes Aircraft in 1966, is using the same skills for a different task—creating an arcade game for a casino in Las Vegas.... ‘In terms of the details of what I do, not much has changed,’ says Jacobs” (Wood, 1998:3).

“Our eyes move faster, we are much more pictorial, and we are so digitalized that we are almost Borg drones,” Rhonda said, somewhat flatly. “Things are different, we need realism!” “How could science fiction seem real?” I asked. She laughed and then gave me a quizzical look. There is an expectation that our virtual environments need to simulate something real, or something hyperreal, or something photo-real.

Hollywood led the assault on the military’s sensibilities, literally forcing military commanders to adopt a different attitude toward virtual reality and realistic simulacra. (In some ways, they have become virtual prisoners of a tech-war). Military leaders have discovered (I do hope that they didn’t waste too much time and effort studying this) “that the more simulation mimics the real world, the better it serves training—particularly mission rehearsal” (Wilson, 1995:15). There should be no surprise whatsoever that the “U.S. Marine Corps is evaluating commercial war games software for use in training, and the Army is thinking about adapting the Nintendo 64 game machine as a training device” (Futurist, 1998, <http://www.ebescohost.com>).

Rather than the usual form of capitalist competition, a spirit of cooperation has emerged, and research efforts in the Department of Defense “and the entertainment industry” are linked. It is “not as farfetched as it might first appear,” says a report from the National Research Council (Futurist, 1998). It is not farfetched at all, considering just *who* is at the helm of the industry.

“Connections between the two communities stretch back over the decades and have taken many forms, from sharing products, to sharing technologies, to sharing people,” the report states. Arcade games have for years imitated the military’s cutting edge

technology, such as electronic maps and heads-up displays for fighter pilots. And civilian programmers have become so good at creating vivid displays and simulations that the military is often envious. (Futurist, 1998)

“‘We will train everyone from clerks to Special Forces to heavy wheel mechanics,’ says Mitch Smith, a vice president of PinnEast Interactive, one of a handful of companies producing the materials for the Army.” The army’s plan to turn GI Joe into a computer whizkid “dovetails with trends in the civilian sector” (Moniz, 1997:5), and sales in the civilian sector. Both the entertainment industry and the defense industry continue to experiment with increasingly complex virtual programs, computer-generated characters, and simulations. “The military could use realistic simulators for training, for example, while game makers can sell the simulations as recreational products” (Futurist, 1998). Of course, a nameless officer of Star Fleet stated, “Everyone benefits mutually from the arrangement. That is what is so beautiful, everyone is a winner!” “My hope,” Matt explained, “is, frankly, that the digitally remastered *Classic Trek* showing on Sci-Fi now, will complement a new generation of *Star Trek* games and will reintroduce or introduce for the first time a whole new generation to Treklors.”

### LOVE ‘EM LUDDITES

Ken Perlin, of New York University’s Media Lab, says, “Trek...made us accept technology; its airing was an exponentially huge step beyond the success of Luddite 50s.... Star Trek made assumptions. It was assumed you could talk to your computer.... It was assumed that we would be comfortable with technology. And so we as viewers were. How would we have dealt with technology if there were no *Star Trek*?” (<http://www.godzilla/nov4/html>) From everything the Trekkers told me and from the hundreds and hundreds of articles (newspaper clippings and even books) on the topic, I would have to conclude that we couldn’t! “You know computers that you can speak to or that read to you? Trek! You know cellular car phones? Trek! Handheld diagnostic scanner, you got it: Trek! The diagnostic bed used in hospitals—yes, it came from *Star Trek*” (Mary, a Trekker teacher). There is also the transporter, which had its first full-fledged demonstration in 1998 (made by Charles Bennett of IBM and a team of international theoretical physicists; see Pease, 1998:22), an eye chip designed in the style of Geordi LaForge so that the blind can see (see Radford, 1998:12), a phaser (more about that

later on in the chapter), a tricorder, and even holodeck technology. Scientists have now published “the results of experiments in producing antimatter, the power behind the warp drive on *Star Trek’s* USS *Enterprise*” (Brooks, 1998:10). In the meantime:

NASA’s \$152 million Deep Space 1 probe was launched Saturday from Cape Canaveral, Fla., on an unmanned Delta rocket. Instead of using typical chemical-burning rocket engines, Deep Space I is traveling by “ion propulsion.” The concept was featured in a *Star Trek* episode called “Spock’s Brain” in 1968 but has never before been tested in deep space. (Hoversten, 1998)

“Respectable scientists [are] our core audience,” says a Paramount official. He continued:

Some members of this audience might even be tempted to start yelling helpful advice at the screen when the chief engineer tries to fix the warp drive. “We have a couple of friends who, during the first season, were working at Los Alamos labs on projects involving antimatter. When *The Next Generation* was premiered at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, the minute that Picard said ‘Let’s see what’s out there,’ the room went crazy.” (Hoversten, 1998)

Rhonda says, “Trekkers hold the most important positions in the technological infrastructure of this country.” She cited several studies, one from England, which said that a majority of physics students were influenced by *Star Trek*, and another from Purdue University, which, according to Rhonda, proved “that the majority of students in the United States learn most of their science from *Star Trek*” (I want to note that Rhonda’s claim seemed a bit too grandiose. So I checked the accuracy of the information. The study concluded that, next to parents and teachers, students learn most of their science from *Star Trek*.) “*Star Trek* cannot help but be influential in every sphere where science or technology is utilized.” “Does that include the military?” I inquired, knowing that my question was rhetorical. “Naturally! The new modern army is all Trek. Can’t you tell the difference?” After all, James explains, “Gene was a military man before he joined the LAPD.” Before Roddenberry began to write for television, “he was an Airforce hero, he flew bombing raids in World War II,” Dave commented. As a Trek Website dedicated to his memory explains:

Gene Roddenberry led a life as colorful and exciting as almost any high-adventure fiction. He was born in El Paso, Texas, on August 19, 1921, spent his boyhood in Los Angeles, studied three years of college pre-law and then transferred his academic interest to aeronautical engineering and qualified for a pilot's license. He volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps in the fall of 1941 and was ordered into training as a flying cadet as the war began. Emerging from Kelly Field, Texas, as a Second Lieutenant, Roddenberry was sent to the South Pacific where he entered combat at Guadalcanal, flying B-17 bombers out of the newly-captured Japanese airstrip, which became Henderson Field. He flew missions against enemy strongholds at Bougainville and participated in the Munda invasion. In all, he took part in 89 missions and sorties. He was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. (Trekker teacher)

Roddenberry's public and private persona interfaced in the netherworld between entertainment and the military-industrial complex. This Roddenberry complex can be seen throughout the arms and entertainment industries. Ernest Bloch, a former head of the National Science Foundation and a fellow at the nonprofit Council on Competiveness, explains, "There are some defense technologies that were born in the civilian sector and vice versa.... We fund...through defense because that's where the money is. And, we keep funding it because...we don't spend enough on technological development" (Rubin, 1991:21).

"Gene Roddenberry was not anti-military, he was a military man.... He also sat on the National Science Federation, and a whole bunch of boards having to do with space work," Robert explained. He served in what Robert defined as a "liminal position."

I began to consider what it means to be part of a privileged culture that plays space war or any war as if it were nothing more than a video game with Captain Kirk at the helm. Looking over seven years of narratives from Trekker teachers, from other Trekkers, from Websites and newspapers and magazine articles, made me realize that the hierarchy just reconfigured itself in a virtual form.

Political philosophers of the day tell us we haven't had a devastating war in over thirty years! History will tell us that about every twenty to thirty years there will be a devastating war that will wipe out fifty or a hundred thousand of the population! We

tend to put in our military—this is why our military has so much trouble getting started—we put in our military a lot of times the individuals who are not the most desirable in society. They are people who are naturally violent. So, we put them into war and let them let that violence out and then eventually they become disciplined! Ultimately they realize what they are doing. That also takes the worst elements of your society out. They are no longer there. Of course, the last war was Vietnam, fifty-eight thousand casualties. That was a very ethnocentric war, with the idea that a lot of the troops that were fighting were Black or Hispanic. I heard a sociologist once say: “Opie, didn’t go to war.” (Trekker teacher)

“What do you mean by that?” I demanded an answer. “If you grow up in a violent world, you will be violent. It is who you are.” Robert was calm while speaking about violence. “Yes, some people are born into a violent world.”

We war on want, disease, hunger, pollution, AIDS. We war on communism, on protesters, on drugs. We do war research and weapons development and massive procurements and countless deployments. We prepare for nuclear war and conventional war; we fight mid-intensity and low-intensity conflicts. We watch gang wars, civil wars, sci-fi wars and private wars on the screens. We live through the race wars, the war of the sexes, the war against ourselves, and the Cold War. Yes, the Cold War continues, except it is now clear what has always been true: it is a war between the haves and the have-nots, and it is getting hotter. (Gray, 1991)

Melissa recalled her own childhood, on military bases and abundantly what Robert said; indeed, what I heard throughout the narratives became very clear. Trekkers are speaking about particular bodies. Robert said:

There is a place in Florida called Intercession City. There [were] Mexicans and Colombians and Peruvians and South Americans, an odd lot. I always thought that these strangers from elsewhere were the best of the breed!

And then the Cuban Crisis came along, and Intercession City became logged with Cubans. They were military people. They were not the Cubans, well, like you would have grown up with.

They were not refugees, like you think of Cuban refugees today! They were military people who were escaping Castro and so, when they settled in, it was a very lovely formal type of thing. There was no ragtag about it! Today, you got the Cuban refugees who are the ragtag. They're not the upper crust! And it's different.

Despite my discomfort, or maybe because of my discomfort, Robert persisted in his protracted recitation. "Those sorts of people should be ground troops. They have an instinctual way of knowing this. It is a type of intelligence." "Oh, you mean like multiple intelligences," I added (meaning to be caustic). "Yes, yes, in many ways that is exactly what I mean. Star Trek is a meritocracy, where everyone does what they do best. Soon, there will be tests to program people into doing what they should be doing." So the pace of war is set by machines, programmed by Trekkers, and experienced by *other* humans. "And it wasn't just the Iraqi troops who were bedazzled by their glamour and their destructive power, although they felt it most truly, in their bodies...in the war of mechanical speed against human reactions, bodies are the only real losers." (Gray, 1991)

### HUNTSVILLE AND STARFLEET, OR WAS IT APOLLO AND STAR TREK?

*NASA...has for years sought to align itself with... Star Trek. From dubbing its mission control computers and naming the first shuttle Enterprise to scattering Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry's ashes in space, NASA has consistently modeled itself on the space Federation. In the late seventies, it even recruited Nichelle Nichols (Lieutenant Uhura to help encourage women and ethnic minorities into the astronaut corps). The ploy worked: Mae Jemison who in 1992 became the first African American woman in space cited Uhura as her inspiration.... Constance Penly convincingly argues for the existence of a single symbolic entity: NASA/Trek: Star Trek is the theory, NASA is the practice.*

—LANGE, 1998:1



Huntsville, Alabama, is a one-industry town. The industry is NASA. It is the home of the Space Station, the Marshall Space Flight Center, the Werner Von Braun Civic Center (now there's an oxymoron for all of us to ponder), and, of course, Space Camp (where hundreds of fourth-graders go yearly to engage in a love affair with the stars).

In 1996, the home of the U.S. Space and Rocket Center was taken over "by a space program almost as old as NASA" (Parks, 1996b:2). The event often labeled as Spacestock (a Woodstock for outer space aficionados) commemorated 30 years on the final frontier. Astronauts Buzz Aldrin, Alan Bean, Alan Shepard, Ed Mitchell, Charlie Duke, and Fred Haise stood side by side with the captains of the *Enterprise* and their respective crews. The hyperreality of it all could have given someone grounded in a modernist universe a case of virtual vertigo.

NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin presented a tribute to "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry. His widow, Majel Barrett Roddenberry, also known as Nurse Christine Chapel in *Classic Trek*, Lwaxana Troi in *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine*, and the voice of the computer on other Trek incantations, took the podium. Describing how the show and NASA have been helping each other for years, keeping our attention focused on the stars, she said: "The correlation between them is so close, so intimate." Looking up to the heavens, where Roddenberry is circling Klingon right now, his ashes having been launched into space during a shuttle mission, with dramatic élan, in authentic Hollywood diva style, she continued, "Gene, wherever you are, you were right!"

He was very, very appreciative of everything that had happened and I think its rather remarkable that he was allowed to live long enough to see and reap some of the benefits of this, too, and to know how much people loved him and his show and his ideas and how part of his vision was coming true. I think that was the most important part. If there would be one thing that would be put on his epitaph, this is what he said: I would like to see it say that *He loved humanity. I would say that by the looks of everyone here, humanity loved him too.* (Majel Roddenberry, America Online)

Not to be upstaged by an actress, Goldin presented an award to Roddenberry for his contributions to the space program.

Gene Roddenberry, creator of the *Star Trek* television series, posthumously received NASA's Distinguished Public Service

Medal on Jan. 30. The medal was presented to his widow, Majel Barrett Roddenberry, by NASA Administrator Dan Goldin in a ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC.

Roddenberry is credited with popularizing the exploration of space through the original *Star Trek* television series, six motion pictures and the spin-off television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. His vision of a positive future for the human race, as well as the social and artistic content of the series, have enjoyed enormous success and popularity since the original *Star Trek* premiered on television in 1966.

The impact of his program was recognized in the U.S. space program as the first Space Shuttle was named *Enterprise* after the spaceship in *Star Trek*. Many people, including astronauts and others involved in the space program, cite *Star Trek* as being an early influence on their lives.

The citation accompanying the medal reads: "For distinguished service to the Nation and the human race in presenting the exploration of space as an exciting frontier and a hope for the future." Gene Roddenberry died in October 1991. (NASA News Release)

In conversation (until he found out he was speaking to a tabloid reporter), Goldin also waxed wistful. "America is about dreams and hopes and opening frontiers. *Star Trek* helps people visualize those dreams." Goldin inspirationally expounded upon the "Mars rock," finding extraterrestrial life, and said, "If life can exist on two planets, why not more?... If they're there, we'll find terrestrial-sized planets and a chance of life. America is going to be in space forever and ever!" he said to an ovation given by loyal legions of fans (Sloteck, 1996:35).

When the doors opened at 9 A.M., fans swarmed the Warp 10 store, a market bigger than many strip center shops. It was packed with new "limited edition" Trek merchandise, ranging from the new Star Trek Barbie and Ken doll—\$75 and going as fast as clerks could open the crates—to Trek boxer shorts. An even bigger market area of hundreds more Trek items, ranging from \$2,000 lithographs to \$1 buttons, was so jammed movement was almost impossible. Hundreds lined up to have their picture taken, at \$20 a snap, with supporting stars such as George Takei (Sulu) and James Doohan (Scottie). Even Grace Lee Whitney, a minor

character (Yeoman Rand) from a few 1966 episodes, attracted long lines when she signed autographs. (Parks, 1996c:2)

At the extravaganza, Buzz Aldrin sported a *Star Trek* tie while walking among the faithful. Alan Shepard clarified “the main difference between real space travel and *Star Trek*...[being] they spend all their time worrying about the Klingons, and we spend all our time worrying about things breaking down.” Charlie Duke, the born-again Christian astronaut who has always been a *Star Trek* fan, was there. Amid the dancing Klingons, Ferengi, and gospel choirs, the celebration became more and more hyperreal. Actor James Doohan, otherwise known as Scotty, burst into tears, and in a moving testimonial recounted the story of a suicidal female fan into whose life he intervened. The fan went on to get a degree in electronic engineering. Is this moment staged? Is it real? Is it virtual? Is this churchlike confessional hallelujah chorus designed to make NASA feel good? Trekkers feel good? Or are they one and the same? Something is going on, besides mere material transformation or a talk show disclosure of personal epiphanies.

Not that everything in the *Trek* universe is perfect, despite the celebratory nature of the event. Since Roddenberry’s death (or departure), relations between NASA and *Star Trek* have cooled a bit. “Rocket scientist Jefco Von Putkamer, the first NASA official to ever address a *Trek* conference 21 years ago,” decided not to go to Huntsville. “After my friend (*Star Trek* creator) Gene Roddenberry died, we lost a lot of our connection... *Star Trek* turned very commercial. Today it’s just a big money-making machine” (Parks, 1996a:2).

### **FULL STOP, CAPTAIN...WHERE IS THE MONEYMAKING MACHINE IN THE HYPERGARDEN?**

In the 1980s the space program changed considerably. Supposedly, our focus was on the space shuttle, or perhaps our expressed focus may have even been on the space station. But neither program has had the *deep impact*, long-ranging consequences, or national significance as the privatization and commercialization of the space program. *Star Trek* may well have *become* commercial, although I would tend to think because *Star Trek* was (and is) a television program, by definition, its interests are inherently commercial.

Way back in the old West, I mean in the days of Ronald Reagan, the very first Reagan administration policy statement on space called

specifically to open NASA's terrain to private capital. On September 9, 1982, a Houston-based firm, Space Services Incorporated of America, launched the first privately developed commercial rocket, named Conestoga I. A new space age was born, the age of commercial space. *Star Trek* may well be a commercial enterprise, but to call NASA anything but a commercial enterprise is both naive and short sighted.

"Star Trek and NASA," Ted (a Vulcan Science officer) says with a casual sort of haughtiness, "are really synonymous." Mary explains, "I have just read this book about NASA/Trek. If Trek is the theory, well, then, I am glad because NASA has gone entirely too commercial, and that does not fit with the IDIC." It is the influence of the IDIC, apparently, that has been so important to so many. Mae Jemison was the first African-American female astronaut from the United States of America in the twentieth century. At the start of every single one of her shifts aboard the shuttle, Jemison invoked Uhura's famous line, "Hailing frequencies open." I was told, that "she believes in the IDIC! She is committed to it, that is why she was on the program." I remain perplexed as to whether the Trekker I spoke with meant the space program or *Star Trek*.

### **HOW DO WE GET FROM HERE TO THERE OR THERE TO HERE?**

Why, for example, is the voice of *Star Trek*'s Captain Picard chosen to narrate a pro-NASA propaganda film, aired on PBS, that makes a U.S. mission to Mars sound inevitable? Follow, as usual, the money. Specifically the \$17 billion already spent on a Space Station that so far is only paper, the \$77 billion more the project will ring up within seven years, by General Accounting Office estimates, all of this often justified as mere prep work for a who-knows-how-expensive manned mission to Mars. "The *Star Trek* lobby" is how Dr. Robert Park refers to the powerful interests pressing for this money—meaning the aerospace industry. Park, a former head of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, threw some cold water on the *Star Trek* lobby when he addressed NASA's Langley, Va., operation on the 40th anniversary of Sputnik. (Beers, 1997)

The idea of space travel (so near and dear to the hearts of NASA A employees, and Trekkers) was inculcated and incubated in a "series of

articles in *Collier's* magazine that was later expanded into a lavishly illustrated book entitled *Across the Space Frontier* (Viking Press) in 1952." One of the authors was none other than Wernher von Braun, "the ex-Nazi V-2 engineer whom songsmith Tom Lehrer later lampooned as the person to whom "the widows and cripples of old London town/Owe their large pensions." He made it all seem so simple and so logical, and demonstrated space flight with simply gorgeous pictures and a multi-stage rocket "that foreshadowed today's Shuttle, and a space station surpassing Reagan's Freedom in both size and beauty, to which the spaceship would travel from Earth hauling goods and personnel" (Hines, 1994:18).

Von Braun's vision was similar to Roddenberry's. "Roddenberry never thought about how you would get from the Earth to space; he already knew we would be there," Jane explained. NASA, much like *Star Trek*, was a child of the Cold War. In 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik 1, thus "beating" US into space. As nuclear testing and Armageddon became (real or perceived) threats to Americans, and air raid sirens and drills became the rule rather than the exception, Russians in space became synonymous with our fears. "Americans were alarmed, it was a wake up call, we needed to do something, and do something fast!" Ted exclaimed. Mike told me;

If you go back and you look at 1957, the Soviets had just launched Sputnik. Caught the United States with its pants down, big time! There was a collective realization at that point, on the part of society, in general, that there is a larger world out there. Unfortunately!

"And?" I queried. "I became an engineer because of Trek, but also decided it was important to teach, so I teach computers and technology. I love this country. I love its potential. I have an investment in the future." The investment Mike has was not stocks or bonds; the investment was in "seeing Trek become a reality for my children." Richard recounted:

There really wasn't a heck of a lot to get a young person interested in science and technology until about 1956-57, when Sputnik was launched, and I became totally committed to space exploration. I love this country. But it was because of *Star Trek* that I joined the Action Research Society, which was a professional rocketry group. And we'd go out and launch rockets.

Now these were before model rocketry. These were rockets, serious kinds of hardware. My dad, bless his heart, never really fully understood. I kind of think he understood that this was something that was going to be useful to me later on, so he encouraged me to stick with it. Now look at me, I have had a successful career in the military, I have a master's degree, I am a school administrator, and I am a colonel in Star Fleet. Not too shabby, not shabby at all.

We needed to catch up with the Russians, our nation's prestige (and, some policymakers felt, our nation's security and our national survival) was at stake. So we got into space. On February 1, 1958, Explorer 1 was launched to the gleeful (albeit heavily accented) jubilation of Werner Von Braun: "A great day for American rocketry!" President John F. Kennedy trumpeted a visionary plan to land Americans on the moon.

The country responded to that vision from Camelot by basking in the glory of the space program's numerous achievements (Brown, 1993: 13). Ted, who is now in his fifties, told me, "It didn't matter if you were a hawk or a dove, everybody was united and mesmerized by John Glenn and the Apollo astronauts." Donna is a mother, a fifth-grade teacher and an ensign aboard her Starship. Taking time out of her hectic schedule she recalled:

I looked at the television set, we all looked at the television set, and we were transfixed. It was the most stirring moment in history. Do you remember *Star Trek 1*, when they brought the ship back to us after all those years? The opening sequences in which we got to see "her," her hardware glistening in the spacelight, the panoramic shot of her smooth, curvaceous hull. Many in the audience seemed to be moved close to tears. I sat seduced by the hardware. We were back in space! And it felt so good! It made me imagine what it must have felt like when we went to space for the first time.

Perhaps I seemed a bit impatient, as much as I want to believe I can disguise my feelings (as an ethnographer); maybe my ambivalence was showing. Donna wanted me to understand, she needed me to understand.

Look, I don't want you to think I'm crazy. I am very sane. But the fact is *Star Trek* gave us the shuttle project, it gave us the future. What we know about space came mostly from Trek. It inspired

us, it drove us forward. I can't wait to see what happens next. Where we will go with all of this wonderful technology. And I am so pleased that *Star Trek* inspired so much of what is going on!

## SPACE PROGRAM

*Presidents, prime ministers, and corporate executives are always proposing new programs to encourage young people to study science and engineering. They want to instill in the young an interest in technology and the future, to make genetic research more appealing than gangsta rap. I offer a three-word proposal guaranteed to succeed: More Star Trek.*

—BOUTIN, 1997

Aside from watching the astronauts on the moon, which I am sure boosted the three major networks' ratings, there were other benefits from the space program. After all, what would the world be like without Tang? How would children without fine motor skills ever negotiate the streets of suburbia without Velcro? Both developed directly from the space program. The notion of research and development was used as a public relations ploy by NASA. Civilian benefits were not forthcoming. It was the threat of the Evil Empire alone, which warranted such an amazing crash and cash effort, with such an amazing concentration of resources and capital.

On July 20, 1969, eleven years after NASA was formed, we landed at Tranquility Base on the moon. We took the small step for mankind; there were no giant leaps. Over the next three years, there were twelve Apollo astronauts who roamed the surface of our closest celestial neighbor. Ho-hum, we reached our goal, la-de-dah. The flag was planted, and there was no place else to go. Although unmanned flights such as the Viking probe for life on Mars were daring and did increase our knowledge of the solar system in thousands of ways, the thrill (as well as the threat) was gone.

## BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS TREK

*Star Trek was, and still is, one hell of a marketing instrument for high technology and space travel as a lifestyle enhancement. I fantasized daily about revving up*

*the USS Enterprise to warp 9, kicking some serious Klingon butt, and meeting a green-skinned geek grrl. The fact that none of the technology on Star Trek really worked only made me want to rush right out and invent it.*

—(BOUTIN, 1997)

*[With] “Star Trek,” Roddenberry’s reputation as a futurist began to grow. His papers and lectures earned him high professional regard in that field. He spoke on the subject at NASA meetings, the Smithsonian Institution, Library of Congress gatherings and top universities.*

—WEB POSTING

*Considering that the ranks of Star Trek fans include persons ranging from the Dalai Lama to Colin Powell to Dr. Oliver Sacks to Ronald Reagan (a controversial figure, to be sure, but one who indisputably had a life), anyone who says that Star Trek fans don’t have lives is a fool.*

—WEB POSTING

*Krauss believes that Star Trek inspires not only students, but the designers of modern technology. Flip-open mobile phones probably would not look the way they do if it were not for the program’s “communicators.” The point is illustrated in an exhibition currently touring Britain’s science museums, in which the fictional and real mobile phone technologies are shown side by side. The display has been a huge hit, attracting 50,000 people a month. A spokeswoman for the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester said: “It’s our biggest exhibit ever”*

—RODGERS, 1996:44–45

John Spencer, a space architect, believes “*Star Trek* kept interest in space exploration going after the Apollo program. *Star Trek* survived as a safety valve. It was the only thing cruising in space” (Conway, 1991: 44). After the Man on the Moon, all was not well at NASA. Once the glory days of Apollo ended and cutbacks (including the massive Saturn rockets) occurred, a painful evolution transpired. Elephantine expenditures, attenuated delays, voluminous obstacles, the *Challenger* disaster, and the Hubble telescope changed our perceptions. Space shuttle launches did not attract the attention that moon launches did. We



were used to space. It was no longer a big deal. It became a big deal when *Challenger* exploded and we asked, "Why are we out here?" NASA no longer dazzled US. But *Star Trek* did. *Star Trek's* popularity grew.

NASA drifted rather lifelessly on terra firma. *Star Trek* was the only thing consistently and successfully jaunting through space. Thomas Paine, who headed NASA during the Apollo landings, admitted, "I've been watching *Star Trek* ever since Mr. Spock put on his ears. The people I work with are encouraged by the series. It demonstrates...the potential of space. In a sense it's a vote every time the show goes on. *Star Trek*... that's where our dreams ought to be." (Lange, 1998:1)

"Trek technology is under development in the real world," says Harvey White, a microprocessor industry consultant and design engineer. "*Classic Trek* made me want a Krell laboratory of my very own" (Lange, 1998:1).

"When I was a little girl, I used to look up and dream about the stars and ships. Then we went to the moon, and there was *Star Trek*, always opening my eyes and urging me to go forward, to do my best to be my best. It encouraged me; it showed me the way," Melissa said. Lawrence explained:

*Star Trek* came out about 1966. I really missed the first year of *Star Trek* because I was overseas with the Vietnam War. I was still in the Navy so I didn't even know it existed because I was totally removed from civilized society, serving on a ship off Vietnam. But as soon as we got married in 1968, I remember this vividly, we moved into our apartment that night, we turned the television on in the apartment, and there was this program called *Star Trek*, and I thought, "All right. This is far out." Been a *Star Trek* fan ever since. This is how things should be.

I got a job offer to teach for 3M Corporation. *Star Trek* had gone off the air. It had only lasted for three seasons, and I remember when it went off the air I thought this was like someone had removed a part of my body! I remember reading incensed letters from fans from all over the world. "Why did you do this?" Anyhow, there was a void period. That is when I decided to become a teacher. I thought that somehow if I couldn't make it come back, I could make it a reality.

It wasn't just fluff, but it talked about real issues! It was able to take a mirror and hold it up to society and say, "Here are your warts." I think one of Roddenberry's greatest contributions was

that philosophical construct to use an entertainment program not just to entertain but to enlighten. As a Navy man, I thought that was great!

But, why ought our dreams be vested in *Star Trek* or NASA? What are *our* dreams anyway?

If the show is a vote every time it airs, then it has to be a vote for something. And that something has to do with dollars and jobs. That some-thing celebrates some-body and some-thing. To call *Star Trek* a space that had “a positive effect on the sciences,” as Jim Griffith, a senior software engineer with Krell Laboratory, stated, or to name *Star Trek* as “a space that uplifts our vision” (Lange, 1998:1) is to really move into hyped-up, hyperreal, hyperhegemonic-military space.

In this hypermilitarized fantasy, the technological conflates with the scientific in an aesthetic, albeit violent, spectacle. Welding the spectacle to a white-right “common” dream of America’s manifest destiny, a future just like US, engendering ecstatic visions—that would enable America to defeat all evil empires, “wage war to end all wars and make the world eternally safe for democracy” (Franklin in Davies, 1990:151–152) and products, and ratings.

In theory, NASA is a civilian agency, yet NASA’s chief contractors are defense contractors such as Lockheed, Martin, Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. NASA consistently has made use of military technology (particularly missile technology), as it has consistently made use of Paramount’s *enterprise*. It becomes difficult to unthread the interconnected tapestry. What is real? What is not? Does it matter, for example, that Stephen Hawking appeared on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*? Which he did. Hawking is a Trekker. While on the set, he asked if he could be lifted from his wheelchair. He wanted to be placed on the bridge in Captain Picard’s chair. Picard’s chair felt, according to Hawking, “a lot more powerful” than his own. According to Vice President Al Gore, the reason that Steven Hawking spoke with an American accent while asking to be lifted into the chair is because his speech simulator was “developed in California.” (Gore, 1994). Apparently, *Star Trek* is on Gore’s mind, too. “I was elated when *Star Trek: The Next Generation* wanted me to do a guest shot—until I learned they wanted me to replace Lieutenant Commander Data” (Gore, 1994). “If *Star Trek* can make Stephen Hawking feel like that, then we must be doing something right after all,” I was told. “Right” may well be the operative word.

## THE TECHNO-MILITARY MERINGUE

*Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down?  
That's not my department, says Wernher von Braun.*

—TOM LEHRER

Mavis teaches elementary school and is a hard-core Trekker. She informed me of what she perceived as Roddenberry's "true" relationship with the military prior to *Star Trek*:

Gene Roddenberry and Isaac Asimov and Wernher von Braun all did some think tank work back in the early 50s, late 50s, and early 60s. There was another man, who was the other man? The kidnapped baby. Lindbergh was in on it all, too.

We know it had to do with some of the rocket work, some stuff. It's a matter of fact. They were all part of a think tank. Now, none of that material has been made public. It never probably will, it is both very advanced and top secret!

For instance, Asimov's material on the Foundation had to clear the government before it was ever published, and this was the 60s. Because they were afraid he was going to write about it in the Foundation. I'm sure he did, but it was not enough to warrant any great attention.

But Gene Roddenberry's mind has never been released in written form. The philosophy, the underlying material that produced *Star Trek*, isn't there. Well, you see, what's not known is what makes it so very interesting. You know it's there; it's not known, really. If he were as human as we would like him to be, then there would be written material available. He would fight the government, because the government knows. What they know is, like we know, he wasn't human.

The story of the government creating a think tank for a most unlikely combination of minds in this century is both provocative and evocative. Certainly, it brings to mind several conspiratorial theories that seem to be proliferating in my known universe, particularly surrounding the military's involvement with UFOs. Mavis continued:

But the government has hid so much on UFOs from us. We don't know what they were working on, but it was top secret. Maybe we

will never know, but we can speculate, and it must have something to do with UFOs and space travel!

Perhaps it is really inconsequential to know if Roddenberry possessed “insider knowledge” and presumably could engage in “insider trading,” capitalizing on the presence of extraterrestrials. What is “known” about him that is crucial remains.

He took great care to have the show’s technology checked out by real engineers. In the 1960s this was done by links with NASA, among others, links that still exist today. (Bains, 1991:46)

Roddenberry said in an interview, “I’ve always tried to keep things scientifically accurate” (Conway, 1991:48). The certitude with which Roddenberry prudently consulted with technical advisors created mutually beneficial ties to NASA, the military, and the military-industrial complex. The *Village Voice* once labeled the intertwining of technology and ideology in the Trek empire “Rand Corporation Humanism” (Foote, 1992:21). It seems wherever there are very regressive, reactionary voting practices (Thurmond of South Carolina and Helms of North Carolina, for example), there are going to be military bases with access to cutting-edge high technology. Where there is cutting-edge technology and anything to do with airborne missiles, space, aircraft, or computers, you will find Trekkers. Certainly, Roddenberry (quoted in Conway, 1991:48) reveled in his connections to and with the advant garde of the technocratic community.

I was at Cal Tech a couple of those evenings. One of the great pleasures of doing *Star Trek* is, whether I’m worthy of it or not, I’m welcomed in these places. I am a member of the board of governors of the National Space Society and the Planetary Society. So, I’m welcomed in these places and, wow, where can you buy that? The fact that I know some of the astronauts is exciting as well.

What is wonderful is that when I go to places like Cal Tech, everyone knows me, and many say, “If it wasn’t for *Star Trek*, I wouldn’t have been interested in the space program.” *Star Trek* has inspired many, and that’s a feeling that’s incomparable.

The teachers I spoke with took great pride in Roddenberry’s connections to the higher echelons of the elusive military-industrial

order. As one teacher commented in a very cavalier fashion, “I think you’d be hard-pressed to find a NASA employee who wasn’t a *Star Trek* fan.” Joan (a sixth-grade teacher) superciliously said:

There is a huge following in the military. We have a ship, the USS ——down in——. But it is so hard to keep a ship stationed in the military! They always get transferred, and so we constantly have to change our ship’s personnel because of that! Now there’s one at Ft. ——. The military people really love *Trek*. When my husband was in the army, I worked at a comic store. Every Thursday the new *Trek* stuff would come in. People would have accounts. We’d have to pull and fill their accounts and we couldn’t keep the *Trek* stuff in stock! There were millions of *Star Trek* fans on the post!

One day we had to go to the military ball. It was the opening night of *Star Trek III*. I was so angry. But I went to the military ball. It seemed like everyone at the table, everyone mentioned it, was angry about missing the premiere, and spoke about it all night.

Marla elaborated even further (in a separate conversation):

Our chief engineer works for NASA, or something associated with NASA. He is constantly working; he is very devoted. Right now he is building a model of our ship from scrap. He’s constantly working. So he is really up on NASA. He knows everything they are doing; he is our link to NASA. He contacts us on everything they do, and when it comes to that, he’s really excited. If you could call it anything, he shows real excitement!

When it comes to anything else, like meetings and stuff, he is very quiet, he doesn’t say much, unless you get started talking on NASA or some point on *Star Trek*, which he really loves.

A year later, Jamie stated:

Well, *Trek* is the ultimate vision of NASA. Most of the people in my ship are very interested in space! As a matter of fact, one of the girls on my ship right now is in school getting a degree in astrophysics. One of my roommates in college was also a *Trekker* and majored in astrophysics and is working for NASA right now!

Natalie, with tremendous pride in her family's values, explains:

My uncle, who is in Strategic Air Command, is a Trekker. My brother, who is military, lives for *Star Trek*; my brother-in-law loves *Star Trek*, and they are all military. It presents such a positive view of technology and the military! It shows us as good guys!

Larry summed it all up for me when he said:

Well, we are the good guys. I am so tired, so very tired of everyone making the people of this country to be the bad guys. I am patriotic. I do wave an American flag. Sorry, I don't go out and take things from this country. *Star Trek* shows what we can do if we return to basic values and tradition.

"All baby engineers watch *Star Trek*" Marc Millis, an aerospace engineer at NASA's Lewis Research Center, explained. When he was a child, he watched *Star Trek*, too. "I assumed by the time I was old enough to get into the field, the rocket technology used by Apollo would be old hat" (<http://www.defelice.lerc.nasa.gov>). John wanted me to know, "The world changed, and not for the better. I really did think we would be in the stars by now, but politics got out of hand and we were diverted from what ought to have been our mission."

### **TREK BLESS THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX**

*This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience.... We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications.... In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.*

—DWIGHT DAVID EISENHOWER,  
FAREWELL ADDRESS  
TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, 1961

*Star Trek, in many ways, more personifies the spirit of what NASA used to be...than does the current NASA."*

—ALAN KEYES, REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE  
FOR PRESIDENT,  
DALLAS PRIMARY DEBATE, SPRING 1996

*Thank heaven for the military-industrial complex.... Its ultimate aim is peace in our time."*

—BARRY GOLDWATER

Deputy Department of Defense Secretary John Hamre said (and I paraphrase) he wanted to dissolve the ignoble military-industrial complex. "We don't want a defense industrial base anymore...we just want an American industrial base." The term *military-industrial complex* got lost somewhere after the Cold War, but, just because something goes underground, doesn't mean it goes away. With the defense industry's consolidation, and the brain trust of the former military-industrial complex finding new gainful employment in the private sector, the complex has become exceptionally complex.

Lockheed Martin and Boeing's glossy national magazine ads—and their billboards in the Washington subway system—push the \$64 billion F-22 fighter aircraft program. The ads call the F22 "the anti-war plane...that will kill an enemy's appetite for war." In its ad campaign, Newport News Shipbuilding dubs its \$6 billion aircraft carrier "90,000 tons of diplomacy." Magazines likely to be read by Washington opinion leaders are saturated with full-color ads for destroyers, tanks, fighter jets, and other weapons systems. (Isaacs, 1998:14)

Strom Thurmond (who, like *Star Trek*, refuses to die), and Floyd Spence, both of South Carolina, Bill Young from my home state of Florida, and Ted Stevens of Alaska are all chairs of committees that approve defense spending. Needless to say, these gentlemen are all very sympathetic to the needs of large defense contractors. Although he may be gone from the public eye, Newt Gingrich is certainly not forgotten. Before he left Congress, he wanted the budget to be renegotiated to permit increased defense spending. In June, Trent Lott wrote to President Clinton, asking that more money be allocated for national defense. What type of weapons are they calling for? High-tech *Star Trek* weapons, of course. "A host of incredibly expensive weapon

systems whose admittedly eye-boggling technological sophistication will, in fact, possess little relevance to the world that they will confront” (Isaacs, 1998:14).

We live in a world driven by profit and pork barrel politics, but it is not the pork barrel politics of the Soviet-U.S. balance-of-terror Cold War universe. We are changing the relations of production dramatically. Space has gotten increasingly competitive; there are numerous agencies and businesses who have an interest in the “final frontier,” feeding directly into what Eisenhower termed the military-industrial complex.

Newt Gingrich wanted to offer prize money to “companies that can develop low-cost ways for the United States to reach Mars within decades. He noted that such prizes helped spur the growth of the commercial airplane industry” (McCutcheon & Christensen, 1998: 1494). Gingrich also suggested offering tax breaks to companies that manufacture in space or do research or offer commercial space flights. “I think that what the space station is doing is not an adequate level of space research activity,” Gingrich said. “If we add to that the concept of setting up a prize for the dramatic lowering of the cost of getting into space and setting up a zero tax...it could have an extraordinary effect” (McCutcheon & Christensen, 1998:1494). At a recent space conference attended by more than 700 people, the discussion focused on commercialization, and the mood was upbeat.

Space frontiers, once the province of large government programs, are on the threshold of expansive, value-driven commercial expansion,” Boeing Co. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Philip M. Condit said in a May 4 speech to aerospace executives.

Dozens of space-related companies, from Boeing and Raytheon Systems Co. to smaller businesses such as Orbital Sciences Corp. and Cincinnati Electronic Corp., filled information booths with brochures and booklets displaying new satellite technologies, advanced computer software and similar products aimed at furthering the private space boom. “There is an absolutely radical, historic paradigm shift to the commercial market,” said Stephen Rochereau, managing director of SpaceVest, a Reston, Va., venture capital company specializing in space. (McCutcheon & Christensen, 1998:1494)

Seized with privatization fever, NASA announced, “Immediate steps can and should be taken to encourage space tourism over the next few years” (McCutcheon & Christensen, 1998:1494). At approximately the



same time a St. Louis-based organization (the X Prize Foundation) tried to raise “\$10 million for the first team of entrepreneurs to build a private spacecraft that can carry three people on a suborbital flight up to 62 miles high on two consecutive trips within two weeks” (McCutcheon & Christensen, 1998:1494), and a Seattle company, Zegrahm Space Voyages, began taking reservations for a \$98,000-per-person space trip.

In December 1998, *Star Trek Insurrection* was released in theaters around the country. What made this particular *Star Trek* different was not its boring plot line, which has been done in many *Star Treks*. *Insurrection* aired nationwide with an invitation to join the Planetary Society (a nonprofit organization founded by Carl Sagan) to search for extraterrestrial life (the government SETI program was axed in 1993). The Baudriillardian bulletin on the business wires heralding this momentous occasion read:

For the First Time in “Star Trek” History Planet Earth is Invited to Help the Crew of the USS Enterprise in a Real Search to Seek Out New Life and New Civilizations! On October 19, 1998, Paramount Pictures’ motion picture *Star Trek: Insurrection*, in cooperation with The Planetary Society and SETI@home, will invite people from all over the planet to help in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. “To seek out new life and new civilizations” has been one of the primary objectives of the USS *Enterprise* since the beginning of the Star Trek phenomenon. This is the first time in motion picture history that the public will have an opportunity to participate in an authentic search for life elsewhere in the universe. Those signing up to participate in this historic search will be able to do so from any corner of the globe by accessing the Internet.

SETI@home is an innovative screen saver, developed at U.C. Berkeley by David Anderson and Dan Werthimer, which can be down-loaded and used to analyze data scanned from the sky—which may contain a potential signal from an extraterrestrial civilization. The SETI@home program will be analyzing data collected by SERENDIP IV (SERENDIP is an acronym for “Search for Extraterrestrial Radio Emissions from Nearby Developed Intelligent Populations” and it is the fourth in the series). *Star Trek: Insurrection’s* Director and Co-star, Jonathan Frakes, will pull the switch to start data recording for hyperlink mail to: SETI@home. The event will be televised on CNN. SERENDIP IV operates at Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico.

The 300 meter instrument is the world's largest single-dish radio telescope. Like a cosmic hitchhiker, SERENDIP piggybacks onto the observing runs of many astronomers. Typically, the Arecibo dish scans all of the sky visible to it once every six months, providing the SETI program a thorough survey of that region of our galaxy. SETI@home is an innovative screen saver program that will harness the spare power of hundreds of thousands of Internet-connected home computers around the world to crunch data from SERENDIP IV 21 cm. Thanks to the sponsorship by Paramount Pictures' *Star Trek: Insurrection* and The Planetary Society, the software will be available free to anyone wishing to participate in the program. "With SETI@home, each person who uses the program has the chance to become the first human being to detect the whisper of an extraterrestrial civilization on an alien world," said Louis Friedman, Executive Director of the Planetary Society. For over three decades, Paramount Pictures' popular *Star Trek* television series and motion pictures have had a mission "to seek out and explore... new life and new civilizations." SETI@home offers the public, worldwide, the chance to directly participate in the scientific search for life elsewhere. (*Business Wire*, 1998)

I could say that the military-industrial complex has become part of a virtual terrain. The virtual-reality, let's-play-war-games-in-space mentality has reinvigorated interest in space and in space wars and games and in the software market. The game "Back to Baghdad" is a good example of this. The game incorporates photographs that were taken during Desert Storm; these are not tourist-type pictures. The images are the same ones that were used by General Schwarzkopf to bomb the Iraqis. Postmodern virtual warriors are not military men in the traditional sense. Air Force Captain William O. Glascoe III is an astronautical engineer at a Los Angeles area air force base. Recently at a conference, he argued that "centralizing the various agencies that currently have jurisdiction over space would improve the nation's ability to defend against future space-based attacks. He advocates a multilayered agency similar to the other armed services, complete with a secretary, Space Combat Command and Space Force Academy" (McCutcheon & Christensen, 1998:1501). Although some Air Force officials were miffed, there were many, many federal government employees and policymakers who heard his speech and did not consider it far off base. Would it be like the International Space University, which uses Star Fleet as its model? It kind of makes me wonder who is

manning the photon torpedoes, or whose hand is on the phaser (which is a concept that I told you I would return to). Yes, it is true, it seems, that a phaser-type weapon has been invented, and the prototype for a photon torpedo is being developed.

According to Baudrillard (and I paraphrase), topography precedes geography. How do we negotiate a world that is just not there but has very real consequences? Travel, distance, and speed in a metaphorical world become a cybernetic interface in which the symbolic distance between metaphor and reality is abandoned, like an old tire on the side of a road—an empty road, replete with virtual tumbleweeds, and duststorms. (Because the information highway is part of America's nuclear highway, the allusion to the desert is very appropriate). Fatal technology foregrounds the conflation of the military with the industrial, with the academic, with science, with technology, and with *Star Trek*. There is no turning back, there is *No Exit!* There is no modern closure, because this is not the modern world.

### POSTMODERN PARAMILITARY CONDITIONS

A Rodney Dangerfield one-liner went like this: "I went to the fights and a hockey game broke out." Well, I was watching a television show, and the military-industrial complex broke out. Not that it ever went away. The sands of time have turned into silicon, and my phaser is not on stun, because I am already shell-shocked. Perhaps this trek is an expression of a postmodern paramilitary condition, a space where (as Hebidge might argue) "competing intentions, definitions, and effects, diverse social and intellectual tendencies and lines of force converge and clash" (Jarvis, 1998:103). Nevertheless, "A celebration of the age of rational science and modern society cannot simply be disconnected from the weapons of mass slaughter or the techniques of genocide: [the] language and logic of liberty and emancipation" cannot be "detached from the terror waged in their names." (Jarvis, 1998:103).

He who has the most toys when he dies wins. The technological continuously masks the economic base. We have entered into a world where technology reigns supreme, where the Treknological is triumphant, where technological literacy becomes the new literacy in a capitalist conflation of the military-industrial complex, with Hollywood style, on an expressway driven at breakneck spread. He who has access to the technology rules, and is firmly seated in the driver's seat. There is no reverse gear; the shoulder restraints are just not there. The

Treknological world speeds up at warp drive, and it is the ruling class who gets onto the information highway first.

It is those who can negotiate virtual terrains at accelerated velocities who remain (as always) way ahead of those who do not have the capital to pay the toll (or even know what the toll is). Perhaps the Treknological information highway, filled with virtual land mines of military video games and space ships being blown out of the sky, is a Hegelian highway, “a highway of despair of modern consciousness” (Dallmayr, 1993:31) constructed in postmodern-porkbarrel political terms. The mode of production is obscured in the machine of the holographic interface. This form of cyber-capitalism, a virtual form of manifest destiny and Mac (rather than Pax) Americana, is part of the rhetoric of the technological sublime (Marx, 1964), sublime fluid fetishized simulacra whose mutable boundaries disappear into virtual air.

After World War II the superhighway system was built, and America took to the open road.

After Desert Storm, America took to the virtual road. “The information highway” was a phrase that originated by media spin doctors in signifying (for we do little more nowadays than signify) the National Information Infrastructure. Entering into the popularized vernacular, the implications of this all too often overused phrases in an unprecedented conceptual shift. We have no adequate representation for the engineering that connects war machines to one another, or connects us to one another, or connects us to war machines in the cyber-realm. Within these phantasmagoras of progress “visual displays...concretized metaphors of progress...can appear ominous and terrifying to the first generations confronting it...who have not yet learned to master, not this nature itself, but humanity’s relationship to it.” (Bukatman, 1995:279).

Mastery is always tied to domination. Mastering the technological relationship, feeling comfortable within this new reality needs to be framed and understood through an ironic twist—a twist on, as Stone (1995) suggests, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, venturing not into the “heart of nature but, rather, into the heart of technology” (p. 38) in search of the ideological and political formations out of which it emerged. “Hey, you know what,” Laura said gleefully, “in the end it will all be okay, because it is our turn now! Star Trek is the future. And,

guess what! The future is here NOW!” Laura had to leave. I walked her to her car. She opened her car door, told me to live long and prosper, and drove down the road. I noticed a “Beam me up, Scotty,” bumper sticker as the car kicked up some very real dust.

# CHAPTER 4

## Klingon as Curriculum

### Militias, Minstrel Shows, and Other Language Games

#### DID YOU SAY KLINGON?

*Duj tIvoqtaH—always trust your instincts.*

Klingon is ostensibly the fastest-growing language on the planet. It's "the hottest language in the universe," with Terrans signing up for conversational Klingon courses in droves. This rapidly expanding linguistic phenomenon wasn't even a glimmer in its creators' eyes 20 years ago. Conceived in the netherworld of the Trek empire, Klingon perhaps is the first language ever forged in hyperreality, emanating from a popular television show, based on a cultural world that came out of the *Star Trek* series, that is spoken, written, and studied—spoken, written, and studied not on the celluloid screen but on terra firma.

The origins of Klingon begin with first Star Trek movie. During filming, the character Scotty (played by actor James Doohan) uttered several guttural sounds, simulating "Klingon" speech. In the next movie, *Star Trek 2: The Wrath of Khan*, Klingon played a pivotal role. Klingon characters had several attenuated dialogues, which took place on board Klingon ships. The producers and directors thought that in order to enhance the hyperrealistic effect of the script (and to please the detail-oriented *Star Trek* fans), Klingons ought to speak in Klingon. Subtitles on the screen translated the dialogue into English, parodying foreign films. There was a glitch, however; at the time, the Klingon language did not exist.

Mark Okrand (a linguist by profession, working for the National Captioning Institute in Washington, D.C.) was hired to "create" the Klingon language for the movie. The guidelines given to create the Klingon vernacular (using the sounds made in *Star Trek: The*

*Motion Picture* as a base) were really rather simple: Klingon needed to “sound good” and be a “real” language. In other words, it had to have grammatical structure, a system of word arrangement, and sound patterns.

### GOOD, CLEAN, INNOCENT FUN

As Klingon language experts continually reminded me, there is no question that Klingon is alien-speak from another planet, not from another nation: “It is not a language that Terrans speak naturally.” “It is a language that is not from Earth, so, it cannot sound very Earthlike.” “Linguist d’Armond Speers argues that ‘Klingon was designed to violate language universals’” (Lawrence, 1998). Jack (a middle school teacher who is both a Star Fleet officer and a Klingon officer) reminded me that “language universals as we know them now, stuck here on Earth. In the future, other languages from alien races might well resemble Klingon.”

The Klingon language contains more than 2,000 words (the minimum needed to be a fully expressive language, according to Klingon linguistic experts). The words do not take into account screeches, scratches, associated growls, lip smacking, and several distinct genres of spitting. “Why is spitting necessary?” I inquired. “Well, you know that Klingons are really primitive in many ways. They don’t have great table manners,” Jack said. The word *primitive* and Jack’s knowledge of precisely what was needed to construct a language signaled my own (internalized) semiotic red alert, a red alert putting me on the lookout for colonizing forces.

### DIVERSION, PARODY, AND THE POLITICS OF PRETEND

*nuqneH? So you want to be a Warrior. You think you’re good enough to join our crew? ... The I.K.V. Bloodlust is an active vessel. When we are not insulting humans, we like to drink warnog, and further the interests of the empire. We are known as Katah’s Mercenaries because of our complete and unbreakable loyalty to our captain. We have a saying on our crew Hira ‘taH yInwI’, meaning in your weak English, My life at your command. And our lives are at*

*our captain 's command, for we would die for him, our fleet commander and the Empire!*

*We are part of the Klingon Assault Group and it's Ring of Fire Fleet. Our fleet commander, Kutaj zantai KorDas, keeps the fleet in order and working hard For the Glory of the Empire. So now it is time to decide. Are you a warrior or a human ?*

—[HTTP://AVWW.KAG.ORG](http://AVWW.KAG.ORG)

Klingon is a diversion and, like all of Star Trek, seems utterly and completely benign. “Klingon prepares Terran (Earth) minds for the future.”

It is a lot like learning a dead language, like Greek or Latin. But Klingon is much more interesting. It captures students' attention, and anyway learning a language is always something that is good. Who knows, maybe someday Klingon will be a language spoken by everyone. Learning Klingon, I will almost guarantee you, helps students with their English and, of course, eventually with their English literature.

I needed to ask, although I already knew the answer, “Their English literature?” I knew that Clara (this particular Trekker teacher), who taught in a country club-like setting, where gated communities dotted the quasi-suburban, semirural Georgia landscape, was not talking about second-language acquisition in the same manner as it is spoken about in areas where bilingual issues prevail. Admittedly, my mind began to wander. Clara interjected (interrupting my thoughts) with a smile, “Do you know about the Klingon translation project? All of Shakespeare's works will be translated back into their original Klingon.” We both laughed. Clara was speaking in hyperreal terms, and we both knew it. (She seemed to relish the opportunity to do so.)

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Trek lore, in the movie *Star Trek, The Undiscovered Country*, the crew has a conversation with a visiting Klingon diplomat, Chancellor Gorkin. His statement “You have not experienced Shakespeare until you've heard him in the original... Klingon” preceded and, in many ways, precipitated the Klingon language phenomenon.

Now, Klingon announcements, advertisements, and Websites (which are expanding as exponentially as both Star Trek and the Internet) continually speak to and about authenticity. “I try to be as



authentically Klingon as possible in my uniform actions and deeds,” said James. I began to wonder if there could be an authentic artificiality. The very naming of authenticity carries with it constructions of inauthenticity (against which “the former is always evaluated” [Root 1996:79]).

Far more than a fetishized artifact (in both the Marxist and the Freudian sense), Klingon is something that has emerged on the bandwidth between the simulacra and the tangible. According to the Asheboro Courier Tribune:

“The Klingon Language Institute” a Philadelphia group that includes a number of linguists...is offering a free 11 lesson correspondence course... Star Trek Conversational Klingon (Simon and Shuster Audioworks \$11), a new audiocassette featuring Michael Dorn (who plays resident Klingon Lt. Worf on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) and Marc Okrand is aimed at Terrans planning a visit to the Klingon Empire, home to learn many colorful customs. You’ll learn to recognize common Klingon phrases including checkout time is at five A.M. (frequently heard when checking into a Klingon hotel) and “Buy or die!” (uttered by Klingon shopkeepers). Several colleges... offer or have offered... courses in Klingon including Chicago’s Northeastern Illinois University... Lawrence M.Schoen, founder of the Klingon Language Institute and a...teacher at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia initially started studying Klingon...using computer electronic bulletin boards...he began publishing a quarterly academic journal. (Klingon Language Institute, 1993)

The *Miami Herald* (1993) announced: “In warrior garb...Klingon Captain Krankor—also known as Rich Yampell...bellows out the Klingon national anthem during opening ceremonies of the first ever Klingon Language Camp in Red Lake Minnesota.”

<i>Qoy qeylls puqloD</i>	<i>Hear! Sons of Kahless</i>
<i>Qoy puqbe 'pu'.</i>	<i>Hear! Daughters too.</i>
<i>yoHbogh matlhbogh je Suvwl'</i>	<i>The blood of battle washes clean.</i>
<i>Say' moHchu' may' lw'</i>	<i>The Warrior brave and true.</i>
<i>maSuv manong 'ej maHoHchu'</i>	<i>We fight, we love, and then we kill.</i>
<i>nl 'be' ylnmaj 'ach wovqu'.</i>	<i>Our lives burn short and bright.</i>

*batlh maHeghbehj 'ej yo'qljDaq* Then we die with honor and join  
our

*vavpu 'ma' Dlmuv pa 'reH* fathers in the Black Fleet where  
*maSuvataHqu'* we battle forever, battling on  
through the Eternal fight.

—[HTTP://WWW.KAL.ORG](http://www.kal.org)

In some ways, the “camp” of the camp is humorous. But the humor and camp concerning the Klingon camp reveals far more than it can conceal beneath the uniforms-costumes and language games.

Camp organizer Glen Prochel (who is also studying to be a minister) said, “These are people who are highly trained professionals” (“Klingon Language Study,” *Herald*, 1993). “The military types and biker types are attracted to Klingon” was told to me over and over again, in different settings and at different times.

Paul views *Star Trek* as a metaphor for our world and aliens as a symbol for a certain type of human being: Klingons are like bikers. I’ve been a biker for years. Bikers are very honorable people. They’re very family orientated, they take care of their own. We would never put somebody else down because of their race, creed, color or because they were from another galaxy. (Witham, 1996:22)

“Originally,” Marsha (a Trekker teacher interviewed in 1993) began, “guys starting dressing up as Klingons to protect speakers from fans who were just dying to get close to them!” “Sure, I work security,” Barry said. “I’m a Klingon, and that means I am intimidating enough to control a crowd.” Russell (a Klingon warrior) explained, “I’ve actually worked in years past doing security” (Pierce, 1998:1). He has been lucky enough to have been “William Shatner’s bodyguard three times. Other famous personalities Russell has met include some *Voyager* cast members, such as Kate Mulgrew (Captain Janeway), Garrett Wang (Lt. Harry Kim) and Jennifer Lien (Kess)” (Pierce, 1998:1).

Klingons pump iron (Witham, 1996), practice swordplay, and (given the neo-Pagan connections that several Klingons profess) “already imagine themselves to be pillaging nomads” (Davis, 1994:127). “Klingon clubs attract people who are not traditional Trekkers. I feel confined and constrained by the rules of Star Fleet. . . actually we are the bad ass boys,” Dave, a middle school principal, said, while playing with

a phaser keyring. Broome, a 36-year-old former navy man, chose to join the Klingons because “the Feds are just a little too perfect.” Klingons, by contrast, being an aggressor species, allow one to “be arrogant and obnoxious. It’s a safety valve—the dark side can get out” (Lewis, 1995: 10).

Indeed, “as a Star Fleet captain you have one hand tied behind your back; as a Klingon, you have two hands and one of them has an axe in it,” enthuses Close (yet another warrior).... “The ultimate glory for a Klingon is to die in battle with your hands round your enemy’s neck.” (Smith at <http://www.klaw.com>). Close is another ex-Navy man (there seems to be an abundance of ex-military men at Klingon gatherings, and retired military men turned teachers who coach football and join Klingon battleships as an avocation). “You don’t want to be hurt by a Klingon,” Close (a father of two and a second-generation Trekker) continues. “You run about at conventions threatening folk and stabbing them with fake knives. At conventions Star Fleet officers will actually step out of out way” (Smith at <http://www.klaw.com>).

### SURVIVING THE KLINGON OR SURVIVING IN KLINGON

*IKV RakeHell, a loyal ship of the Klingon Assault Group, announced TARG TV. The first Klingon television station. “Blood Guts and Glory. Good clean family fun” They also sell Klingon battle training videos, and videos of great Klingon historic battles.*

—MY NOTES

While I was agonizing over the Klingon phenomenon, a colleague acerbically pointed out, during a casual dinner table conversation, that Klingons bonding together in Klingon groups ought to be seen as something positive. Given the descriptions and the signifiers that surround Klingons (she felt), they could easily become part of “real” (Earth-based) militant militias.

They’re ruthless. They’re politically incorrect. Klingon Bastards do not conform to the fictitious norms espoused by pinko-commie-libs. Klingons normally conform to their own society by disemboweling pinko-commie-libs.... Klingon Bastards are not mean, cruel, or rude as a matter of course; they are mean, cruel,

and rude on purpose, and for good reason. They understand that brutality, when carefully applied, is a wonderful motivator.... A Klingon Bastard would kick a puppy out of the way when helping a little old lady across the street. Klingon Bastards eat red meat, real eggs, and real butter. They drink whole milk and carbonated beverages with real sugar and caffeine. When in doubt, bet on the Klingon. If you ever bet against the Klingon, be prepared to defend yourself. (Original content copyright 1995 Steve "Auger" Edwards, <http://www.kwai.org>)

Prince Keon, a self-described neo-Pagan, ex-army functionary (with Germany's Dirty Thirty force, i.e., Pershing missile brigade), currently drives a school bus. He is not a Klingon, I would bet, under any circumstances. He was first attracted to Klingon because he had "already participated in a war machine" (Davis, 1994:134) and found that the Klingon warrior code of honor resonated with his own (mercenary) philosophy. Ka'Hil (his Klingon name), another well-trained professional, admires "Klingon toughness and survival instincts" (Davis, 1994:128). Joe (not his Klingon name) insists that "the warrior has gotten a very bad name. Today, it's not a warrior anymore. It's a militarist. A warrior understands why he or she is fighting" (Davis, 1994:129).

"It is amazing to see the number of police and military men who adopt the Klingon lifestyle," Robert, an ex-navy officer who teaches social studies and coaches football, said proudly. "Becoming Klingons lets us be all we can be!" "Mike Sandeffur...is an ex-Navy man who teaches computer skills.... I was always fascinated with ancient Egyptians, the knights, battle armor [and]... I don't think there is anything more proud than a Klingon warrior" (Wickham 1996:28), so he signed up for a ship in San Diego.

It is undoubtedly less volatile and dangerous for Klingon warriors to engage in charitable activities such blood feuds (blood donation drives). It is preferable for Klingons to meet in Spartan camplike settings (singing campfire songs in Klingon) while watching demonstrations of the Baf'leth (a Klingon weapon, which can cost upwards of \$500) than for the same Klingons to meet in Spartan settings plotting the overthrow of the government. It is certainly less insidious for Klingon groups to discuss the intricacies of reading Klingon texts, including one based on the O.J.Simpson trial (McLeans, 1995), while bellowing out the Klingon anthem than to discuss the nuances of *Mein Kampf*.

## EXOTIC EROTIC ON THE POSTMODERN PORNOGRAPHIC

Klingons do speak the same ideological language as “our” boys surviving around camp-fires, somewhere in the rural recesses of the nation. (Klanwatch reported that Terry Nichols, for example, intended to create a paramilitary army [Garrett, 1997], the structure of which is no different than a Klingon assault group.) Although Klingons have been known to appear in New York dance clubs (Davis, 1994), the paramilitary survivalist ideology is costumed in their codes. Klingons are survivalists of a semiotic variety, performing drag in paramilitary garb—semiotic paramilitary drag where “excess, artifice and theatricality” (Robertson, 1996:4) counts and where constructed language interanimates with the construction of culture in the playing fields of the credit card classes. The virtual play of Klingon renders any debate somewhat meaningless because Klingons do not exist.

You know I taught myself Klingon, you could say I came by it naturally because I am a Klingon. Sure, I have been teased, even heckled, especially when I am in my Klingon uniform. Once, I even went to a restaurant, and they didn’t want to let me in, they thought I was a Hell’s Angel or something. But, I mean, who would be just downright dumb enough to mess with a Klingon warrior, so they let us in.... I recognize it is not entirely real, but when I have my Klingon uniform on I walk taller, I am much prouder, I even feel stronger, and I am not afraid to go into any neighborhood. My students know not to mess around with me if I am in Klingon attire. (Trekker teacher)

Klingon exoticizes and eroticizes selected elements of apocalyptic and survivalist millennialism. At the same time Klingon also frames elements of selected specific cultural sites, especially of African Americans, through a colonizing filter, what Deborah Root (1996) would call a “smoking mirror,” a mirror that deflects and projects notions of barbarism, blood, and savagery onto colonized people. To do otherwise would question the very basis of Western canon. After all, it is not the enlightened, rational European who is bloodthirsty. Europeans would *never* aestheticize violence.

negotiations or sanc. tions could ever be because it aestheticized dead bodies. Violence became something beautiful. (Root, 1996:3)

Klingon, in the same manner as the Gulf War and other aesthetically violent displays, displaces white rage onto the body of the other, in this case an alien other, highlighting a fascination with militaristic, genocidal, and rapacious violent sensuality. But “it is not us [really], it is Klingons.” The smoking mirror deflects power in a myriad of ways, but, in deflection (because power is certainly never benign), the “European” abrogates himself from barbarism; it is invariably *the other* who acted with bitter cruelty and unmitigated savagery.

Klingons strip cultural elements of social context by displacing, commodifying, and ultimately transforming them onto a different body. Commodification is central to Klingonese. To engage in Klingon is to engage in the consumption of a particular body. Historically, Europeans attribute savagery to the other, “to those they sought to colonize...as a way of displacing and drawing attention away from the extent to which European elites were prepared to consume bodies. The fascination remains provided it does not come too close to home” (Root, 1996:16). Our fascination with others, our willingness to consume others continues on endlessly in a boundless frenzy, a globalized maelstrom of glamorized violence and desire, because it is profitable to do so. Consumption breeds more consumption, and on and on and on and on, until at a certain point, what is being consumed is drained of its original meaning.

Klingons take stereotypical white signifiers of blackness (for it is always the powerful who control access to data and definitions of how any-“thing” can be understood), transfiguring and signifying onto an-OTHER body (an imaginary body brought into reality through simulacra and the interface of the hyperreal). The allure of the eroticized exotic is fundamental to the appeal of Klingons, whose themes of war and honor and death and battle celebrate a *marked body* in the smoking mirror with postmodern conservative irony and parody.

Klingon is a celebration that pays homage to peculiar and selective icons, including danger, rage, fighting, and hostility. The predominantly white Klingons (who must emerge from a particular class nexus to be able to invest in all the Klingon accouterments) participate, and improvise their version of uninhibited primal primitivism (a stereotypical signifier for blackness)—defining, distorting, and “camping” selective icons (which is always the prerogative of the culturally dominant) while never naming them at all. “Klingons have

more muscles and bigger sex organs. You don't want to fuck with a group of Klingons walking around late at night."

Kyxak Solaazam enters the...security room. With long cornrows, a strikingly attractive face, a pure vinyl suit, and a con hand stamp on her breast, Kyxak embodies the Valkkyrie/Amazon archetype of the Klingon female. A Bajoran calls out, "Women with Klingon ridges drive me wild!" She bares her teeth and growls. (Davis, 1994:128).

Inasmuch as whiteness erases and effaces, Klingon erases that which is already consigned to an invisible space (their own unmarked white bodies, for as the emerging field of white studies has shown us, whiteness is the norm by which everything else is measured), an unmarked space that exists at the juncture of economic and political relations of subordination and domination. To play with Jameson (1991: 315) for a moment, Klingon culture deliberately erases ideas of class, globalization, race, gender, and ethnicity, effacing history into an otherworldly functional consumer package that becomes an indispensable precondition on which to build their Klingon virtual home-world. As Klingon signifiers detach themselves from objective teleological conditions and the commodities and commodified beings they represent, they become swept up into a vortex of signs engulfed in a semiotic sea, a great, swirling tempest of signifiers, that attempt to drift further and further away from that which they signify. Yet, Klingon remains anchored to a particular space, place, and time.

Klingon "heteroglossic" (and I bracket the term deliberately) images and narratives fuse features of public and private discourse, making use of in-group metaphors, riddles, puns and jokes; they are "intramodal parallelisms" (Bertelsen, 1996:89), which somehow create a highly cohesive hyperreal form. Klingon offers a shared vernacular of rituals, aphorisms, and stories, that serve to confirm a particular Klingon social identity (such as the Klingon holiday "days of honor" and Klingon memorials to events that took place in the "future-past" in a universe of electronic chimeras). This universe Trekkers (including Klingons) *know* (and knowing is power, and in this case those who have the power to know are the only ones that can laugh at their own jokes). "Character and place names have significance either as historic or literary allusions, or as inside jokes or tributes to the production staff" (Murdock, 1998:10); the meaning therefore is not necessarily symbolic, but anchored to something.

How can I debate or discuss my discomfort with the discursive practices of Klingons? How can I contest (critically, oppositionally, and consciously) vested interests that speak out of both sides of a single mouth? “Klingons have nothing at all to do with blacks. It just seems that way because a lot of Klingons are black.” Kyxak insists that her attraction to Klingons has nothing at all to do with race. “In Klingon society there’s no such thing as black and white. You’re either imperial with the forehead, or you’re irrelevant” (Davis, 1994:128). Ruffles may have ridges, but apparently so do various forms of racialized signification.

### LANGUAGE ANXIETY (MY OWN)

*RICH YAMPELL: If I tell you that “lech” is to see, how do you say, You see me?*

*1ST CHILD STUDENT: Lesh*

*1ST ADULT STUDENT: Cho-lech*

*MR. YAMPELL: Cho-lech. Good.*

—NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO 8/21/1993

*On the opening day of camp some of Captain Kirk’s crew took on a group of swarthy Klingon warriors in a game of softball which included some cheerleading in Klingonese.*

—NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO 8/21/1993

The Bible is being translated into Klingon, and, as Clara mentioned (in a previous section), so are the complete works of Shakespeare. The University of Oregon’s modern language Website has Klingon alongside French, Spanish, and German. And then, of course, there is the Klingon Language Institute.

Now in its fifth year of operation, the Klingon Language Institute continues its mission of bringing together individuals interested in the study of Klingon linguistics and culture, and providing a forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas. Our membership is diverse, including *Star Trek* fans with curiosity and questions about Klingon language, RP gamers wishing to lend some authenticity to a Klingon character, as well as students and professionals in the fields of linguistics, philology, computer science, and psychology who see the Klingon language as a



useful metaphor in the classroom or simply wish to mix vocation with avocation. Though based in the U.S.A., the Institute is actually an international endeavor, presently reaching over thirty countries on seven continents (yes, even Antarctica!). Our primary means of pursuing our mission is our quarterly journal. *HolQeD* is a referred journal. *HolQeD* is indexed by the Modern Language Association and is registered with the Library of Congress (ISSN: 1061-2327).

The KLI has gained a great deal of attention in the press for our translations efforts, specifically our Klingon Shakespeare Restoration Project (KSRP) and Klingon Bible Translation Project (KBTP). Copies of our translation of *Hamlet* (ISBN: 0-9644345-1-2) may be ordered through our website (<http://www.kli.org>), and you can find samples of both projects for your enjoyment at our FTP site (<ftp.kli.org>). In addition to translation, we encourage original composition in Klingon and publish an annual literary magazine...entirely in Klingon.... We also carry the complete range of Klingon books and tapes from Simon & Schuster. (<http://www.kli.org/kli/merchant.phtml>)

At the Université du Quebec a Montreal, the Klingon dictionary has been utilized as a classroom tool. A master's degree student at that specific university completed "a two-year project on the language's social impact among its thousands of aficionados" ("Escape into Klingon," *McLeans*, 1998:36). Meanwhile, at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, Lawrence Schoen (founder of the Klingon Language Institute) "uses...Klingon in linguistics courses" (Gorman, 1993:57). Klingon is also a media darling. It is seen as a human interest story, occasionally met with chagrin and sometimes with enthusiasm.

At the same time that Klingon was finding its way into universities, schools, camps, and your home, several language issues emerged in the United States that were not met with the same enthusiastic embrace as Klingon. It does seem somewhat peculiar that languages spoken by real people, in real situations, living real lives are trivialized and disparaged, whereas Klingon does not engender any protest. It seems to me to be more than just incommensurate when questions focus on if Ebonics is a language, yet Klingon is never questioned. It seems absurd that particular languages are relegated to "dialects," "pidgins," or "creoles," while Klingon is afforded full-fledged language status.

## PIG LATIN CROSSES OVER THE NEUTRAL ZONE

Meaning is something that remains tentative and tenuous. Meaning is never fixed. Static, unchanging truths do not account for dynamic, constantly changing symbolic environments. Notions of innate consciousness, of an authentic selfhood, of a singular ontological exterior stable object (sustaining a one-to-one correspondence between human knowledge and language) are embedded in an essentializing matrix tied to positivistic pretentious understandings of language and ideology.

Constructing artificial language is a fascinating linguistic exercise. Yet, when I create an artificial language, I take my world with me. I don't expand my horizons. I replicate and I rearticulate and I reproduce. I attempt to produce a singular exterior meaning. For example, Pig Latin, a language I used to speak rather fluently, as did many of my elementary and junior high school contemporaries, maintained a one-to-one correspondence with what we were trying to describe (hide) in English. Modern secular Hebrew, whose invention parallels the birth of the Israeli nation, is a reaction to the policies of the British Empire. If there was not such profound antipathy toward the British, English might have been the official language of Israel (Hebrew is an act of resistance). The "inventors" of modern Hebrew did not create curse words. To curse in Hebrew, I need to use Arabic words. The revived and revised language began to take on a life of its own, borrowing and exchanging at will from the heteroglot of peoples that comprised the population of the geographic space, which Lavie (1996) defines "as a blob of color floating around without defined edges" (p. 85). Language is a process. It doesn't stand still. "By giving a name to something we create a world, by changing the name for something, we transform its impact both emotionally and intellectually" (Overing, 1987:83). *Sabra* constructed an Israeli national image, and the reinvention of Hebrew was "central to imagining [that] new Israeli national identity" (Lavie, 1996:59). Hebrew remains an unstable subject existing at what Rosaldo and Lavie (1996) describe as the intersection of multiple border zones (p. 59). Hebrew may well have been the only real Zionist victory (what Lavie would call a territory in the form of language). And in that way, Klingon does parallel Hebrew, for central to imagining the constructed Klingon identity is the Klingon vernacular. But Klingon does not change any names or words *for* something; Klingon changes names *to* something.

By importing European technology to both reinforce Ashkenazi superiority and primitivize both Sephardim and Palestinians, the language of Hebrew ultimately became a part of a colonizing force. Klingon primitivizes in its signification. The words, the “technology,” all prescribe a particular worldview, signifying some-body. And, yes, as much as “Klingons make members of Star Fleet tremble (because we are so bad),” in much the same way as signification makes meaning tremble (Bammer, 1994).

However, although Klingons (also) have a language (which produces a form of hyperreal identity), and their territory also exists in the form of language, I doubt Klingons will be given their own homeland (or homeworld) anytime soon.

### ESPERANTO AND KLINGONESE

Esperanto, (just) like Klingon, was invented by one person. Esperanto’s creator hoped it would be embraced by and adopted by everyone in the world. Words, however, depend on the circumstances of their production. What does it mean to have a language that is based on capitalist consumption and production on a postfordist terrain? Klingon may have changed the marketing impulse (being primarily profit oriented). In both Klingon and Esperanto, there is an emphasis on packaging and marketing (although Esperanto emerged out of presumably idealistic impulses). Esperanto’s relative success (which is small in comparison with Klingon) is primarily due to marketing. While the creators of rival languages focused on grammar, Dr. Zamenhof (Esperanto’s “father”) focused his time and energy on the community of Esperanto speakers, furnishing Esperanto enthusiasts with a rather extensive collection of what could only be dubbed as “great” (in the perennial sense) Esperanto literature.

Esperanto was created out of specific historical circumstances (as were a whole array of other “universal” languages) at the end of the nineteenth century. The ennui, anomie, and alien-nation that were felt throughout Europe (historians continually refer to a sense of loss that was proliferating on the continent), as the world stood at the precipice of the profound changes in this century, were central to Esperanto’s formation. People felt an increased need for security, and as twilight descended on the British Empire (even though the sun still has not set) questions of citizenry and national identity were beginning to enter the discussion. As postcolonial issues were beginning to make an impact. Esperanto was conceived in utopian terms, supposedly transcending any

and all boundaries (national or linguistic) and uniting mankind as a whole (which in many ways sounds very Trekkoid). In the Rodney King “why can’t we all get along?” mentality (which differs from the backlash at the end of this century), there was a desire to create a single language that could open up worldwide lines of communication. Yet, Esperanto’s project, as ambitious and altruistic as it may sound, used European languages as the base for a one-to-one perfect correspondence between European words and European concepts for new Esperanto words. Esperanto has been heralded as easier to learn, more grammatically regular, and more perfect than any natural language. I am an active agent in the process of language. The very hierarchy of the “easier to learn,” new-and-improved variety suggests that some languages are more difficult than others. Should it come as any surprise that Europeans creating Esperanto used European words and ideas and orthography? After all, really foreign languages are just too difficult to learn.

We are socialized through different languages, which operate through us and construct “views of the world” (Whorf, 1940:221) or “picture[s] of the universe” (Whorf, 1940:214). One-to-one correspondence with some-body’s reality (language world) does nothing to transform the politics of language or open up the possibility for other worldviews. There is no imagination; there is no expanded perception embedded in some-thing that emerges out of a single position, a single time, a single space, and from the mind of a single individual—in other words, a specific canon.

Esperanto’s imperialism (like other universal languages or any notion of universality) is, without a doubt, a form of linguistic hegemony, constructing universality with Europe at the center of the galaxy. Klingon’s imperialism emerges out of a postmodern, post-Fordist, and postcolonial (albeit universal) impetus. As Terry Eagleton (1990) so aptly explained, “The term *post* if it has any meaning at all means business as usual, only more so” (p. 381). If Esperanto can be equated to tropes of empire, Klingon can be understood as a trope of the multinational corporation.

Mark Okrand has consistently claimed that Klingon has its base in nothing at all. Nothing emerges out of a Hegelian vacuum. And nothing is always some-thing (in *Seinfeld*, in the null set, and in post-Newtonian physics). Mark Okrand created Klingon (and he is human); therefore, the words he chose had to correspond to concepts he wanted to describe. Klingon is considered and described as a creative masterpiece, which it may well be (it is certainly a marketing masterpiece).

Nevertheless, Okrand remains the artistic-linguistic hand that brought Klingon into existence. He does not come into the “universe” without ideology, position, or subjectivities.

### CREEPING KLINGONESE

People are having a good time learning Klingon. The “language’s” proponents feel learning Klingon is an extraordinary opportunity for people who have never spoken or attempted to speak a second language to do so. “People study Klingon who’ll never dream of studying a foreign language” (Lawrence, 1995:E-5), declared Lawrence Schoen, the professor in Pennsylvania who founded the Klingon Language Institute.

D’Armond Speers in an interview expressed his professional and therefore expert opinion (as a linguist) concerning the enriching elements of second-language acquisition and bilingualism. The professional conflated with the personal as Speers used his own son, Alex, both as example and exemplar of a bilingual child. Alex “is possibly the Earth’s first native born Klingon speaker” (Lawrence, 1998) The slippage in the unarticulated spaces of Speer’s quote concerning bilingualism is much more problematic than the notion of artificially constructed language in general or Klingon in particular. The gap, the gulf, the blank, seemingly empty space of this particular smoke screen, much like other neutral deflections in the face of persistent and continuing racial inequality, coincide with a very racialized text.

Teaching remains both a cultural and an intellectual endeavor. Given the opportunity to act, to speak out, to use Klingon to highlight assumptions concerning language, and surrounding language acquisition, nothing was said by Speers or the article’s author. When given the venue to speak, a teacher, a linguist as an active agent can act in a responsible manner in challenging unjust social practices, but all was quiet on the final frontier. Why bring up bilingualism without connecting it to bilingual issues?

Foucault (1974) has argued that:

The real political task in a society such as ours...to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (p. 171)

“Klingon is a way for people to put themselves in another world...to escape from the everyday” (Wickens, 1996:65). But not everyone has the material means to escape into the world of Klingon. Not everyone has the material assets or the leisure time to escape the world of role playing (in the virtual or hyperreal sense, not in the Goffman-like dramaturgy of roles) or language games expressed in artificial language as an artifice of desire. People are too busy dealing with the politics and materiality in the politics in natural language. For many people, learning English means survival. For many people, second-language acquisition is not a luxury, not an escape, but a necessity: a necessity in an inhospitable world.

### INTERANIMATING INCOMMENSURABILITI ES

Children who speak a second language score better on their SATs and other standardized tests and develop increased cognitive skills. For example, in Miami, bilingual education is considered fundamental to any student’s success; “inhabitants who know English and Spanish earn more than those who know only English—perhaps as much as \$3,000–\$5,000 more a year, on average” (Rifkin, 1998:42). The politicized forces, in the playing fields of the new right in California, cite a different study, which frames bilingual education in a manner befitting a defense of their ideological position. Measuring the eventual income of students in bilingual education programs, “Their findings suggested that students placed in bilingual-education programs earn significantly less than their otherwise similar peers who received monolingual English instruction” (study by Lopez and Mora in Rodriguez, 1998:20). The incomesurability between the two studies (and, yes, I am being exceedingly caustic) I have cited here has nothing at all to do with oppressive social conditions, right-wing restoration, or legalized racist backlash in areas outside Latin-dominated Dade County. Would D’Armand Speers’ Klingon-speaking son (if he lived in California) earn less than his monolingual English-speaking peers? I wonder what retiring California Governor Pete Wilson’s position is on Klingon or Klingons? If Klingon is a language (which it is) and it is seen as a positive, perhaps the issue is not language at all, but a political economy that values particular languages above other languages, thinking of some languages as playthings for the leisure times of the leisure class. Marie Antoinette (let them eat cake, or eat their words) notwithstanding, there is the unconscionable, not too subtle suggestion

that there is a standard mode, a standard way, a standard language for speaking at school, work, home, and in the world (and the language is definitely not Spanish). Language discrimination is no different than racial discrimination. If we believe that there is a “normal” language spoken by everyone in order to avoid a breakdown in the lines of communication, any language constructed outside that norm (standard English) is suspect. Language games are another smoking mirror in the trope of capitalist empire.

The English First Foundation is a lobbying group committed to the abolition of bilingual education. English, according to this not too thoughtful think tank, ought to be the only language utilized in the United States. The 1996 Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole explicitly stated, “We must stop the practice of multilingual education” (Pitsch, 1995:18). Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich wrote, “Without English as a common language there is no...civilization (1995: 162), for “bilingualism keeps people actively tied to their old language and habits” (1995:161) (and he ought to know because when he is not playing power broker in Congress, he does teach Western Civilization). Indeed, this argument is rather ludicrous, especially as an argument stemming from good capitalists. Accumulating two of anything is always more than one or, as my friend Brian Zalis has always said, “He who dies with the most toys wins” (although I think he was thinking of chess sets and laser tag). I feel quite sure and assured in saying that the English First Foundation, and Senator Dole, and the Honorable (UFO-seeing) Mr. Gingrich are not speaking about the Klingon tongue when they rant on about monolingual education.

## TRANSPOSITIONS AND IDEOLOGIES

*“Become a Member of the Proud Horde”*

*Excellent pay—all you can steal*

*Good Food—most of it dead, some of it even cooked.*

*Travel to Exotic Planets—visit ruins, both ancient and recent*

*Applicant must pass minimum strength requirements such as the ability to rip opponents limb from limb. Applicants must possess the ability to withstand large amounts of pain, usually from other Klingons.*

—THE KLINGON STRIKE FORCE

We all know language. It is the base of all that we do, think, and say. I don't need to learn anything about language; I am using it right now (I can speak, I can read, and I can write). I don't need to learn about language acquisition (everybody everywhere acquires language), or how language is learned (because we all learn "it"), or how language constructed because we all construct our wor(l)d through language. We are constantly engaged in language, we don't exist apart from language, and we work at language and with language from the day we are born until the day we die. What does it mean to take away somebody's language, or ridicule somebody's language, or disparage somebody's language? What does it mean when we relegate somebody's language to nonlanguage? Which is precisely what happened during the Ebonics controversy. What was lost in the jokes about "hebonics," "hickbonics," and "I be, you be" conjugations was the real issue. People speak Black English every day, all the time, in their lives. It is a language (a real language, not a linguistic exercise, or a bourgeois form of escapism). Ebonics is not superior or inferior linguistically to any other form of language. The issue revolves not around language at all but around inequity. It is not a question of separate language, or the anachronistic imperialistic notion of pidgins, creoles, or other dimunitizing definitions. I recall reading somewhere the story of a black American scholar who was constantly asked (much like Peter Pan asking Wendy if she believed in fairies) if she "believed in Ebonics." Nobody has ever asked anyone that I know of if they believed in Klingon, not even the linguist D'Armand Speers, who proclaimed his child to be the first native Klingon speaker. The school board of Oakland was chastised on many occasions because of their recognition of Ebonics. I have yet to hear somebody chastise anyone connected with Klingon.

The most unconscionable unchallenged racialized ideological mechanisms are enacted and played out in this peculiar analogy. "The reason that African American English has drawn such fire is...because it is spoken by Black people" (Foster, 1997:11). Language discrimination is a way of masking the racist relations of production and is contingent on a peculiar notion that an objective language exists, one that is not "packed with ideology" (Freire and Macedo, 1987:128).

"Students of nonstandard languages in the United States do not fail because of a language failure; they fail because they live in a society that lies about language.... The brutal truth is that the bulk of White people in America never had any interest in educating Black people" (Stuckey, 1991:122). The brutal truth is that there is a colonial language hierarchy that works in much the same way as the racial hierarchy. It is



not only the uncontested nature of Klingon that is problematic but also the words that Klingon seeks to describe. It is not only the acquisition of Klingon (which requires an investment of time and money) but also a question of the cultural capital of those who have the time and money to acquire it.

**WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH  
KLINGON? WHO ARE THE KLINGONS,  
ANYWAY?**

I suspect another attraction for me, as a teacher working in an urban school, is that the Empire is a warrior society. As a warrior and a teacher I even get combat pay. Many like myself look at the Klingon way, “warrior way,” as a way of life.... At its best, the Empire gives us glimpses of what it might be like to live in a culture that follows a noble military path. There seems to be a misconception that aggressive tendencies are bad. But not really. When I listen to my black students, they have a code of honor, you don’t diss them. And you don’t insult a Klingon either. (Trekker teacher)

Remember the Trekker teacher named Mark who used the word “primitive” to describe the Klingon culture? Remember the quote concerning “associated growls, lip smacking, and several forms of spitting” used by Klingons? Recall the words “guttural sounds,” which were supposed to simulate Klingon speech? What do these expressions reveal, or conceal, when members of various Klingon groups dress up and drink “blood wine”?

On the original *Star Trek*, the Klingons were a thinly veiled representation of the Soviet Union. Glasnost inserted a problematic peccadillo into the story line. The story line in *Star Trek* for almost twenty years ran parallel to the Cold War. As Captain Chang said to Captain Kirk in *Star Trek Six*: “All space warriors are cold warriors.” Since the (cold) war was over, Trek producers had the Federation move toward peace with the Klingon empire (while attempting to construct new enemies of the week in much the same manner as George Orwell, or the U.S. government). A rather tenuous alliance was forged between the former Soviet Union and the United States, which paralleled the peace forged between the Klingon empire and the Federation.

It was at that particular moment in Federation time that Klingons began to change, mutating into something (someone) else entirely. Different signifiers emerged on the playing fields of the hyper-real. Once again I refer to *Star Trek Six*. In that movie, Klingon diplomats came aboard the *Enterprise*. The crew responded to and commented on the Klingons' (bad-smelling) body odor. Klingons became taller and more muscular. (Michael Dorn, the actor who for so long has been associated with the Klingon character Worf, notes that he wears shoulder pads to give himself a more imposing appearance.) And their faces changed considerably (due, in part, to a large makeup budget). Sulu (the Asian American character on the multicultural Noah's ark of the Federation) may well have said it best when announcing the arrival of the Klingons aboard the ship: "Guess who's coming to dinner?" "The Star Trek Movies also opened up Klingon subjectivities—literally. For the first time, we saw the dark, cramped interiors of Klingon ships and met the Klingon race" (Davis, 1994:134).

Some seventy-odd years later, hostilities long over, on the *Enterprise* of the *Next Generation*, we are introduced to Worf, a full-blooded Klingon raised by human (ironically Russian) adoptive parents. Worf's adoptive family and his human adoptive environment are inconsequential. Worf's personality, his understanding of history, his needs and desires are entirely Klingon. Culture, in this Trekkoid version, is not a process but a tangible entity, a thing—a thing that remains entirely entrenched and encoded in blood. This biological form of determinism cannot ever be transcended. Worf may never have lived on the Klingon home-world, he may have been raised in an entirely human environment, but the lure of his Klingon blood, which is at the essence of his Klingon self-hood (as if there was a self in and of it-self), dictates how he will respond and how he will understand any given situation (see Bernardi, 1998).

When Klingons are reconstructed as "honorable savages with a long and noble history," the audience gets to view Klingon "culture" (while concurrently constructing Klingon culture for themselves). We witness Klingon sexuality in "The Emissary" (1989), where acts of violence proliferate and bone breaking is seen as a good luck sign. We witness a pain ritual in "The Icarus Factor" (1988), where electronic prods are inserted into various body parts. And as we witness the differing manifestations of Klingon culture on television weekly, or in the movies biannually, despite the Trekkers' constant celebration of "equality" and "sentience," the subtext, laden with biologically determined, eugenic,

racialized signifiers, speaks to particular realities here on Earth (see Bernardi, 1988).

The imperial Klingon race is as imposing as it is aggressive.... Each cranial structure much like the human fingerprint is unique. However, in family lines there are similar patterns. One of the little known rituals among the Klingons involves the casting of an impression of their foreheads. These impressions are then kept by the family as a proof of lineage. During the time of the Klingon/Romulan alliance it is believed that the Klingons also traded some of their genetic engineering technology to the Romulans. (<http://www.klingon.org>)

“As a Klingon I am much larger than life, because I have to be,” Paul states. “When I am a Klingon, I rule the school” (Witham, 1996:23). After all, “Klingons have more fun;” they are not “subject to the same rules as humans are.” “Klingons have war in their blood, we are very aggressive.” “Klingons insist that to be part of their culture you must be ready for fun and adventure, the occasional Klingon exotic dance and perhaps some living Klingon food” (Witham, 1996:22).

The introduction of Worf, who is played by actor Michael Dorn, an African American, to the series and movies and the subsequent casting of many African Americans as Klingons “added an alien dimension to TV’s tentative engagement with cultural difference.... Klingons come off as galactic gangsta rappers with Afrocentric pride (Davis, 1994:134). “They are the coolest aliens to be at cons.” “Klingons don’t have to care about anyone else, you don’t ever mess with Klingons, ‘cause they are bigger and stronger and meaner than anyone else.”

At first, I tried to do the Vulcan thing, the repression of emotions. But, because of a lot of anger within me, I found myself gearing toward the Klingons.... They offered no apology to anybody. That was their culture. Klingon is what’s inside you. You have to let it out.... I like growling [at people].... This is a way to act out.’ Cause they see the darker side of reality.” (Davis, 1994:129)

The Klingons are a warrior race. It is hard for me as a Klingon not to be violent. When I am teaching, of course, I am in control, but let me out on my Klingon ship, I become rambunctious, I snarl, and I am just doing what comes naturally to me as a Klingon.

Since we are an aggressive race by nature, and have developed a society based on our skills as warriors, I would consider politeness and kindness a sign of weakness and an insult. If you use forks, you make my blood boil. I cannot be domesticated. (Don, a social studies teacher)

I am a Klingon who wears his uniform with great pride. I am a mean motherfucking animal as a Klingon warrior and you better not try to roll me, dishonor me, or insult me or mine. To do so is tantamount to death. You also better keep your purse close to you. (Ralph, an assistant principal)

I would say that the fact that the Klingons are a warrior society. Strong, honorable, and they hold fast in their beliefs, and fight for them. They are compelled to it is in their blood. Klingons are the only people and the only place in our global society where we have a positive, aggressive culture, and set of role models. In our current metropolitan, cosmopolitan culture, this is viewed as something bad. For us as Klingons, it cannot be any other way; it is both honor, and it is also blood! (Trekker teacher)

Blood by any other name would be race. (I can play in the Klingon Shakespearean parody, too.) Biologically, race does not exist; racism does. Klingdom (the word Klingons use to describe their fan world) uses esoteric collocations of essentializing somatic characteristics to naturalize Klingon difference. Klingon's have:

greater muscle mass ratio than do most humanoid forms. They also generally grow taller and reach full, adult height at an earlier age than humans. Perhaps the single most striking feature of Klingon anatomy is the ridged forehead crown evident in genetically pure individuals, a characteristic missing in the few Klingon/human genetic fusions still serving in some parts of the Empire. (AOL bulletin board post)

Michael Dorn (Worf) has said in interviews: "I wanted the character to be less animalistic, and more like a Samurai warrior" (AOL interview on 12/12/98). Nevertheless, the fascination with and the articulation of words such as *nature*, *blood*, *warrior*, *primitive*, *savage*, *darker*, *violent*, all signify very specific cultural sites. For example, in the episode "Heart of Glory" (1988), the last scene shows three Klingon warriors, from a high angle shot, enacting the death ritual, "their ridged foreheads, dark skin and dirty teeth visible intertexts of a bestial race" (Bernardi,

1998:133). I contend that the manner in which Klingon was adopted and adapted and is celebrated throughout the Star Fleet/Star Trek universe unearths other dimensions of Trekker subjectivities.

### THE MINSTREL SHOW AND THE KLINGON ATTACK CORPS

*My blade is sharp as is my eye  
And all who challenge me will die  
I am a Klingon warrior and  
Ready for battle do I stand  
To challenge I don't hesitate  
Nor to accept one do I wait  
I glory in battle for you see  
I always gain the victory!*

—GENNIE SUMMERS

Klingon gatherings are no different than minstrel shows. As odd as it may sound, minstrel shows were symbolic of working-class resistance to the upper classes. White people of various subjugated social positions (in terms of class and ethnicity) experienced their own places and positions in America with profound trepidation (understanding how tenuous life on the bottom can be). Who would be able to climb the agentic stairway to an ineffable whiteness of being? Looking at the history and politics of whiteness in the United States, whiteness must be “understood largely through the consequences it provides for those who are considered to be non-white” (McLaren, 1998:66).

I am a department head on Klingon ship. We really need to recruit a dentist. The crew needs to see an orthodontist badly. (Joking comment by teacher who is captain of a Klingon ship)

“Performing blackness” permitted antagonistic working-class white ethnic groups to form a collective new “American” identity. The construction of black as Other gave working-class white people a sense of status, and a sense of superiority. If the various competing ethnic groups of “whites” had nothing else in common, they shared not being black. Whiteness (an oftentimes absentee signifier) and the economic relations of exploitative industrial capitalism (which are masked) provided a raw form of commodification, “the economic context out of

which blackface display emerged.... This display, in turn, depended upon the dangerous, imaginary proximity of ‘raced’ bodies” (Okker & Williams, 1998:133). The black other in the minstrel show specifically embodied “the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for” (Roediger, 1991, in Okker & Williams, 1998:133) To blacken up, then, served a contradictory function: One could enjoy a release from industrialized hierarchies, “a refusal to be governed by clocks and bosses” (Okker & Williams, 1998:138). The white minstrel grotesquely presented and performed imitations of Southern black dialect, making jagged exaggerated movements while exaggerating physical features, presenting the Southern black man as the diametric opposite of the white Northerner. Although Bakhtin’s theory of carnival seems to speak to both the minstrel and the Klingon performance, I would argue that they are very different celebrations. In carnival, sociohierarchical inequities are suspended and social distinctions are erased. Carnival attempts to change conventions and is ultimately relegated to a momentary release, a daydream. Klingon attempts to reinforce existing concepts by displacing them into a form of semiotic stereotyping. In some ways, Klingon performance may well be the flip side of a Bakhtinian carnival.

Being a Klingon releases me from the inanities of the human world, where I have to work, dress a certain way, and act a certain way. As a Klingon, I can scream and claw and act as savage as I want to. It is something you just know to do. It is part of you, and that part of myself, that Klingon part is the part that constantly needs to be let out into the open. When I am teaching I am somebody else, but when I put on my Klingon uniform I just let it all out. I don’t need table manners, I can use my hands. I don’t need to be polite, Klingons are not polite. I can scratch and claw and scream; that, of course, is a Klingon expectation. (Trekker teacher)

“A biological notion of blackness is displaced onto the Klingons while a civilized notion of whiteness is ascribed to the Federation” (Bernardi, 1998:133). There is clearly a celebratory quality to the Klingon performance.

There is also a specific class element to the Klingon home-world. Placed on the social ladder of the federation, “The Klingons are lower class, but that’s okay: They’re still on the same scale as we are; they are just less evolved forms of us. And, though they can never become us,

Thank God, we know darn well they want to” (Haffner, 1996:221) be like US.

Performing Klingon (in bodies that are clearly marked) gives politically correct liberal humanists a way to act out their racial anxieties in the face of the other without naming the other, without reverting to overt racism.

STVI stages the liberal pluralist utopia in relativizing Klingon otherness without falling into a romanticizing orientalism, simple racisms strategically flip side. It is imperative to recognize liberal pluralism’s good intentions qua good intentions, that is, in their moment of immediacy. For example, upon the Klingons beaming back to their ship after the formal dinner, the Enterprise crew members shed their formal, but courteous, politeness and literally proceed to breathe freely after the bad smelling Klingons have left. The comic aspect of this breath of fresh air as acknowledgment to the objectionable quality of our own (as Starfleet officers) disgust is a sign that this Klingon distastefulness neither orientalizes them nor makes them the target of a simple racist attack. They disgust us; our disgust is reprehensible and that is the reflective comprehension of the long way we have to go to meet our pluralistic ideal with which faith is, ultimately kept, and which is, hence, left unconditioned, uninterrogated. (Haffner, 1996:220–221)

Jane is a second-grade teacher living in a small town in North Carolina. We were having some tea while discussing her passion for *Star Trek*, when she said to me:

In *Star Trek Six* when the Klingons are all sitting around eating dinner with the Enterprise’s crew, Chekov says something about human rights. That’s something I didn’t even think about. But by them presenting it that way, it hit me. I mean, we are reading it in a roundabout way! Just when you’re saying, involving everybody, you’re using that expression: “mankind.” Ick! But, of course all women resent that! Of course, when Chekov was saying that, he was meaning that in a round-about way the rights that we apply to ourselves should be for everybody. But, just because he said human rights, the Klingons perceived that as being racist. He said: “Human rights! Don’t Klingons have rights?” ‘Cause they’re not human you know!

KAREN: So should Klingons have rights? Are Klingons like us, different than us? I am not sure if I really understand, Jane. Please help me out.

JANE: They are both like and unlike us. The Preservers, you see, made all the races in the universe. We just developed differently. But, they are sentient. Nobody would ever say they weren't. They evolved differently. They have a primitive savage culture based on a code of honor. Culture, you see, develops out of biological necessity. Have you ever read Darwin?

Should Klingons have rights? Have I read Darwin? They are not human, you know!

For all its coded complexity, the minstrel show's message was that black people belonged only on Southern plantations and had no place at all in the North. "'Dis being free,' complained one minstrel character who had run away from the plantation, 'is worsen den being a slave'" (Toll, 1978:102). "With their ludicrous dialects, grotesque make-up, bizarre behavior, and simplistic caricatures, minstrels portrayed blacks as totally inferior" (Toll, 1978:102). With even more coded complexity, the Klingon performance is no different. The terrain just changes to a hyperreal space.

### KLINGONISM AS POSTMODERN RACISM

*This Klingon with a bad attitude walked into [Jadzia's] life, and the next thing [you] know [they're] getting married!*

—DAX TO SISKI,  
"YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED"

*I have a dream; a dream that all people— human, Jem' Hadar, Fearing, Cardassians—will someday stand together in peace...around my Dabo tables.*

—QUARK, "THE SEARCH"

*Eaten any good books lately?*

—Q (TO WORF), "DEJA-Q"

*This is ridiculous! I'm surrounded by corpses, my shoes are dripping in blood—and you want me to feel romantic?*



- QUARK (TO HIS KLINGON EX-WIFE, “LOOKING  
FOR PAR’MACH IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES”)

To thousands of people around the world, the Klingon race is as real as any. “We’re like one big dysfunctional family” (Powell, 1998:15). “We are a tight-knit Klingon ship. Very proud, very savage, and very violent,” Miranda (a teacher) told me. “Klingon culture, language and social mores have come a long way from the early days when the race was no more than a savage and warlike enemy of Captain James T.Kirk’s Federation” (Powell, 1998:15).

There remains a complex series of signifiers and racial encodings at the heart of playing and performing Klingon. Although Klingon warriors and the other members of the Star Trek universe seem to be engaged in examining and attacking racism, what occurs is that the foundational epistemological aspects of a racist epistemology are rearticulated, buttressed, and reinforced.

In *Star Trek*, species becomes a signifier for race (in much the same manner as the power of whiteness and the ethnoracial pentagram obscures and confuses ethnicity, race, and social class). So while disclaiming the scientific or social validity of race, Trek and Trekkers reify the construct and the terminology, by transferring the term *race* into the term *species*—species who are either able to evolve or not able to evolve (indeed, on occasion devolving) to become more like US. Although there are a multiplicity of “races” and “cultures” on Earth, in Trek, other planets have only singular species. On the rare occasion that a planet may have more than one species of articulate animal life (usually humanoid), the differing species fight over the planet’s resources. Furthermore, the biologically determined view of other “species” in *Star Trek* reinscribes specific learned attitudes, stereotypes, and behaviors that have developed out of particular historical, economic, and cultural milieus right here on planet Earth.

## CHAPTER 5

### Resistance Is Futile

#### You Will Be Assimilated into the Predatory Jungle

It was a glorious spring afternoon on the desert. As I was driving along Interstate 10 (otherwise known as “America’s highway”), a slight breeze was blowing in my hair, and the sun was shining brightly in the clear blue sky. I could have been anywhere. If I closed my eyes for a moment, I could have been driving the stretch of 1–10 from Jacksonville to Tallahassee, except for the saguaro cacti sporadically dotting the eerily empty landscape. It looked really otherworldly. Santana and Malo oldies were playing on the only radio station for miles (Radio 9.07 from Mexicali, Mexico). For the first time in years, I was singing out loud. I didn’t care that I was singing way off key. If anybody was listening, it would have sounded like a Klingon opera. But if nobody can hear you scream in outer space, who could possibly hear me singing out in the middle of nowhere? Frankly, I really didn’t care, I was elated, I would soon be delivered from *The Promised Land of California*, I was ready to make my *Escape from LA*.

I stopped at the border (of California and Arizona) for what ostensibly can be called an “agricultural” check. The checkpoint, perhaps the “final outpost on the vanished frontier” (Lind, 1995b:21) didn’t have heroic chords of a John Williams pop-symphony there to greet me. I even had to shut off the radio as I slowed down for the inspection (giving me cause to ponder what or, better said, who were the flora and fauna that were alien to the artificial Southern California landscape).

The outpost on the *Outer Limits* of this *Twilight Zone* was constructed in California mission style; the inspector waved me through. I don’t know of any other state that has a checkpoint. When you enter California, it feels as if you are entering a *separate nation*: an alienation. I turned up the radio once again, and the car picked up speed. I readied myself for one more chorus of *Oye Como Va* and then I saw a sign:

**Welcome to California  
Home of the Illegal Alien  
Don't let this happen to your state  
Call 1-877-No Illegal**

I drove silently the rest of the way to Los Angeles County. The 1-877-No Illegal sign haunted me home, the word *alien* echoing in my consciousness and my conscience.

**CULTURE CLASS AND CLASH**

*Alien? I ain 't no damn E.T.!*

—OVERHEARD, OVERUSED CHICANO SLOGAN  
([HTTP://WW.LATINOLINK.COM](http://ww.latinolink.com))

The next week, the “no illegals” sign still reverberating in my memory, I decided to show a scene from the movie *Men in Black* (for the culture class I taught every quarter while living in Southern California). In the film, Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones play elite agents working MIB (for *Men in Black*), ostensibly a clandestine intergalactic immigration agency protecting *the gated community of Earth* (as the trailers and advertisements say) “from the scum of the universe.” As Tommy Lee Jones’s character K explained in deadpan seriousness, “The United States is filled with illegals who would not even be welcome on their home planets, just like the movie *Casablanca*, only without the Nazis” (Turan, 1997).

I clicked the remote and turned on the video clip (from *Men In Black*). In the scene, K (Tommy Lee Jones), in his been-there, seen-that, done-that, no-nonsense, world-weary posture, stands at the border while Immigration and Naturalization Service agents apprehend a *suspicious* vanload of “aliens,” on the Texas-Mexico line. After years of service to his agency, K knows exactly WHO the alien is. He grabs an alien, dressed in exactly the same attire as everyone else (so that initially his actions seem somewhat arbitrary and downright mean-spirited). It turns out that the extraterrestrial K apprehends “has come from a lot farther than Cuernavaca” (Turan, 1997).

After K terminates the *real* alien (who looks unsurprisingly like an insect), he welcomes the vanload of undocumented migrants to the United States (in perfect Spanish). ET does walk among us. In the world



From the Aryan cartoon website 1994

(<http://www.aryan.com>)

of *Men in Black*, that is all right, provided “your papers are in order” (Turan, 1997).

### WHAT A JOKE

The class laughed heartily at the scene, but in the laughter clear divisions emerged between those who understood the joke, those who were made to feel uncomfortable by the joke, and those who resented what the joke represented. Joan Leach (1998) suggested that what used to be alarming in science fiction has now become science fiction’s main source of humor (p. 1027). Is the laughter endemic of a reactionary response to dystopian desire? Is the parody a way to recuperate ideological ground? Anxiety about race, ethnicity, class and “the roles of technology, gender and the state are replaced by humor about the notion of anxiety itself. Anxious we may be at the close of the millennium, but *Men in Black* tells us to just laugh it all away” (Leach, 1998:1027). And laugh they did. The students in the class responded: “Oh, I forgot how funny that scene is!” “I wonder if they would understand the scene in Nebraska?” “I wish we could show that scene to Pete Wilson!” “I felt that it was really appropriate to show that part of the movie, and it was hysterical! I loved the double entendre.”

If, as academic literature on humor suggests, we receive some of our impressions of the Other through the folkloric (Leveen, 1996), I would

ask that we reflect seriously upon what it is that we find so funny. Humor does have positive social effects. At the same time, humor invariably is used as a means of control. Quite often the joke is a way of venting hostility and encoding tacitly felt sentiments and resentments, rancor that is no longer cloaked in the politesse of the politically correct. So jokes such as:

Why are there no East Indians on *Star Trek*?

Can you see a Star Fleet uniform with a turban?

Why aren't there any Puerto Ricans on *Star Trek*?

Because they're not going to work in the future, either.

Did you know that *Star Trek* takes place in the future and that *Star Trek* isn't real?

Because if it were, there wouldn't be a place for coons in space.

emerged in the backlash, part of a resurgent racist rhetoric in which even the most noxious statements that can be made do not engender any form of virulent protest. "Hey, that's diversity, too!" Wayne said. "If you say this is okay, it is; if you say that is okay, it is everyone needs a voice." So, Leela can feel no reservation in remarking without any hesitation whatsoever:

I think Tuvok is a fucking joke pulled on those NAACP niggers.

What the fuck, why does every fuckin' race of aliens have a nigger in it? Racial equality? Shit no. It's fucking niggers takin' over, man!

And Kennedy doesn't experience any consternation writing:

Politically correct movie studios love to put a token nigger or two in most white-conceived, produced, and directed science-fiction movies. When they do show up, it's usually as a very high-level commander, which enhances the absurdity of seeing these lamebrains in a technologically advanced setting. They don't add anything to the movie—in fact they detract from the movie going experience for several reasons: One: they look dumb: Two: they sound especially dumb, and Three: they have trouble pronouncing most scientific words: "holodeck" becomes "ho'deck," "phaser" is "phasuh," "warp drive" becomes "wop drive." "Cap'n, can I be ride de eluhbator to de Engineerin' deck to get mo'lithium crystals for mah tea, an' shit? Suh?"

And Hoyt publicly expresses “feel[ing] everyone does understand” without a moment’s pause:

No one is going to cater to a minuscule minority. Blacks, Hispanics and Asians always try to play the race card. There are just different flavors of stupidity. What happened in California happened just out of sheer stupidity.

Honestly, this land originally belonged to the Indians.... Spanish and English speakers came later, MUCH LATER. Of course, the Indians held no concept of land ownership.... Hispanics who scream about “taking our land back” are as bad as whites who scream, “kick all the spics off our land.” Both are examples of racism. Racism transcends color...all humans are racist to some extent. That is the way it is, that is the way it was. I think Trekkers who believe that in the future this will change are misguided. How do they feel about Ferengis?

### ONLY FUNNY FOR SOME

After I showed the (*Men in Black*) film clip, a student sent me an e-mail:

I was coming home from Mexico with my family, when crossing at the border, I was stopped by the *migra* crossing the border into the U.S. We (my mother, aunt, cousin, kids, and my ex-wife) were placed in different rooms and questioned. We were questioned separately as to where we were coming and where we were going, and where we had “bought” our papers, since they looked fake. The questioning lasted for two hours.... The *migra* threatened us with jail, deportation to South America, never seeing our families again. They cajoled us that if we told the truth and turned our relatives in they would not do anything to us. The sons of bitches kept us apart the whole time, and were scaring the daylight out of the children. When they finally found out that our papers were legal, all they said was “Get out, but you had better be careful the next time.”

“At one time or another, most foreign-looking [aka *alien-looking* people] have been humiliated, harassed, ignored, denied entrance or a seat, from restaurants to theaters, to schools, work and even hospitals” (<http://www.latinolink.com>). In San Antonio, Texas, human rights

organizations receive complaints every day of the year. In Los Angeles, California, during a single three-year period (from 1993 to 1996), the Mexican American lawyers' association investigated the deaths of fifteen Latinos at the hands of the INS and the police. In one well-documented incident, Antonio Gutiérrez, 14 years old, was shot four times "while the young man was holding his hands up" (<http://www.latinolink.com>). It is shocking to realize that a police state "has developed in the southwestern United States since the 1980s. Where nobody is free to travel without the scrutiny of the border patrol" (Brugge, 1995:202).

Since the passage of several increasingly restrictive and racist propositions in the Golden State:

Americans approach other Americans in the supermarket or on the sidewalks asking "the other" Americans if they're in the United States legally, or not, and if they can prove whatever they say. (Jordan, 1995:18)

And so, in Bell Gardens, "a teacher asked students for their immigration papers" (Brugge, 1995:204) while

[A] fifth grade teacher in one California school district has assigned her students to report their own immigration status and that of their parents. And a school security guard in Atherton, California, the day after the election, told two American-born Latinas, "We don't have to let Mexicans in here anymore.... A McDonald's worker who insisted on seeing immigration documents before serving a customer; a pharmacist who refused to fill a prescription for someone they "suspected" was undocumented; a customer at a restaurant who asked the cook for his green card, adding "It's a citizen's duty to kick out illegals"; and a hotel owner who called the police when a U.S. citizen would not show immigration documents when registering for a room (Munoz, 1994:19). Pregnant women are reportedly afraid to seek prenatal care for fear of deportation. In at least one case, the death of a child has been linked to such fear, when the parents of a severely ill eight-year-old postponed seeing a doctor. (Romney and Marquis, 1994; Romney and Brazil, 1994; Martinez, 1994 in Calavita, 1996:284)

Seized with the fear of the alien, the ebullition of anti-immigration rhetoric has geometrically expanded exponentially nationwide since California's propositions 187 and 209. The passage of the amendment gave the white population legal impetus to express their ambivalence. Proposition 187 proponent Barbara Coe stated, "Californians acting out of patriotism and love of country are defending our borders against invasion" (Chen, 1995). In Coe's xenophobic version, the invaders, the aliens, come from the South; we are not being attacked on all sides.

### DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE

At about the same time as the movie *Men in Black* was making its way into theaters, a Riverside County, California, sheriff's deputy chased "a broken-down pickup truck" filled with undocumented workers (which in many ways recapitulated the scene from the movie *Men in Black*). The adrenaline flow must have been astronomical, the testosterone must have been colossal, as hormones and gas pedals surged on the Southern California freeway system. The chase went on for 80 miles. The truck was stopped. The people who were riding in the open bed fled. The truck driver and a woman remained inside the truck's cab. The deputies pulled the two people (who did not flee) out of the truck. The woman was yanked to the ground by her hair and beaten with police nightsticks half a dozen times. "Those beaten were not illegal aliens, but human beings. In fact, their legal status is irrelevant" (Rodriquez, 1996: <http://www.latinolink.com>). The incident was videotaped. Sergeant Mark Lohman, the officer whose actions were so reprehensible, responded to the horrible incident by saying, "I'm not going to stand up here and say that there was no force used, because you would laugh me out of the room."

"All of a sudden *Men in Black* didn't appear so funny," Alexandria (a teacher education candidate and Trek fan) said. "It is all too close for comfort or coincidence." Dana (another teacher education candidate and lifelong second-generation Trekker) explained:

The aliens shouldn't have done what they did. They shouldn't have defied the law of the land. But it still was so brutal. I mean people made jokes, but the humor used was done at the expense of the Mexicans. It forced us to look at ourselves. Frankly, I am not sure if I really like what I see. If they don't come over here, who is going to pick our vegetables?



## MORE FUN ON THE BORDER OF THE FINAL FRONTIER

*La cultural no es un “producto” monolitico sino una  
variedad regeneradora, diferenciada y contradictoria de  
expresiones culturales.*

—VALENZUELAINLOPEZ, 1995:273

The experiences of a group of uniformed Trekkers at the San Onofre checkpoint near San Diego (on the Mexican border) were significantly different from those of undocumented workers in the ill-fated brown truck. Although they were asked to step out of their car, nobody was treated like a criminal, and nobody was beaten. The joke was not self-reflective, and the signifiers were far from opaque. The border patrol

looked at me and said we can see that you’re aliens, but are you legal aliens? They made us get off at the side of the road where they’re searching through everyone’s trucks. They had us step out and show our weapons. They were all Trek fanatics. (Witham, 1996:27)

The Trekkers found the incident hilarious and were laughing about it. How can it be a joke when people are beaten, cajoled, and even killed while trying to make their way across the border? “But it was funny, you have to admit it.... Get it, *aliens...aliens*. The problem is that people who are so politically correct don’t have a sense of humor,” Bennett, a high school teacher in San Diego who is a self proclaimed “rabid” Trek fan, maintained. “The Trekker group who made the border crossing in Tijuana,” he continued, “were just using a syllogistic synonym between aliens. It really is funny. I don’t think we need to be so politically correct that we can’t laugh about it.” True, I’m not laughing. But I did when I heard Michael Lind’s cogent observation and creative idea:

for some budding Roddenberry...out there: a party of white Orange County Republicans rockets out of California and travels to the Epsilon Eridani star system. To their horror, they discover that the aliens speak Spanish—and have just passed a law denying emergency landing rights to earthlings. (Lind, 1995a:28)

“Now, that’s funny!” Alexandra said while laughing.

## THE FUTURE BORG

The metaphor, the connection between the extraterrestrial (as alien) and noncitizen (as alien), has been deployed as a plot device on numerous occasions. In *Star Trek*, there are always attempts to bring the “alien into our civilization, provided he or she has good manners” (Trekker teacher) and can adapt to “our” way of life, and has made sufficient progress along the culture-evolutionary scale (as determined by the Federation).

The use of the word *alien* in relation to US is not always one of assimilation. It is not always something that melts (like Odo, the shape-shifter of *Deep Space Nine*) into the great amorphous Velveeta cheese of the melted pot. As *Planet of the Apes* and *Omega Man* star Charlton Heston articulated rather vociferously (speaking to good white American citizens on David Duke’s Website, I might add):

Rank-and-file Americans wake up every morning, increasingly bewildered and confused at why their views make them lesser citizens. The message gets through: Heaven help the God fearing, law-abiding, Caucasian, middle-class Protestant—or even worse, evangelical Christian, Midwestern or Southern—or even worse, rural, apparently straight—or even worse, admitted heterosexuals, gun-owing—or even worse, NRA-card-carrying, average working stiff—or even worse, male working stiff—because, not only don’t you count, you are a downright obstacle to social progress.

Perhaps the paranoid themes of the science fiction movies Heston starred in resonated with him in a different way than they did with me. There are always multiple readings of every text. But the fear of the other, of the alien as presented (with dramatic flair) by Heston is that of a threat, a frightening threat.

Peter Brimelow (1995) certainly relied on an allegorical rearticulation centering on the word *alien* in his *Alien Nation: Common Sense about America’s Immigration Disaster*. In this appalling volume, Brimelow resignifies and represents the title of the film (and television series) *Alien Nation*. A myopic and mythic distory-ed version of a white pastoralized United States (in the once-upon-a-time of those *happy days* in *pleasantville*) frames Brimelow’s argument, an argument calling for restrictions to and changes in U.S. immigration policy.

In both the movie and the series *Alien Nation*, the setting is the balkanized multicultural mosaic of Los Angeles. The plot line revolves

around the prejudices experienced by aliens (escapees from a former slave colony) trying to make a new life in a new world (Earth). The aliens in the movie and program are called *guests* in much the same manner as then Senator Pete Wilson of California touted “guest worker” provisions, which stem from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act: that populist moment in time when Wilson welcomed undocumented labor into California as an effort to undermine farmworkers in the United States who sought a raise in their paltry wages and who attempted to politically organize as a cohort.

The April 1994 issue of *Border Watch* claimed aliens were displacing workers, much in the same manner as the *Stepford Wives* replaced the bodies of women with robots, and the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* replaced the bodies of humans with pods. Aryan Nation and assorted other white supremacist groups consistently speak about the replacement of the “white population” by the other—a common cultural trope expressed by *Star Trek*, Brimelow, and a host of other texts.

There is, however, a very real public political pedagogy in the allegorical-alien-twin synonym: tales of aliens...including “tales of aliens abducting humans, resonate with something in American life at the end of the millennium” (Dean, 1997). Something that may well best be expressed in the cinematic images that frame Los Angeles, California, as the space of a future that seems out of place—broken, dark, demented, and fragmented, driven by the increased presence of Third World people, this genre visually displays a monstrous city.

The images of the city are clearly “visual and expressionistic” (Walker, 1998:119). A display that exorcises and exercises congealed xenophobic panic. A panic embodied in the contours of a desolate barren decaying cityscape. A debasing disconsolate gloomy gritty space painted in blacks, grays, and browns, a futuristic “lower east side” scaffolded with the constant virulent din of incoherent muddled noise—a dysutopian Muzak that hums unremittingly in the background (see Walker, 1998). Jeopardy and danger lurk on every corner. Perverse plebeians—third world and off world mutants—engage in black market exchanges in the confused menacing chaos replete with inhuman industrial ruins (a referent to some former majesty). Prostitution, petty thievery, and pandemonium reign in a display of hypersexed-hyperviolent machismo machinations. Machinations and mechanizations in the postmodern-robotic machine, a postcataclysmic (the cataclysm is usually unnamed) that confronts and affronts the subject (see Walker, 1998).

The city becomes a display of broken and fragmentary parts signifying in a post-holocaust imaginary morality tale, the dissolution of a once-cohesive social community (a cohesive community and the myth of a once-golden age are part of all definitions of fascism) (Walker, 1998: 120).

In this decomposing, degenerating urban Sodom, a peculiar post-modern paradoxical couplet rises (not like a phoenix) on the smoky, fetid, putrid ruins. Machinery and computers in the technobleak landscape interface and intertwine with metaphors of the primeval jungle. A jungle where

Asians, Hispanics, Blacks and Eastern Europeans swarm the streets; most Caucasian Americans seem to have departed for off-world colonies. A paramilitary police force maintains order, and enormous corporate headquarters dominate the skyline. (Lev, 1998:30)

The setting may have changed, but the ideology remains. The further you move from the Aryan center, the more natural you become, the more primitive you become. In the postmodern junk-heap future, the jungle is clearly predatory. But the location has moved to the city. “The alien becomes literalized.” (Walker, 1998:119). The closer the alien encroaches onto or into OUR space, the more foreign it becomes, the more malevolent, the more vile and violent; IT is in their nature.

### **ANIMALS ARE SENTIENT, SOME PEOPLE ARE NOT**

Tina invited me to her house. Although the setting was rural and the landscape was dotted with farms, I did not expect to see a virtual *Green Acres* inside. She has been a teacher in her town for sixteen years. Aside from her six children, she had more cats than I could possibly count, four dogs, a pot-bellied pig, fish, hermit crabs, and a ferret.

My definition of racism is if you consider anything less than you, even a dolphin. If you consider a dolphin has no life, it has no reason to live, because it's just a dumb animal, that's racist to me. You are being racist towards dolphins or fish or something. And you have to realize that all of us, as sentient beings, are related to each other. Everything else that comes in my house, I try to put back outside 'cause I think they might only be living for four

hours. You know some insects live such a short life span. They have the right to live, too. What if they were really weird and wanted to squash me, like in the fifties on TV? Killer ants, killer bees, this kind of stuff. They don't have the right to do that to me, so I don't have the right to do it to them; that's true equality. Whatever you do on yourself, you reciprocate. You don't say: "Well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander," they always say that.

My allergies were taking over and dominating the conversation. I have three tapes filled with Tina's narrative and a variety of sneezes (my contribution to the interview). She obviously loved her animals a lot, so much so she kissed them, shared food with them, and anthropomorphized them in ways that both bewildered and amused me. As I sniffled and sneezed and wiped my itchy-watery eyes. Tina continued:

There are so many lessons in *Star Trek* that have important morals. Morals which as we all know is one of the missing elements today in schools. The students learn to appreciate sentience and difference in all forms from me. I think they come out of my class, I hope with an appreciation for all life forms.

We went for a drive in her pickup truck to her school. On the way, she pointed out several features of her town. "This is where blacks traditionally live.... It is a very poor area, and I am not too happy with the way these mangy ole dogs run around wild here. I don't think that *they* really care too much for their animals." Making a right turn, we came upon an area where the "Travelers" live. Tina thought they were a "fascinating tribe.... Talk about aliens, you know that they sell their daughters, well, actually marry them off at a very early age." It took about ten minutes to reach her school. Her classroom had handmade student work on the walls. Much of it was Trek based. It didn't surprise me. After so many miles and so many interviews, I had come to expect classrooms filled with Trek paraphernalia.

*Star Trek* has influenced my teaching a great deal. I think that the books of Star Trek have been instrumental in my understanding of curriculum. I use the books all the time. The points of view, the scenarios, and the relationships that are portrayed in the books make my children think, and to deal with foreign things. I love

this one so much. It is the one where Uhura plays such an important part. It is entitled *The Crying Seals*; the story is that these seals, these animals, are not sentient and are of no consequence. And people killed them off. But it turned out not to be true. They do have a conscience.

In the end, my children develop a respect for life. They know that you just don't go out there and kill that lizard, just because he's a little creature. He might be a sentient being here just looking things over. I have children who will go out and pick up a little creature and say, "You think he can think?" That does my heart good.

As I looked around at the walls, and student work, and Tina's lesson plan book, I noticed cages for gerbils and lizards and more fish tanks. Tina smiled and said, "Well, you just never know now, do you? Animals need homes." My tape recorder was off. Tina turned it back on because:

I want to add something. I want to tell you about "Mirror/Mirror." I love that episode. It had a profound impact on my life. "I am a killer but I will not kill today." It showed me that we do have hope, that there is possibility, that we can conquer the savage resting in our souls. Tomorrow, maybe we can see that we can act civilized; we do not need to resort to violence, even if we are by nature violent creatures. We can learn, like the Vulcans learned, to suppress that violence and learn how to live within logic and reason. I think *Star Trek* is by far the most important civilizing force we have. I would show it to all those tribes in Africa, I would show it in the Amazon. I would even show it in the cities where those children in gangs roam the streets terrorizing everyone. Have you ever been to New York? I have. It is not pleasant.

We stopped at a Mexican restaurant to eat lunch. "It's pretty new here; recently we have had a lot of Mexicans move here. Nice people. Quiet people." I ordered my meal in Spanish, which may or may not have been a mistake. "You look different than them." The comment that followed would have shocked me, but it was not the first time I heard it. "You don't look dirty like them. Your skin is different; it is almost like ours." While we were eating, Tina (who knew I was from Florida) recalled her childhood:

I used to go to Naples and then track inland into the swamp, with the Seminoles. I would get fabric from the Indian women. They would weave a very loose gauze kind of fabric. I would trade that for all kinds of stuff that they wanted from the civilian side... I mean civilized side of the swamp. Indian woman never came out of the swamp. I used to enjoy going in there 'cause they had such fascinating beadwork and different things. It amazed me that they lived in such primitive conditions but could make such lovely things. Oh, how they cooked! The sesame-seed cookies were just so good!

When I was living in Florida, the Seminole Indians still had their drivers' licenses stamped "Indian." They could not buy liquor. Their genes are different and they are prone to alcoholism, so the state protected them. I'll tell you a little secret about the airboat. Only the natives did it! For the most part people normal people didn't do it! When I was living in——(town), ——(company), outboard motors were just beginning their testing on the lake. They hired the Indian air-boat drivers to do their testing. The airboat drivers knew how to handle flips and disasters in the water. The average motorboat driver had no idea. So, the Indians were the ones who were doing most of the testing. We lived on one side of the lake, and the testing area was on the other side. The Indians are impervious to danger. They would take risks the average regular guy on the street would not.

Frankly, most people think of them as savages. They are very creative. They live such a relaxed, wonderful lifestyle. They are not encumbered with the trappings of civilization. You often wonder why anybody would want to live any other way! Why would they ever want to move to the city? They are happier and much better off down in the 'Glades.

We drove back to her house. The children and the animals greeted us; the baby-sitter she had hired for the afternoon looked exhausted. The baby-sitter's exhaustion was a stark contrast to the wagging tails, noise, and frenetic kinetic energy of Tina's "home on the range," where I knew the deer and the antelope could play. But, I wondered, who couldn't?

The mimetic-anthropomorphic drive creates an esoteric borderland. A modernist duality between what is animate and inanimate and what is human or animal or human and machine is something that I find particularly disturbing in the Trek universe.

*Star Trek* has gone so far primarily through the IDIC in embracing diversity. The fact that Data is considered a life form, or that the Doctor is considered a life form demonstrates the acceptance that we believe in. (Trekker teacher)

The galactic biodiverse discussions I heard over and over (Tina is just one of many examples) endow animals with consciousness and even with “civil rights” (“animals should be afforded civil rights, too”) while endowing some humans with characteristics other than human. Bernardi (1998) asked a Klingon female “why she chose to make herself up so darkly.” Her response was that she wanted to be identified with her “animal instincts” (p. 140). Karl Marx once referred to this alien-ating process (while discussing the alien-nation of labor) by saying “what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal” (1983: 137). But who is human is something that is displaced in the sentient celebration of diversity.

Watching *Trek* in earnest these last 25 to 30 years has done wonders for the way I look at the world surrounding me and on the people inhabiting it. The input in my classes when children whose backgrounds in cultures and communities are vastly different from mine have helped me to gain insight into their problems. As I see it, overrepresentation of any one group is detrimental to growth in any context. There has got to be some unifying force. (Trekker teacher)

Have no doubts about it, the unifying force is US!

### **FEDERATION STANDARD MEANS ENGLISH ONLY**

Actually, Maud explained:

When the real business starts, English is the only language that matters. The *Star Trek* Universe, much like California, is a one language domain with little tolerance for some filthy foreigner who can't cop the lingo. *Star Wars*, on the other hand, is as linguistically diverse as the foreign student housing areas of the average state university. Jabba the Hutt, the Ewoks, Wookies, and all those wacky extras from that space bar, all running around without as much as an Endor-to-English phrase book. In



California they'd have a hard time getting food stamps, much less taking over. I can see it now—a whole field full of Storm Troopers picking fruit, while Jabba the Hutt works for \$1.50 an hour baby-sitting Captain Kirk's kids.

She laughed uproariously at her own “quick wit, and dry sense of humor,” reminding me that she “used to be a hardcore Trekker, but... decided Star Wars is a preferable universe.... Trekkers are a bunch of pimply-faced geeky malcontents.” She didn't understand why I wasn't laughing at “some of [her] best lines.” I was more curious than offended. What do they speak in the (imaginary) Federation? English, was (almost) universally the answer. Were there dissenters? Yes, three Klingons felt Klingon ought to be the universal language of the Federation because:

A guy in Japan who spoke no Japanese got separated from his tour group. He was walking around lost when he met a Japanese boy wearing a Star Trek shirt emblazoned with “I speak Klingon.” It turns out the boy gave the guy directions in Klingon.

It seems that the UNZ initiative is part of the galactic federation. English is privileged as the language of the Star Fleet. Maurice, a high school teacher in Georgia, told me:

What I find interesting is last summer we had an exchange student stay with us from Belgium. The first question I asked him on the way back from the airport was, “Do you have *Star Trek*?” He said, “Yes, we do.” So I made further inquiries. I find out *Star Trek* is everywhere, it's all over the world! Something that really blew me away is that in most cases it is not translated to the native tongue, it is left in English! I think that is another positive benefit of Trek. We can learn to communicate with one another because you know that the smartest people all over the world are learning English, and many learn it through *Star Trek*.

Regina, a third-grade teacher in Missouri, knows:

The reason everything is always in English is due to the universal translator. On Earth English is the most common and easiest-to-learn language. That is why all controls on ships and all writing for Star Fleet is in English. But the other races continue to use

their own alphabet and language, except that Terrans hear it all in English because the universal translator is built into our communications systems.

“As I understand it,” Bobby theorized, “terran citizens speak English because it is the normal thing to do.” Roy is a high school social studies teacher who is also associated with the Federation Academy of History. He explained the evolution of English into what is known as Federation standard, attempting to displace some of my increasingly visible anger at the English-only metaphors. His details were exacting.

It is not really English, but Federation standard. It only sounds like English. In the future when we have the universal translators implanted in our ears, communication won't be an issue. Everything translates automatically. There is no reason to even think of another language.

Delma, a high school literature teacher, was very specific.

The English language has the largest vocabularies of any language spoken today, and thus has the greatest variety of ways to explain and describe. This especially comes in handy for philosophical and imaginative topics. It certainly is a necessary language for science and engineering as worldwide textbooks are always written in English. Of course, I don't think English is the most beautiful language to listen to, but the variety of sounds is really extraordinary.

What I find compelling is something Delma said much later on in her narrative. “*Star Trek* fans have directly and indirectly helped to define what *Trek* is and what it can be,” particularly in light of a comment Adolph (another *Trekker* teacher from Southern California) made: “Well, there is no Mexican flag on the moon! Of course, English is the language spoken in the Federation!” I wonder what the Atzlan Earth Station (a Mexican *Trekker* organization) thought of this concept, or if their voices really mattered within the larger sphere of the *Trek* universe.

## BORGS ARE US

The new myths coming out of Star Trek concerning the Borg (re) present an altered version of a takeover. The Borg are a menacing collectivity without any subjectivity. They share a common identity and collective consciousness and a seemingly overly determined biological or cyborgological drive to assimilate everything in their paths (they are the ultimate consumers). The Borg drones toil on, mindless mechanistic machinelike automatons reminiscent of subterranean workers in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The Borg's all-encompassing machine does articulate many of the social contradictions stemming from changes in the industrial mode of production. The complete restructuring of U.S. industry during the 1980s "constituted the largest shift in technological, human, and capital resources in U.S. industrial history" (Morales, 1994: 67). But the Borg also narrativize differing social exigencies as a way of expressing and representing technological transformation. "These two functions interact in very interesting and sometimes contradictory ways, complicating [issues] of technology [and] ideology" (Arnold, 1998:20).

The Borg, a "growing organism that feeds on entire civilizations in order to assimilate them" (Hastie, 1996:118), are a monstrous community of indistinguishable others, all assimilated, all of one mind. The current nativistic, xenophobic arguments surrounding migration to industrial nations parallels Borg descriptions, as a Trekker in California highlighted:

The Borg have no desire to adopt to our ways. They just come and assimilate everything and leave a path of destruction. Once you are a machine, you have no way to remember what it was like when you were human. Once you are like them, there is usually no turning back.

Pandering to contemporary racialized fears, the Borg are "purely evil... they inflict diaspora, destruction, death—yet their constitutive features and characteristics reveal, paradoxically, their impurity" (Harrison, 1996:246–247). Guinan, one of the continuing characters on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, played by Whoopi Goldberg, with an ironically colorless cast (and, yes, the double entendre was entirely intentional), described the Borg: "They destroyed our cities, ...they swarmed through our system and when they left there was little or nothing left of my people" (Harrison, 1996:247). "When they all come over the border, they bring their diseases, their politics, and their lack of sanitation and

education with them. What will happen to us? They don't even like us. I know that because I taught in Pomona." (I find this teacher's account particularly compelling because accidentally I did not label his or her transcript and do not know if she or he was referring to *Star Trek* or the Southern California Other.)

The imagery used to describe these immigrants is almost always the same: Immigrants are to hordes what sheep are to flocks, or lions to prides. They swarm rather than arrive, their faceless uniformity evoking the insect world and its ceaseless, relentless capacity to reproduce. (Quinn, 1995:10).

The novel *Butterfly Plague* (also) takes place in California (during 1938–1939). The story centers on the migration of millions of plague-ridden butterflies to Hollywood. The story's moral is "the myth of the Aryan master race [resides in] the dangerous potential of American idealism: America is not the Nightmare. It will be" (Sanderson, 1998: 104). Fascism is "the mode of production of reality that fears independently moving life," at least independent of US.

### KILLER BEES AND MUTATING FORCES

*The opening of Laurie Garrett's article on the 1995 Ebola epidemic suggests that the very atmosphere of Zaire teems with infection: "The instant the jet's doors open..., cool European air" is replaced by "an acrid, sweltering dampness" and "swarms of malarial mosquitoes..., followed closely by hordes of 'officials' and 'helpers.'" 32 Garrett almost conflates Zairian people and disease-bearing Zairian insects—in fact, the quotation marks make the humans' status even more ambiguous. In addition, Africa as the imaginary locus of both the origins of life and the endemic primitive could easily serve as the ideal metaphoric source of dangerous predators.*

—SCHELL, 1997

*I use what is popular to teach my students. So in addition to Star Trek, knowing that aliens are believed to look like insects. Since so many science fiction movies have giant bugs. Like Men in Black. I have the kids draw their aliens*

*so they look realistic, and so, yes, they mostly look like bugs. But they are heavily into integration in my district, so what I do is use this as an artistic exercise, a creative writing exercise, a science exercise, and, yes, even in music because we learn the song "La Cucaracha."*

—GEANANNE, A TREKKER  
WHO TEACHES FIFTH GRADE

It seems that many terms are confused along the borders, not just revolutionary songs displaced as children's tunes, a displacement that has its own diminutizing and trivializing rationale at its base.

"In the simplest terms, allegory says one thing and means another. It destroys the normal expectations we have about language, that our words 'mean what we say.'" Allegory encodes and decodes prosaic language, unfolding words "as a series of punning commentaries, related to one another on the most literal of verbal levels—the sounds of words." Allegory has tremendous semiotic-textualized allure because the reader is forced to choose between meanings, negotiating the text's "often problematical process of meaning multiple things simultaneously with one word" (Sanderson, 1998:104). The signification, the allegory of the alien as insect, is not something new. Although insects comprise more than 70 percent of the life on this planet, most of us remain skittish, if not genuinely phobic, about insects.

They look so alien compared to what we're used to—multiple eyes, antennae and other things we don't have.... Take a picture of an insect up close, and you've got a horrible creature. (Kuznik, 1995:18)

Conspiracy theories abound, squiggly little creepy-crawlies burrow inside human bodies, and the Gnosticism of "we are not alone" continually features the all-too-familiar scaly insect with razor-sharp jaws that oozes slime. *Mothra* invades Tokyo, and out at night (particularly in rural areas) we still have scenes where insects hit a lot more than windows (I am referring to abduction narratives). We drive along a highway to Armageddon, checking our rearview mirror, looking back upon a utopian golden era at the history of a future (road) not taken. Unable to change our route, helpless and disempowered, it always boils down to US versus THEM. But *what* re-presents them is clearly of significance.

I doubt that many people would remember (or even want to remember) the 1973 film the *Invasion of the Bee Girls*. The movie was a below-B grade, without any Academy Award-winning performances. The premise of the flick was a top-secret government genetic research center, a well-endowed female lab assistant who mixes her own DNA with that of a killer bee. As much as *Bee Girls* was instantaneously forgettable, John Belushi was not. He was an original cast member of *Saturday Night Live*. On January 17, 1976, Belushi, costumed in yellow and black, sporting antennae on top of his head, toted a machine gun and a big black cigar and sang: "I'm a king bee, buzzing round your hive." The skit parodied the arrival of killer bees. Belushi and company resembled an invading force that invited comparison to Alfonso Bedoya's ruffian gang in *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*" (<http://www.moviereview.com>).

This past January, my friend Toni Humber called to tell me about several articles in the *Los Angeles Times* focused on the invasion of killer bees in southern California. Who said sticks and stones couldn't break my bones? Mystifications and metaphors can kill or maim, when placed at the mercy of racist, sexist, and global capitalist constructions.

"They're he-e-e-e-re" (Gorman, 1998:8). Africanized honey bees have made their way across the border and have colonized much of southern California terrorizing both animal and human populations. The bees always arrive in swarms, and live in colonies, and attack in or as a swarming mass. The bees are "Natural born killers" (1998:4) (after a movie of the same title no doubt) and much more aggressive than their European counterparts (Miller, 1999). Los Angeles County officials will destroy "any swarm that we expect to be Africanized" (Ritsch, 1999) as a precautionary measure. DNA tests will be taken only after the bees are killed (since researchers have found that there is a gene responsible for the bees aggressive behavior). Africanized bees have a special odor, a pheromone that is released from its stinger. The threat is so large that the Los Angeles County Africanized honey bee task force reconvened this year to deal with the "killer bees" (Gorman, 1998)

Originally, African honeybees were imported to Brazil to help increase honey production there (they were more fertile). But the bees, which are also much more hostile than their European cousins, soon escaped into the wilderness, resisting domestication and swarming angrily out of control. The aggressor species (the African bees) invaded European bee colonies and mated with their more passive flower-hopping European counterparts. African (bee) genes are dominant over the European genes; the bee world would never be the same. Whole

colonies of bees have taken on new behaviors. The reports of miscegenating killer bees is rich in metaphor, especially considering the insectlike nature of many of the aliens in contemporary science fiction (which includes *Star Trek*) and the insectlike qualities afforded immigration to the United States. The comparisons are far more than a supercilious deconstructionist exercise, for they reveal anxieties that persist and subsist in the *Star Trek* universe, in science fiction, and in a myriad of other hyperreal social texts.

**HERRENVOLKING TO THE DYSUTOPIAN  
STARS: BEING AND NOTHING MUCH ELSE**

*We all to-day (possibly with a coldness reminiscent of the insect-world) are in each other's vitals.*

—WYNDHAM LEWIS,  
QUOTED IN BURSTEIN, 1997:139

*Consciousness has arisen in nervous systems of a particular type and complexity, with an evolutionary history and an individual history. I'm not saying...consciousness couldn't go with something made of silicon rather than carbon units, as they say on Star Trek.*

—OLIVER SACKS,  
QUOTED IN WERTENBAKER, 1995:20

The television program *X Files* featured several episodes connecting contemporary *alien* anxiety to insects. Paranoid, conspiratorial, and apocalyptic, *X Files* tells us “the truth is out there” but cautions us also to “trust no one.”

One episode in particular, “Herrenvolk” (literally translates to mean master race), contained several pivotal scenes exploring aggressive killer alien bees and their relationship to extraterrestrial invasion.

A van pulls up to a pole in the middle of nowhere. The repairman gets out of his van and attaches two special additions to his boots, two spikes on the insides. He then clips a strap onto a clamp on one side of him, then throws the strap around the tree and clamps it on the other side. Digging the spikes into the wood, he makes his way up the pole, using the strap for support. He opens up the box on top and starts using a screwdriver when a bee approaches

him. He goes to swat it away, but it comes back. He tries to swat it again.

REPAIRMAN: Get away.

(The bee lands on his neck and stings him.)

Oh, damn it!

(He smacks the bee and it falls down to the ground, laying on its back and buzzing wildly.)

Five boys walk up to the pole. Five identical boys. The repairman acknowledges their presence but doesn't look directly at them.

REPAIRMAN: A bee stung me, 'ay?

(He looks at them and sees that they are identical.)

Well, now...don't you all take the cake?

(He chuckles.)

Does your mom ever mix you up?

The boys don't answer. He laughs to himself, then gets cottonmouth. He starts to gag and choke, clutching his throat. The boys step back as the man shakes violently, jarring loose the spikes and straps. He falls, screaming, then rolls over on his back. The boys walk over to him as his last breath escapes him. One of the boys nudges his head with his foot, then the boys head back in the direction that they came from.

As the episode progresses, protagonist Fox Mulder sees his younger sister (who was kidnapped by aliens as a child).

MULDER: Samantha?

(Bees buzz in the flowers beneath the sheets.)

Samantha! Samantha?

(The boy and the girl turn around to see Mulder running towards them.)

Samantha? Samantha?

(Reaching his sister, he gets down on his knees and puts his hands on her arms.)

Samantha, it's me. It's me, Fox, your brother.

(She shows no response. Smith runs up to them.)

Do you remember me?

(Mulder looks back at Smith.)



What's wrong with her?

JEREMIAH SMITH: She has no language.

To lack language (as if that were possible) devolutionizes humanity, or takes humanity into a Borg-like future that transforms the individual into a spoke in a larger wheel, one of many drones for a hivelike aggregate. Buzzing along the theoretical concourse, Barthes “pronounced the demise of the novel in *The Literature of Exhaustion*, the same year [1967] as Jacques Derrida traced the ‘flight of the signifier.’” A little later, Barthes memorialized the “death of the author” (Smith, De Barros, & Paes, 1995:1). These somber commentaries signaled the emergence of the nihilist-apocalyptic, whose epicenter (or lack thereof) continues to send tremors pollinating the fault lines of contemporary cultural experience, anticipating the end.

The science fiction novel *Childhood's End* ended with humanity's extinction. The book concerns the irrevocable and inevitable mutation of Earth's progeny into something ineffable and incomprehensible (which certainly puts a new twist on narratives of progress). With metamorphosis comes nothingness. “Oh, no,” Wayne (a Trekker teacher near the San Diego border) said, “you see:

Everything has design. Everything has purpose. Without design and purpose nothing exists! To believe in accidental existence takes more faith than anything. Accidents don't question their own existence! Without control of some form, there is no order. Without order, there is nothing. You would descend into a virtual tower of Babel, like right here in—California.

**WE ARE NOT MEN, WE ARE  
DEVOLUTIONIZED— OR YOU SAY YOU  
WANT A DEVOLUTION**

*We lost our tails—evolving up—from little snails—I say it's  
all—just wind in sails—are we not men? —We are DEVO!*  
—DEVO LYRICS

In *Keep the River on Your Right* (1969), Tobias Schneebaum writes about eight months in the Amazon jungle. He positions himself as the spokesperson for *his people* (see Castillo, 1995). The pronouns Schneebaum used are evocative. By adopting or adoption into the



MULDER: How'd they get here?

JEREMIAH SMITH: They're stationed here. They're part of an agrarian work force.

(Mulder looks around.)

MULDER: Who takes care of them?

JEREMIAH SMITH: They take care of themselves. Parenting is unnecessary... a needless division of energy.

"Resistance is futile! You will be assimilated." Forever transformed, there will be no going back, there will be no moving ahead, the myth of progress halted, for there is no place to go. It is one big dead end. And as the boundaries between what is human and what is alien collapse, or meet in a singular cataclysmic crescendo, the existential question of what it means to be human needs to be forever left unanswered. It no longer matters. Humanity is no longer an incomplete project; it is completed, it is over. It no longer needs to "redefine itself in order to be itself" (Carollo, 1998:219). We have become the *Strangers in a Strange Land*.

Whose hand will I reach out for in the future? I hope and pray with all my heart that it is not like a Borg. I don't want to reach out and feel the cold hard lines of a machine drone hand...there has to be something more. I must, to quote Captain Picard, my hero, "make it so." But I can't speak to them, I don't understand them. They refuse to adapt to our culture, to our way of life. This is not South America, or Central America or Laos or Cambodia, this is the U.S. and it no longer feels that way. (Noah, a Trekker teacher in Oregon)

**THE ALIEN HEATS THINGS UP: RACIST  
RESURGENCE IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL  
SUBLIME**

*Lower your shields and surrender your vessel. We will add  
your biological and technological distinctiveness to our  
own. Your culture will adapt to service us.*

—THE BORG

According to a short piece from the Reuters news wire, South American "aliens have olive green skin.... UFO experts at the Second World UFO

Congress stated that extraterrestrials in Acapulco, Mexico are secretly abducting humans for use in hybrid breeding experiments and inserting implants into their bodies. The notion that humans are routinely abducted in their sleep, taken off to alien space craft and then returned silently to their beds carried a high level of acceptance among experts from eight countries attending the meeting. This is not a cowboy movie. This is the real world.” Well, more like science fiction.

We do not see the Other as human, but we see it as a thing, a quivering brown lump of humanity collecting at the border, ready to descend on the good citizens of the U.S. while infecting us with their alien-ness. In the movie *The Arrival* (1996), the plot line basically is the same as the more popular (tongue-in-cheek) *Men in Black*. Aliens already have invaded and taken over OUR world. In *The Arrival*, both the greenhouse effect and global warming can be directly attributed to aliens trying to make our planet more hospitable for themselves. (If it is hot, chances are the aliens are not coming from Canada.) Zane Ziminski, played by Charlie Sheen (who, by the way, is Puerto Rican) in the film, works as a professional SETI (the people who endlessly search on satellites for extraterrestrials). Ziminski intercepts an alien message. As part of the plot action, his partner is killed and Sheen is fired (by an employer whose interests are more tied to multinational capital than to the nation). Undeterred (it could not fit into the American monomyth that the hero did not seek out the truth), he risks his life to find out what is going on. At the same time, a comely female researcher (another convenient plot element) discovers a poppy field in the Arctic.

Both scientists and their seemingly separate searches converge in Mexico, where our protagonist (and his female love interest) notice everything isn't quite what it appears to be. “Mexican” aliens infiltrate American corporations and institutes. Huge factories on the southern side of the U.S.-Mexican border are creating environmental havoc (manned by Mexican alien drone workers) (Dean, 1998). Environmentalism in this light must be understood as a bourgeois reactionary discourse. The Museum of Natural History eugenic-styled paradigmatic of climatic humanity, which has been replicated in everything from melanin games to Leonard Jeffries's “sun people/ice people” theory (Dean, 1997), show the aliens laboring at their mammoth task: making the planet hotter. The aliens die in cold climates.

White (Aryan, Nordic) stock—i.e., the *real* Americans of the temperate zones—become the victim of a secret, unfriendly, purposeful invasion (a form of colonialist revenge), as the aliens mass at the border, waiting to destroy US. The eviction notice for our soon-to-be

bankrupt planet was not even posted. “If we continue this alien invasion, we will be like Mexico,” said David Duke. But, who are *we*? An anonymous letter to the editor in *Border Watch* claims, “When the Mexicans get powerful enough in a job situation they kick out the gringos so their buddies can take over” (Brugge, 1995:206). “They” (aliens), I was told by a tenth-grader, “can inhabit and take over our bodies.” “The Borg cannot ever be nice. There is no treaty you can make with them. They will swarm our galaxy like a plague of locusts leaving nothing, making us all drones like they are,” Michael said. “Do you remember how when in *First Contact* the Borg ship went back, what happened to the Earth? It was brown and lifeless, and connected to the hive. They displace the people of the Earth. Displace is too mild of a term, they killed us. Took over our planet and drained it of all life.”

In *The Arrival*, the aliens are not defeated; there is nothing we can do about it. And “just wait until they can work their way up the economic ladder, and... Americans will feel the sting of Mexican racism” (Brugge, 1995:207). “I am not a racist. I have a Chinese roommate. But do you think that all of them who are living here actually like Americans? They hate us,” Wayne said.

### **DIRT WILL BE ASSIMILATED: BORDER ZONE TRANSGRESSIONS**

*Roddenberry was quoted as saying, “We made sure the Enterprise was well stocked with a competent Captain, the finest weapons, the best equipment, and plenty of Niggers, Spics, and Chinks to do the dirty work.” I took that from an interview with Roddenberry, Time Magazine, 04/13/74*

—TREKKER POST

*“We” go there, “they” come here, increasing the risk to United States citizens of exposure to tropical infectious diseases.*

—LLEWELLYN J.LEGTERS

Rob Smith is a 30-year-old patrol agent with the United States Border Patrol, in Campo, California. He writes:

When the sun sets, however, the area becomes infested with a nuisance of enormous proportions. I am referring specifically to the massive influx of illegal immigrants and drug smugglers.

I drove with Wayne (who teaches in San Diego) toward the border one evening. “What are we going to do?” I inquired. He answered:

We are looking for alien lights. You see them better at night. Most people feel that many strange things are happening all over the planet, such as crime, terrorism, disasters, change of climates, drugs, pollution, diseases, and it may well be the reason why there are always alien lights in the sky. I really would like to see some. I wonder if they are like the Vulcans? I wonder how we will react?

Honestly, just then I saw it, a light moving rapidly across the canvas of the evening sky. But it was the border patrol’s floodlight seeking out *that* Other alien. Trying to sound zombielike, I said, “I don’t think the border patrol came in peace.” Wayne responded, “Yeah, so much for *close encounters* of the third kind—the third-world kind.”

Vanessa Smutnak is a community college student at DeAnza Junior College in Cupertino, California, who went to Tijuana, Mexico, on a “reality tour organized by Global Exchange, a San Francisco human-rights group. If it’s illegal immigration they seek to understand, nothing can do the job like a trip to the border fence, where migrants mill about and await the chance to slip past the U.S. Border Patrol” (Koidin, 1999: 2265). So as Vanessa “stood at the edge of a bluff shielding her eyes she gazed out at the neighborhood below. The skeletal remains of an abandoned smelting plant loomed behind her.” Smutnak was mortified; “the mounds of fine brown sand around the old smelter were tainted with lead” (Koidin, 1999:2265). Lead left from U.S. factories. The poison and dirt alarmed her. At the same time, out on the Chihuahua Desert (very close to El Paso, Texas):

The sun already generated a fierce white heat. I rolled down my sleeves and congratulated myself for bringing a hat. In front of me, Joe Gonzales, the head of one of the Border Patrol’s mounted units, was similarly dressed. “Let’s move,” he said, then kicked his horse into a trot. I did the same, and we rode out across a mesa toward the border to hunt for illegal aliens. Gonzales noticed some tracks. “They’re old,” he said. “You can tell new sign because it shines. The dirt crystals reflect more light, since they’ve been scattered in different directions and the wind hasn’t blown them all straight.” (Kratochvil, 1996:11)

Dirt crystals and light shining in the brown velvet dirt, the border between San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, is a peculiar space. When you park your car on the California side and walk across the border, the metal revolving gate clanks, making a noise that to me has always been highly reminiscent of the movie *Midnight Express*. The border's arbitrary placement, the feeling that something is different on the "Other" side (including the geography), and the sense of ending become both titillating and fearsome. But above all else, the border is dirty. What is on the Other side has always been (for San Diegans) part of the exotic-erotic, part of the transgressive zone, a space where all kinds of fantasies and phantasms appear, haunting and infecting our landscape with fear and hate. The social hierarchy is mapped onto the spatial plane. The image of Mexico's dirt, coupled with the picture of the disease-infested Mexican, is presented as a public safety argument. In both the popular-public-political pedagogy and institutional discourse, the distinction between "us" and "them," between Americans and Mexicans, between citizens and "aliens," between persons who obey the law and those who are criminals, has been cast as "cleanliness" versus "dirt," as a distinction between healthy bodies and those infested with disease. So, the "keep America pure" ideology conveys the crystal-clear message that people of Mexican descent were un-American, subversive, and unwelcome (Gutierrez, 1996).

The alien invades, the interloper swarms, as Justine (who lives in San Diego) said, with a real sense of tongue-in-cheek (playing off a skit on *Saturday Night Live* titled "Land Shark," which was running silently on her VCR):

You never have the alien ring your doorbell (like the Avon lady). Dingdong. Who is it? An alien. May I come in and ruin your planet? Look, when minorities come from these underdeveloped countries, they bring all kinds of diseases with them, and then our schools become hotbeds for infections.

The contemporary United States continues to be plagued by narratives of dirt and illness. The imagery and imaginary of disease has long been part of an imperialistic and colonialist ideology. The postmodern-viral narrative displays lethal "new" illnesses with cataclysmic consequences, something that has long been a staple of science fiction, *Star Trek*, and popular discourse. Thus

The virus emerges as a dangerous foreign being: a fecund, primitive yet evolving, hungry, needy, African predator unleashed by modern travel from the last recesses of the wild. It wants to immigrate, with or without a visa. It demands attention in the form of resistance or capitulation. While ostensibly pondering the possible overthrow of the food chain, virus discourse imagines the overthrow of the social order. Viruses represent social change—frightening and enormous social change—and our drastic fear of viral epidemics is in part a reactionary response to the possibility of such change. (Schell, 1997):

Within the virus strain of hierarchical power, the Other perennially remains, that unknowable, often microscopic creature who lurks in the caliginous space, waiting for the right host, so it can corrode our purity into the dirt and dust.

The virus discourse is that now it has become a global passenger with no need for a green card.... Viruses are foreign entities, possibly even anti-American. The virus discourse in Science Fiction retells the same old imperialist story under a different cover. Which justifies exclusionary practices, surveillance, and general prejudice that we would otherwise find inexcusable as well as politically untenable. (Schell, 1997)

Dirt is uncontrollable. It always manages to come back in, to transgress the boundaries. Dirt always needs to be cleaned up. (It represents the physical threat to the ideal order, to the orderly functioning of society.)

If we can abstract pathogens and hygiene from our notions of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place.... It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. (Bass, 1998: 430)

Dirt is related to pathogens and pathology as much as pathological descriptions of the urban landscape depict degeneracy on a larger territorial map. "Although geography has always been concerned with 'the difference that space makes,' there is ideological significance in



marking the space of the border.” In the viral-biographical the boundaries between US and them need to be been maintained. Killer viruses are a morality tale (of difference) told on a spatial plane. When virologists discuss the dangers of “changed social conditions” (see Bass, 1998; Schell, 1997; Dean 1997), they have specific dangerous changes, coming from specific places, in mind. The alien space becomes not the final frontier to be explored but the last outpost of biological mystery, where iconoclastic viruses practice on the local while eventually acting globally (or galactically), preparing their pandemic attack on US. “Viruses living there are unhampered by our human rights regulations” (Schell, 1997). The narrative of the alien microbe has had a long history on the southern border of the United States. The gated communities of the upwardly mobile, sprawling reaches of suburbia overlook the recesses of worker camps. The camps often do not have either running water or electricity. But the camps do house the workers who built the houses of those offended by the sight of the camps. The city of Encinitas, California, decided that the camps posed a health menace to the city. The city was determined to clean up (actually clean out) the camps. “Mexicans...were seen as filth” (Gutterrez, 1996:260). Filth breeds disease and infection and can affect and infect the nation.

In an interview with a Trekker named Felicity, she explained:

If genetic engineering can rid us of disease and infection and infestation, that is a good thing. Certainly you don't want infection running rampant. The whole thing has gotten out of control now. In the future it will be controlled. We can screen them out.

“Poor people and aliens breed and bring infections” (not the social conditions that brought about the situation's emergence) and put *our* lives in danger. So much so that scions in the County of San Diego decided to “light up the border.” “The light...was just meant to light up this area.... This is a main artery, this is a very tender spot” (Gutterrez, 1996:259), a soft spot, a spot prone to infection and infestation.

*Star Trek* plays upon these themes as well, as “Borg nanoprobes are an infection”; “alien mutant viruses which threaten the entire Federation must be eradicated before it is too late.” A race of civilized beings is infected by a virus called “the phage,” which literally means “germ.”

“Well, that won't happen here, there are no aliens or alien infections passing through here,” Wayne said. “Light up the border protected U.S.

citizens.” I told him I heard that before. As Jeff Goldblum (as Ian Malcolm in *Jurassic Park*) exclaimed, “Life will not be contained, it will break free.”

What we are witnessing is one of the great tragedies in human history. Powerful forces are in motion that, if left unchecked, will slowly push aside European man and European civilization and then dance a victory jig on their collective grave. If we do nothing, the nation we leave to our children will be a desolate, third-world failure, in which whites will be a despised minority. Western Civilization will be a faint echo, vilified if it is even audible. I cannot think of a tragedy that is at once so great, so unnatural, and so unnecessary. (Taylor, 1997)

### THE CAUTIONARY TALE AS HYBRID

The virus narrative leading to mutation signifies two distinct paths that head off in opposite directions but meet in a single space. That space is the body. When considering the Borg on *Star Trek*, “the white representatives of humanity’s next generation...[are] threatened by an alien collective whose components end up all looking alike” (Bernardi, 1998:88), I recognize that the fear of the alien is realized in sexualized form.

When Wayne and I sat on the border of the United States and Mexico looking for aliens, and we began to talk about the light up the border campaign, signifier upon signifier allegorically blended into a hybrid double-edged discourse—a two-headed monster in which the alien met the alien and, like the border, could not be contained. The fear is one of miscegenation, of hybridity. Alien encounters are sexual and sexualized. The alien tale is nothing more than a Jeffersonian sexual fantasy, a plantation narrative projected into the stars. We have met the alien and it is our hybrid, a hybrid whose other can be the sterile artificial of a machine human couplet or the mongrelization of the human race (translated to mean the white race).

WAYNE: Damn! Look at that sucker.

KAREN: Give me the binoculars. What is it?

WAYNE: Aliens. Our country’s problem, as I see it, is just like in *Trek*. Interspecies intercourse, interspecies relations, which is extremely common among humanoid species, can come in just about any combination. It makes classification a bitch. It

is impossible for me to create any statistics concerning the various combinations. How would I ever write up an IEP [Individual Education Plan]?”

KAREN: I don't know, why would an IEP be needed?

WAYNE: Well, let's say hypothetically one parent is human, the child will tend to have all of the nonhuman races' characteristics. I know from the Trek role-playing games I play that personality would tend to the human norm only 25 percent of the time. When you blend two races special abilities are always halved, and also hybrids are genetically like mules. That would give them a 75 percent chance of sterility even if they appear to have normal sexual development. Combined together, the kid is gonna have a lot of problems. It is perhaps something that ought not to have been born. Poor thing.

I have heard that story before again and again, Part of the tragic mulatta fable. Most recently I listened to the news stories that came out of Wedowee, Alabama, where Mr. Humphries (the principal) called Revonda Bowen, “a mistake her parents had made” (Patureau, 1994) because her father is white and her mother is black. “To prevent similar mistakes, and more immediately to squelch interracial dating Humphries chose to cancel the prom. School secretary Linda Fincher defended her boss as ‘a good disciplinarian’” (Patureau, 1994).

WAYNE: Most people agree with the goals of political correctness, especially Trekkers. Everyone should have the same rights and opportunities. However, political correctness doesn't allow for any disagreement on policy issues. Trekkers preach tolerance, sensitivity, diversity, and multiculturalism, but for all their talk, straight white males need not apply.

KAREN: Of course this has nothing to do with the fact that you're a straight white male.

WAYNE: Nah, not at all. I am not on Ketracil white [a drug that a race of aliens known as the Jem Haddar is addicted to on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*]. I recognize the Universe has changed. What does Kirk say? I can't remember. But I know he would shoot first and ask questions later. I am a lot like him. If the Borg tried to assimilate me, I would show them where to assimilate it. I would stick a virus where it hurt, like in ID4. Just let someone try and stick an anal probe up my ass...even my proctologist. (Reading a sign) International Borderzone state park. Wildlife viewing permitted. As long

as they don't shoot it. Guess it actually depends on the wildlife. Do you remember the Gorn?

KAREN: Yes! I didn't like him, ever! Ugly gross fake-looking lizard.

WAYNE: Do you remember the Alamo?

KAREN: I heard that before, too! Wayne...look! Look up in the sky. Is it a bird? A plane? No... Must be Superman.

WAYNE: It's not nice to fool Mother Nature.

KAREN: (*Thinking of Nietzsche*) I think I detect a little *resentment*.

## CHAPTER 6

# On Top of Old Mount Olympus, All Covered with Trek; or Mama, Don't Let Your Trekker Grow Up to Be a Fascist

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the footsteps of the herald who bringeth tidings who publisheth peace.*

—ISAIAH 3:7

*The embarrassing fact for the white West (which doubtless explains its concealment) is that their most important moral theorist of the past three hundred years is also the foundational theorist in the modern period of the division between Herrenvolk and Untermenschen persons and subpersons, upon which Nazi theory would later draw. Modern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father.*

—MILLS, 1997:72

The Getty museum opened “like a cultural El Niflo” (Streisand, 1997: 80) with tremendous fanfare. The star-studded opening gala was reminiscent of a true Hollywood spectacular à la “Cecile B. DeMille and Louis B. Mayer” (Dillon, 1997). Actually I heard the party befitted Louis XIV much more so than Los Angeles at the end of the century. The compound is an “impressive cluster of stone-and metal clad citadels” (Dillon, 1997) that cost more than \$1 billion. The Getty is definitely one of the century’s most impressive, expensive, and grandiose cultural projects-cultural formations, a veritable hubris-on-a-hill “that can only be compared to top-of-the-line royal palaces like Versailles or such archaeological wonders of the ancient world as Peru’s Macchu Pichu or Egypt’s Valley of Kings” (Abbe, 1996:11). The Getty floats loftily above the city of Los Angeles like an aberrant Brigadoon. Perched on its mountain looking down upon mere mortals “with utopian detachment” (Ouroussoff, 1998:5), the Getty’s vista is

often “obscured by Zeusy yellow clouds; sometimes storms of lightning—Olympian ruminations never communicated to the valley floor” (Rodriguez, 1996:37) below. This monumental magnum opus represents a “challenge to the notion that art, culture and urban life are intrinsically bound together” (Ouroussoff, 1998:5). The imperious gaze of the Getty, situated in Bel-Air (a suburb of wealth and power), is positioned in stark contrast to the city it oversees (or overlooks).

The dehumanized plight of the poor living in our midst, sleeping in cardboard boxes and eating from garbage dumpsters, is as much a part of the global economy as Los Angeles’s new Mount Olympus, the shining new Getty Center atop the hill overlooking the luxury neighborhood of Bel Air. (McLaren, 1998:431)

With its white-marbled magnificence and beneficence, the site and the architecture “reinforces a crusader castle feel.” Feudal and futile, it lords over its realm. Even if the knight from the Ajax commercial did arrive on his steed, white museums still “tend to get grungy.” So, it is a good thing that the Getty has an endowment of over 4.5 billion dollars, “plenty to pay for all that upkeep” (Temin, 1997). And more than enough to keep the people living in cardboard boxes from looking up at the stars.

### GOING UP

The Getty was a blockbuster hit. Press releases proudly proclaimed (with P.T.Barnum hyperbole) the Herculean efforts made by the Getty Foundation to make the museum accessible and approachable. Yet, it is difficult for the masses to ascend to the anointed apex (where real estate is very expensive). To get to the top, tourists must take a three-car tram up the side of the mountain, putting a surly, objectionable twist on Martin Luther King’s mountaintop metaphor. Most of US won’t get over the mountain to the promised land of the castle in Bel- Air.

The world, particularly the colonized world, is always cut into segments. So I ask, what is the unit of measure that separates the up there from the down here? In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, Jesus repeatedly goes to the mountain, for with height comes distance. Louis Farrakhan used this form of biblical topographical narrative to recount his experiences in Tepoztlan. Invoking Quetzcoatl, the plumed serpent whose cosmic castle extends to the four corners of the world, Farrakhan used the mountaintop ruins to highlight his spiritual-political mandate.

Farrakhan elevates the geography to eco-ecclesiasticism (with more than just a touch of Ezekiel) (see Leib, 1998).

The mountain metaphor (which I have used often in this book) sets an ideological tone, a moral order, and a distance. The mountain invariably heightens the significance of events that transpire on its peaks. When Moses goes to get the commandments, he does not go downtown, or around the corner to the second chariot on the left, or to the market-place.

What goes on *up there* is elevated. As Rabbi Byron Sherwin said, “You project your culture’s highest good when depicting heaven” (Tucker, 1998). Mountains and summit temples (to God or to capitalism) are meeting places between the masses and the gods. They are gateways to the heavens. Space, the final frontier, is an embodied spatial metaphor representing this hierarchy. The *Enterprise* and its crew *up there* elevates prosaic experiences to biblical allegory.

### IS IT HEAVEN OR DISNEY?

The lines at the Getty are so long that they rival Disneyland during high season. The museum ought to be popular, because the Getty (and its attendant Cinderella Castle) used consumer and audience research (including focus and target groups) to find out what would give the space *mass* appeal. The Getty’s bulls-eye targeting connects to a larger cultural phenomenon, a public political pedagogy housed not just in museums but in all institutional sites (spanning everything from public schools to the Internal Revenue Service). We have the new consumer-friendly IRS and elite museums designed for the masses. We have proprietary schools that make education painless, certificate driven, part of a commodity approach to schooling, where in six short weeks you, too, can be a truck driver, a preacher, or a teacher. The customer is always right! By diluting the content (with a spoonful of sugar), culture becomes another consumable item. I buy culture, shoes, and education, perhaps even in the same place. The environment is climatized, culturalized, neutralized, and homogenized. In “the phenomenology of consumption” (Baudrillard, 1995:195), all life, all social relations are represented, repackaged, and articulated through networks of objects (see Baudrillard, 1995). It is ease and comfort that counts, as the text of life is regulated, organized, prepackaged, and constructed in one-size-fits-all without surprise. Utilitarian, functional, and smooth like the lines of an automobile, this is a cold, heartless hypermodernism in which neatness (and packaging) counts. Visitors spend money on pilgrimages

to experience history, art, science, and technology as pastiche, taking souvenirs as bounty, as prizes, “as tokens of their encounter” (Fjellman 1992:59). The souvenir becomes a memory to add to a collection of controlled purchased experiences.

Although attendance has been rising at large museums, thanks mostly to blockbuster shows and the growth of gift shops, restaurants, and other attractions that make art only a part of the experience.... A recent report by the National Endowment for the Arts said arts institutions today draw the same “highly skewed” audience they always have: They are older, less integrated, and richer than the general population. The NEA report laid the blame on the arts community itself: Artists, the report said, too often enshrine themselves—literally and figuratively—in temples out of reach of most Americans. (Streisand, 1997:80)

Star Trek’s Federation Science was the quintessential blockbuster museum exhibition, breaking attendance records across the United States and Canada. Demographic studies indicated Star Trek would draw in the crowds. And the crowds came. Underwritten with a grant by Paramount Corporation (who had tremendous interest in the exhibition’s success), Federation Science’s mission can best be described as “to seek new funds” (Zimmerman, 1997) and to seek out new audiences, while maintaining brand-name loyalty among audiences already hooked on Star Trek (like so much phonics). The overwhelming success of the Federation Science exhibition made everybody happy and everybody richer. Paramount was happy. The museums that were desperately strapped for cash were happy. Trekkers were happy. It was a win-win situation.

### **GOOD MEDICINE FOR SICK CULTURAL FORMATIONS**

In a world where everything, even the future, is prescribed, prescription becomes like so much soma. Star Trek is recall performed as prediction. It disguises the past, repackaging it in the future. In other words, future prognostication literally becomes a thing of the past. We have already seen the future. We have seen the future prescribed, inscribed, and etched into our memory on *Star Trek*. We know how it will all turn out.



History or historicidal approaches to history, science, and the arts are transformative genres, genres of distory (Fjellman, 1992) and distortions. The past, present, and future become nothing more or less than a Sunday outing in the park, a collection of impressions, good clean family fun, in a vacuum-cleaned, sanitized, homogenized, wartless, seamless version of a past (that never was). History is always constructed in the present. Yet, in this model the past-as-future is framed in opposition to the present. And the past-as-future is pleasant and good, not like the present-present, which is certainly not what we want our future to be. Remythologizing the past in a “relatively uncynical and optimistic fashion, the world would be a better place if history could be rewritten leaving in only the parts that should have happened” (Fjellman, 1992:59–60).

“We can construct a better future. In the words of Jean Luc Picard, we can *make it so!*” Enrique (a teacher in Atlanta who originally hails from Miami, like me) explained while sitting on a very green lawn outside the Atlanta Science Museum.

I am not sure what *it* is. But, I do know that *it* does involve quantification, enumeration, and a form of accountancy (which is not the same as accountability) that is part of the bigger and better and new and improved supersized universe of value. “Star Trek has the largest and most consistent following in the world,” he said, gulping down his mega-milkshake. “Star Trek fans have measurably higher IQs,” he said, munching on an oversized box of fries. “Star Trek fans excel in their respective fields,” he told me while eating a double-bacon cheeseburger. “The universe is a big, big place.” What do the numbers signify when they are measured against nothing at all? What does that mean when added into an already ahistoricized pedagogical framework?

### **MORE BIG BANG FOR THE BUCK**

Star Trek’s Federation Science takes up over 6,000 feet and has 30 interactive displays. The Getty is much larger (960,000 square feet in total) than Trek’s moveable feast. (Federation Science is different than and should not be confused with the Star Trek Experience in Las Vegas.) What do the displays promote?

Because museums, exhibitions, and schools are constructed by those in privileged positions, these institutions embody interpretations supported by their corporate sponsors. We have corporate-friendly history, sociology, art, and politics, subject to the whims of vocal special interests. We have designer museums whose

exhibits, like Federation Science, are built by imagineers (a term invented by none other than Walt Disney himself). We have Disney schools in Chicago and Nike schools in Los Angeles. What is *object-*ionable is the way the status quo is reproduced on a corporate level: “Incorporating selections and silences on such a level that they falsify reality” (Wallace, 1996:24), becoming instruments of class dominance serving a multinational corporate order.

Profits are generated, because that is what counts. But what is also generated is a corporatized version of history, arts, sciences, and technology that does not engender any discussion or debate. Thus,

Justifying the mission of capitalists and lending a naturalism and inevitability to their authority. And, perhaps more importantly, they generate ways of not seeing. By obscuring the origins and development of capitalist society, by eradicating exploitation, racism, sexism, and class struggle from the historical record, by covering up the existence of broad-based oppositional traditions, and popular cultures, and by rendering the majority of the population invisible as shapers of history, the museums inhibited the capacity of visitors to imagine alliterative social orders—past or future. (Wallace, 1996:24)

Once upon a time, in a galaxy long ago and far away, there was the imperialist imperative, which has been translated into a globalized universe—a new world order where the colonization of consumer subjects is necessary to ensure capitalism’s unrepentant growth and expansion. Star Trek is just one of innumerable cultural formations reconstructing and reconstituting imperialist ideological imperatives, thus mirroring “the more general process by which television programs work to colonize, represent, and even produce consumer interests” (Fulton, 1994).

### **IMAGINEERING THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF IT ALL**

Meanwhile, back in line at the Getty Center, despite all the engineering-imagineering, the nuts-and-bolts reality remains that people have to wait well over an hour to be able to board the tram for the short (three-minute) ride to the Getty Museum. Could the tram and the ride up the mountain-side be nothing more than a little bit of Magic Kingdom queuing theory?

Disney is a master of finding the longest distance between two points. Not only do these circuitous routes, known as “infinity roads,” confound one’s sense of direction, but they also discourage any impulse to get there faster, when that is obviously not the point. The point is that you are no longer in control, so you might as well just sit back and enjoy the ride. You relinquish control to a higher order and higher authority. (Project on Disney, 1995:17)

You relinquish control to the Gods on the mountaintop so that order is maintained. Unlike Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, we do not know who is behind the magic curtain. The will to power finds expression in the wonders of technology of the modern world (see Lieb, 1998:5). Think of this tram ride up the mountainside as a *Chariot of the Gods* in which “deus ex machina becomes machina ex deo” (Lieb, 1998:17). This powerful chariot, is above all, a consummate machine embodying the impulses to mechanize, control, and tame the machine-made landscape.

“It is nothing less than ineffability transformed into machines” (Lieb, 1998:17), translated into automaton-like rituals. It is akin to Ezekiel’s wheel with hyperreal oil. This important (fascist) message cannot be underestimated. Perhaps this message is more important than what is housed upstairs in the Getty, or up high on the Enterprise circling in imagination above us. “Duty order, loyalty to mission and the Federation, that is our way,” Enrique says. Raphael adds, “In the Federation, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. We are a true meritocracy.” You do what you are told. You continue on the mapped route. You walk in a straight line. “Why?” Aside from *Y* being a crooked letter (as the maxim goes), implicit in meritocracy is hierarchy. You don’t want to upset those in control. But the hierarchy is obscured amid populist stances in the machine’s unerring rumblings. It is not a single issue or a single phenomenon but a collection of layered messages that produce the compliant and coherent hyperrealistic whole.

### NO ROOM AT THE DRIVE-INN

The Getty recently announced it will no longer “admit everyone who arrives at the front door. Those who don’t have a parking reservation, who take the bus instead of driving, will be denied admission if the tram line is too long.” No more than six months after the museum’s grand opening, the Getty began running newspaper ads “asking people not to come” (Weiner, 1999:91). This reversed the center’s original policy,

allowing those with the coveted parking reservations to take the Bundy Drive (public) bus to the Getty Tram station. It is not easy to get into heaven, there is no room at the inn, and I dare you to go tell it to the mountain if you don't have a parking reservation.

But, as the song goes, "don't worry, be happy," which is exactly what an advertisement for the Getty featured. A glossy photo displayed "a dozen happy kids from different races" with the caption: "It's a full house" (Weiner, 1999:91). Perhaps that is a little more Disney magic. A little bit more disparaging than Plato's cave, for I almost saw the light. And "we are now stuck inside of Pluto's doghouse" (Project on Disney, 1995:28). If it is as Chris Whittle (mastermind of Channel One and the Edison Project) claims, businesses' biggest gift to education "is to make education a business" (Project on Disney, 1995:183), if the business of Hollywood is entertainment and imagineering, where can I escape into reality? Is there a space to go where I can develop a sense of unmediated agency? But imagineering the spectacle and the desire becomes enough, why would I want anything else? Jesus saves, *Star Trek* provides. I am still not sure what Jesus is saving or what *Star Trek* is providing. Will I be able to collect my illusory pennies from heaven, too, and trade them in a real marketplace?

I can't tell the difference between the Getty and the Hollywood sign that also looms over the hills of Los Angeles; it all is imagineered magic. So it does seem altogether fitting that the man who created *Star Trek* and opened the eyes of the world to the infinite possibilities of space... spent his lifetime in southern California (Celestius Society Website).

### THE BUSINESS...PRESSING MY LATINUM

If the business of schools is the business of business (which has certainly been written about before in both celebratory and critical fashions), I just need a little commercial magic. If I can buy it, if I can sell it, it is good. Nothing else matters. It is all marketed and mediated. Why Addidas over Nike? Why Tommy Hiflinger over Guess? I don't have any idea. It doesn't even matter if it is real or Memorex. Who cares? Who cares that history is written from illusion, an intertextualized interplay between the real and the hyperreal? Elvis sings with Lisa Marie on a Memphis concert stage, Natalie Cole gets to do a duet with her long-dead father (another King), and Fred Astaire dances with my Dirt Devil vacuum cleaner. Astaire vacuum-cleans the past, presenting it as if he were really there. Walt Disney made a 1967

appearance at the Florida legislature after his death to tout EPCOT, which he said would be a “a planned, controlled community...a showcase for American industry and research, schools, cultural and educational opportunities,” a place where both the past and the present would be without flaws, and apparently without poor people “In EPCOT,” Walt promised, “there will be no slum areas because we won’t let them develop” (Shenk, 1995:82). Don’t mess with my hyper-reality and don’t rain on my parade; “There is no poverty in the future, Star Trek shows us nobody ever goes hungry, nobody is greedy, that is what the future holds” (Enrique said seriously).

If “Trek worked because it explained the future believably,” whose future is being explained? Not mine. Not most of the people I know or come in contact with. Yet,

We look at Star Trek as a sagacious prognosticator. Star Trek foretold of cell phones and PCs and floppy disks. How did they know? We wonder. (Actually, think tank poobah Dr. Harvey Lynn Jr. earned \$50 a show as a consultant. He knew all about the coming computer age.)... We just wanted to wonder. Which just adds to the Trek mythos. “Gene always maintained that Star Trek was not an accurate portrait of the future but a portrait of the present set in the future so that people would have hope that this kind of future would exist.” Perhaps that’s what interested us in Star Trek in the first place. An ultimate kind of Narcissus complex. It was about us, the way we were, the way we are, and the way we may yet be. (Goldberg, Website)

Kristie (a preschool teacher) believes that “some people were put on the planet to give us a message. Whether Roddenberry was sent by Jesus or aliens is irrelevant. He had a message to deliver. He is to prepare us for future worlds. He did his mission. He will return. Like so many others, I do not think he is dead.” Taylor (a phys ed teacher) knows (with Gnostic certainty) that “*Star Trek* is a visionary program. That is why it resonated with the public so much. That is why it didn’t die. It had important things to teach us.” “Trek taught us what no church or no school possibly could, because they don’t understand how to deliver the message,” Somar declared soberly. Yoav also was staid and subdued (not even cracking a sophomoric grin) stating:

The business of space is business. It started with the Russians putting sanitary napkins in space or was it a Japanese

advertisement for a feminine hygiene product? It doesn't matter, we have new worlds to conquer. You know Celestius Corporation? Well, they were the people who launched Roddenberry's ashes into space. But now they will also send DNA samples, hair, pictures, messages, anything to the solar system. Where once again Roddenberry is so prophetic because his ashes will eventually be found by space beings, and our things will be found by space beings. They will come to believe that we are an intelligent and sentient species.

Cimmy believes that "Roddenberry was made like us to make us accept his message. It was a message that was not from him but from above. Above in the places up high where the Gods sit."

### HILLTOP KINGDOMS OF HEAVEN

Back on this earthly terrain, on less exalted hills, the Getty Center made a concerted marketing effort to persuade critics that the "Getty was not, repeat not, an elitist institution" (Weiner, 1999:91). An advertising campaign proclaimed this particular kingdom on a hill as *your* Getty. (I don't claim it. Nothing like that is mine). I have trouble (not only with tribbles) but with heights.

You ascend slowly, floating in a white tube-tram that rises beside a white wall, up toward a gleaming white city crowning a hill. Despite the smoothness of the 4½-minute ride, it's an unsettling experience: All that whiteness makes you feel you've died and gone to heaven. (Temin, 1997)

Heaven is very, very white, and it is always removed from Earth. What the Getty accomplishes, with gentrified and impeccable taste, is an "imperative of cultural and economic aristocracy rarefying it out of the reach of the masses" (<http://www.art-arch-yale.edu-so-postmodem/Ios-angeles2htm>). The Getty Center is not a site of cultural contestation. Even the Getty's collections are comprised *only* of the Great Western Canon of Art, ranging from the European Renaissance to 1900. Marketed and imagineered Father [still] knows best. And Papa Getty (whose fortune was made rapidly) tried to ascend his own essentially proletarian Texas roots, aiming not so much for the "rank of an English squire as the standing senator in ancient Rome" (Atkinson, 1995:40). Gene Roddenberry accomplished the same thing, making us forget his El

Paso, Texas, and Southern Baptist working-class roots the more he ascended into the future. But who will remember, especially in a future that is already past? Honestly, it would be ludicrous to argue with the gods of modernity, be they English squires or philosopher-prognosticators. Everything is presented as fixed, “determined, absolute and pure. In more ways than one the Getty becomes “fixed in stone” (<http://www.art-arch-yale.edu-so-PostModem/los-angeles2htm>). In much the same manner, Trekkers nitpick over details in a universe that does not exist but is already absolute and fixed.

By the way, the stones of the Getty are made out of Italian travertine (the chic stone of ancient Rome), giving the space more classical cache, making it a hyperreal perennialist garden. The aesthetics of the Getty fortify the social divisions that already exist. Aesthetic practices that produce the built environment always are created with the approval of the gods of high capitalism. What we have at the Getty is nothing more or nothing less than “a gated community for art” (Streisand, 1997:80) pretending or portending to be a populist center. What we have in *Star Trek* is a form of populist eschatology elevating media-ated drama to what unerringly will be “a gated community” for an already etched future, giving tangible or virtually tangible territorialized form to social relations.

### MAKE HIM A GOOD GUY

*Gene was a complex man with a penchant for life, for love,  
and mostly for humanity, but a man who needed to be loved  
in return.*

—MAJEL BARRETT RODDENBERRY,  
MARCH 1994

How was J.Paul Getty transformed from a Nazi-sympathizing (according to the FBI), womanizing (with an almost pediophilic obsession for teenage brides), mean-spirited (allowing his son to borrow \$1 million to pay off his grandson’s kidnappers with the demand that it be paid back with interest), cheap (putting a pay telephone in his home and even charging his children for lunch), miserly man into an English lord, and worldwide philanthropic benefactor? How was Disney transformed from a right-wing racist anti-Semitic iconoclast into a symbol of America’s purity and greatness, giving us what is labeled “the happiest place on Earth,” as well as becoming the arbiter of

contemporary consumerist childhood? How was Gene Roddenberry transformed from an ex-cop with Hollywood ambitions into a civil rights crusader and philosopher king?

Jeff Grenwald writes of his visit to the producer of *Star Trek*:

I felt the giddy rush of awe and reverence that one experiences in the ruins of the Acropolis...here was the spawning ground from which an entire mythos had sprung. But unlike the monuments of the Greeks this one still flourishes. Rick Berman, executive producer of various *Star Trek* shows...nods toward his desk, a tip of the hat to the ironically blindfolded bust of Gene Roddenberry perched near its edge. It was Gene Roddenberry, of course, who created the original *Star Trek*, and who ruled over *The Next Generation* franchise with a velvet fist. Roddenberry died in October of 1991. Today, he's spoken of with a dry reverence that indicates he might have been both a visionary and a total prick. (1996 <http://www.wired.com>)

Whatever Roddenberry, Disney, and Getty were in life, they are not now. Not as they sit on the Acropolis of the gods. Money can buy you anything. It can certainly clean up your image. As soon as Tinkerbell taps the castle or the Enterprise engages at warp speed, biography and history are transformed. Perhaps that is why the Roddenberry estate and the scions of Trek seem to encourage the transformation of Gene Roddenberry from ex-cop-turned-television-writer into Renaissance man. His son's Website "Philosophy Sphere" clearly advances this metamorphosis, as Roddenberry is included in the great philosophies ranging from Plato to Gandhi to King.

Athena Andreadis wrote "Star Trek [always] looked like California" (1999:64) and with good reason, for the blindness to the *light* is both mesmerizing and tantalizing. What is new? Perhaps nothing. The message may be the same, although it now comes slickly packaged as part of the new and improved version. Marketed and mediated into a three-second sound-bite of association and name recognition.

### HISTORICIDAL APPRECIATION

Star Trek The Experience opened in Las Vegas in January 1998. It cost \$70 million to build. It is one of the many places of pilgrimage, commemoration, and veneration in the Star Trek Universe, places that have increased in number since the twenty-fifth anniversary of the show.



I visited one fan who proudly showed me the video of her visit there. The video spliced footage of the tourists acting out parts with actual footage of one of the movies, giving the appearance that they were actually part of a *Star Trek* movie. This fan described the experience as “a dream come true” which made the 2,000 miles trip worthwhile. We pilgrimage there. It’s our Mecca. (Jindra, 1994:39–40)

I made the pilgrimage to Las Vegas in December 1998 with two of my closest friends. However, we decided \$14.95 was a bit too much to pay for our ride into the final frontier. So we walked around the free areas. We did get to see scale models of the Enterprise and Klingon Bird-of-Prey hanging from the ceiling. “It’s not like the real one at the Smithsonian,” a Trekker I knew in Tempe, Arizona, who wanted to call himself Surfer-Dude quipped. “No,” I added, “it was not.” Surfer-Dude did not want to discourage anyone from going to The Experience because he feels:

Everyone must go at least once in their lifetimes. It was fabulous. I mean definitely fabulous! Film clips from various *Star Trek* episodes and movies on monitors. It became a short short trip to the 24th century—you needed no drugs to do it either. We entered into the History of the Future museum, which I could call an attraction within the attraction. It was amazing; it spanned the four *Star Trek* television series and nine motion pictures that were made. It was awesome. You really feel as if you are there. You are finally there.

I don’t know or remember if I felt as if I was actually *there*. Because *there* does not exist. I admit that we had a lot of fun. I am not quite sure if it was The Experience or because I was in the company of friends. I do know that I did not get the same feeling as Surfer-Dude did. It was (for me) one of the strangest places I had ever seen. I cannot fully articulate my feelings about it. It was not that I did not like the place. It was not that I did not have an experience (I certainly did), but the simulacra, and the simulacra of the simulacra (e.g., the *real* ship that sits at the Smithsonian intertwines in the interplay between reality and hyperreality) became both compelling and repelling at the same time. It was powerful and pervasive and perverse all at once. *Star Trek The Experience* does give you that California-curricular feel. While we were

there, we looked into Quark's Bar (and priced both the Romulan Ale and the Klingon Blood Wine).

We spent a lot of time shopping and pondering existential mysteries such as why a Klingon rugby team shirt cost more than a Vulcan rugby team shirt. Or who would buy the chair (with a price tag of several thousand dollars) of Captain Kirk for the expressed pleasure of sitting on his lap. We signed up for Star Fleet Master Cards because they gave us a free Borg bottle. There was a sale; we bought T-shirts and bags and matching hats. We also stared, perplexed and amused, at a prominently displayed sign for the Trek Museum, which read "History of the Future." We took holographic pictures of ourselves beaming aboard the ship. One of my friends chewed out a Ferengi; I think she was beginning to get a migraine. I got to hug a Klingon, who acted gruffly and apparently spoke only Klingonese.

The inexplicable interplay between the simulacra and the hyperreal began to give me a sense of vertigo. We decided to leave to go back to the lights of Las Vegas because we needed a dose of reality. I am glad we did not go on the ride, that frenetic movement may have just been a bit too much for me to take. But the Trekker-in-Tempe, Surfer-Dude, went on the ride, and he recalled it in explicit detail:

None other than Captain Jean Luc Picard tells you "in order for the promise of the future to be fulfilled...you must keep the secret that you have learned. The secret is Star Trek and the tomorrow that it promises is real." That was the coolest! He actually said what I have felt in my heart for so long.

### GNOSTIC PROMISES

The secret, the promise, the lesson, and the covenant that *it is real* stresses (as I have said in previous chapters) the Gnostic underpinnings of Trek. Jean Luc Picard's words also articulate another dimension in this hyper-real universe. Surfer-Dude's acceptance of Picard's words rather than his discussion of actor Patrick Stewart's lines shows how complete the hyper-real hermeneutic has enclosed us in a virtual noose, a totalizing, foreclosing embrace. Remember Murphy Brown debating Vice President Quayle? What does it mean to precipitate a national debate with a fictional character? This is no different. Peter Pan asked the audience (in the televised play starring Mary Martin) if we believed in fairies, in order to bring Tinkerbell (back) to life. Nobody ever bothered to ask anyone if we believed in Murphy, or if we felt like

entering the final frontier. And it doesn't even seem weird; we don't notice the changes.

Surfer-Dude (who teaches high school) continued to tell me about his experiences at the Experience, ending his narrative with a typically Trekkoid future vision. He vicariously vested his dreams and desires onto the bodies of his students, reminding me of an insurance or commodity broker. He teaches so "they will take the message to a different level." *They*—the commodities in question are not zero-coupon bonds accumulating hyperreal cultural capital in a simulated environment. They are human beings. Human beings who live, breathe, eat, sleep, make love, and have problems in this world. "But all of that doesn't matter," he protested.

What does matter is that it is up to me as a teacher is that you use Star Trek as the center and reach out in concentric circles. Not everyone can afford to go to Las Vegas but you can bring Star Trek to them.

Despite the scope and sequence (which I thought died with Madeline Hunter; it seems a lot of dead people just refuse to let go; it is not only Getty and Disney and Roddenberry), the concentric circles of Trek curriculum and the attendant mountain-Mohammed motif became excruciatingly annoying. I protested to Surfer-Dude. I told him how much I felt like breaking a Starship or boxing Spock's ears or trashing a tribble. Then I realized how I, too, was lapsing into simulated spaces. This is not using popular media to inform the curriculum. This is the curriculum. I am tired of hearing about award-winning Trek lesson plans (like the \$500,000 worth of computer equipment Victor Williamson received to make his Voyager classroom with), innovative Trek schools, or even innovative Trek discipline plans, such as the one in Karen "Kitty" Klaus's eighth-grade science classroom at Chamette Middle School. Klaus beams her disruptive students into what she calls the Trekkie Station, a discipline system she feels is working beautifully because:

Once settled into the brightly decorated Star Trek gallery, in a back corner of the room, the punished student explores science with a Captain Jean Luc Picard gadget or a science model. While it sounds like fun, it means extra work for the student, separation from classmates and a bad mark on the student's discipline record. (Lane, 1997)

There is something else going on, but the layers and layers of hyper-reality are obscuring my vision, one of those Zeusy-like yellow clouds again. “Don’t you feel that there is something odd about using Star Trek as the central theme or the only thing in the classroom? I mean as the basis of curricular experience?”

Surfer-Dude responded, inverting my own words against me. “Well, what is basic to curriculum?” Seeing words that I use in the context of my own classroom transposed in that manner made me feel (at a certain level) connected to and responsible for this Frankenstein monster. I was becoming angrier by the moment. I tried to listen, and I was glad the tape recorder was still running because many of his words were lost in memory. Words that were filtered through me-my-self and my-ire:

Don’t you want to live in a world where there is no greed or hate or fear or anger? Don’t you want to see the human race endure? Well. You always talk about culture in your class. Culture is more than a language, it is music, food, humor, and art. It means in a multicultural world that it is not the black race, or the white race, or the Asian race or the Hispanic race, it means one race—the human race. That is all the counts.

“Isn’t that a bit blind?”

Didn’t you read Borges? Sometimes the blind can see more than we do. I don’t care what color you are. It doesn’t matter to me. We are one race. Some folks in our time are just very lacking in vision to the point that they are myopic or even blind. Not like Borges who is a great Hispanic author. So, you *must* have read him. But many people are blind to the fact that race just doesn’t make any sense. We need to get past it, get over it. Then we can get productive and go to the stars. It is a social construction that has no place in the Star Trek universe.

There was nothing more I could have asked. One of my professors used Borges’s *Kingdom of the Blind* in classes. I recommended it to Surfer-Dude. I even gave him my copy. It was horrific seeing not only my own words translated for Trekkdom but also words of people I respected a great deal, twisted and repositioned to substantiate a hyperreal hegemonic disciplinary discursive practice. The sixty-minute tape seemed to go on endlessly.

There was this cute little Mexican boy in my class who told me the sweetest thing. He wants to command a Starship when he grows up. See, *Star Trek*'s appeal is truly universal!

There was also nothing more I could have said, short of screaming. Yet, the tape wound on and on and on. I wanted Scotty to beam me out of there. I did the only thing that I could possibly do. I went home and smashed a snowglobe of the *Enterprise* I had, which sat on the mantle of my fireplace. I left the shattered shards there on the floor for a while looking at the pieces with tremendous satisfaction. But *Star Trek* did not go away. It came on at 10 P.M.

### MARVIN'S ROOM

It was almost six years ago when I first walked into Marvin Maitland's classroom. I peeked through the door immediately following the 2:45 end-of-the-school-day bell. He is a high school humanities teacher who greeted me with a hearty handshake while commenting about his room. "I guess I have too many *Star Trek* things on the wall. I wanted to design it in the shape of a Starship, which is the optimum shape for classroom design." I nodded noncommittedly. It was getting close to the Christmas holiday, which in North Carolina (where I lived at the time) signified a change of seasons. Instead of sugarplums dancing in my head, definitions and deliberations on and of habitus did.

I couldn't shake it. If habitus describes the conscious and active role a subject takes "vis-à-vis her own dispositions" (Casey, 1993:169), how does it change when the dispositions relate to objects in a world of objects? If habitus is a product of history, what happens to the "active presences of past experiences"? Especially when the past is placed in the future? When we "intemalize the externality" (Bourdieu, 1995:34), what happens when the external melts into the air? Because it is not there; it exists only in simulation. I better get used to it (as Surfer-Dude said). *Star Trek* is real! Can I draw a line in the hyperreal sand?

Marvin was not the only teacher I encountered who consciously designed his room to resemble a Starship. Cyd, a teacher who lived in Georgia, also went into an extended narration surrounding her classroom setup:

The room is set up to resemble the *Enterprise*, perhaps unintentionally, it just sort of worked out that way. But, the *Enterprise* reminds me of a big giant womb, that holds the

children safely inside, and I want my kids to feel that sense of safety that comes from feeling safe inside the womb. I want my classroom to be a place where they can think and think safely. I encourage the kids to be curious...see these are my tribbles. They're actually guinea pigs, but they do look like tribbles.

In Marvin's Trek room (or womb), however, I turned to the blackboard and was astonished to find Trek quotations placed prominently in the center of the board. Each quotation was accompanied with episode name and number (parroting biblical chapter and verse). Marvin self-assuredly stated:

One of the things I do in class is I put a quotation on the board every week from Star Trek episodes. I think there is a lot of philosophy... on the green board: "In every revolution there is one man with a vision." That was in "Mirror Mirror."

"Mirror Mirror"? I must have been listening to too many top 40 stations during all of these jaunts seeking out new life and new civilization. As soon as Marvin said it, "Mirror Mirror" became an infernal song, an infernal musical anthem, a reworded version of "Louie Louie."

"Mirror Mirror, You remember it?" "Of course, I do," I countered. But still I wondered. How do Trekkers remember the names of all of these episodes? Is there a secret system of mnemonics that they learn in Star Fleet?

Marvin's in-depth recounting some of the very creative curriculum projects he used (with *Star Trek* as a base) was simply extraordinary:

Sometimes I'll rig it so that I know that a certain topic is going to come up in class. We were talking about Classical Greece, the idea of beauty, what is beauty, and I rigged it so that the question would come up "What's beauty?" And I brought up the episode when the sparkling lights in the box are opened up and Spock conveniently has the other eyelid that pops down. So, I rigged it to mention that the question was addressed in *Star Trek* episode number 32.1 had it all planned ahead of time. I did it on purpose. We were then able to engage in an important discussion concerning Emerson and Roddenberry.

Emerson and Roddenberry?

Oh yes, absolutely. There are other Emersonian transparent eyeball allusions everywhere in *Star Trek*. What about Spock's eyelid? What about Data's? "Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes I become the transparent eyeball, I am nothing. I see all, the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me, I am part or parcel of God.

Doesn't "Emerson tell his readers to eschew fashion, custom, authority, pleasure and money in order to live with the privilege of the immeasurable mind" (Selley 1990:32)? "Naturally," Marvin replied. I don't know if he meant it as a pun. I asked Marvin, "Do you only teach humanities? Is there another subject you teach as well?" "History" he replied. "Do you use *Star Trek* to teach history too?" He answered:

Of course, with *Star Trek* you get to see the bigger picture, you know the connections throughout time. One of my favorite things to do with kids is to say to them, you might not remember many things from this course. But you might remember this one thing. It's an unusual event, how the traditional champagne glass got its shape. Well, I say, "When you are sixty years old and you are having Thanksgiving with your grandchildren you will remember this!" The traditional champagne glass is not the fluted glass, it's the wide one, and its got its shape because it was Marie Antoinette's favorite drink and she wanted a very special glass for her favorite drink and she had a mold of her breast and the glasses came from that!

And I also give them characters in class. They have historical characters, and Trek characters. It is like a soap opera combined with Dungeons and Dragons. I have one character who is in France forever, and he perpetually fails at something. He wants to become king of France finally does and causes the revolution of 1830 and gets kicked out. He wants to become king of France again in the 1870s and gets a stupid idea in his head about what kind of flag he wants to have and loses out because of that. Later on I have him put the French plan together for WWI and that's a major disaster. It's fun to mix up the historical periods and use Captain Kirk and Napoleon in the same room having a discussion. Sometimes, a kid dresses like me, and sometimes I even dress like the kids. I am also very aware of what goes on in the Star Trek time line because I attended the Star Fleet Academy of History.

“Marvin, aren’t you privileging a particular history? Aren’t you privileging European history and Western civilization above more inclusive history?” He responded:

No. Because we are *one* world, one planet. Just one among many. The history of Europe is what is influential. I might teach other history, but I often think that those things should be left for anthropology. As far as I am concerned, I teach my students red, black, or white what they need to get into the best colleges and universities. I think you may be misinterpreting Roddenberry. The fact that Voyager and Trek point out that their crew members are multicultural is contrary to what Gene Roddenberry wanted. Gene wanted a society that didn’t think about race as a factor. That is what we think of and dream of. I don’t care if somebody has purple skin with green spots, I do not think about race as a factor in anything that I do or anything that I teach. I want my students to succeed. Nothing more or nothing less. I want them to excel. As Martin Luther King, who was a Trekker, said, I have a dream. If he was a Trekker, how can Star Trek privilege European history? He was a black leader.

Universalism is never universal. At best, it is a transparent fiction that re-produces and recolonizes. Race conflates into ethnicity and reessentializes itself into phenotypical overdetermination. In this social blindness, the categorical is reinscribed. *Star Trek*, “is a pattern card of egalitarian homogeneity” (Hurd, 1997:25), a homogeneity that puts an American accent on universalism.

Prejudice is gone and brotherhood reigns supreme, at least theoretically. It is just those pesky “alien” cultures that repeat outmoded cultural conflicts.... Displacing this debate onto a future and presumably utopian society, still tends to reify a particularly loaded image from nineteenth century psychology and anthropology in the United States. (Hurd, 1997:24)

There is a paradox involved in universalist attempts to call to move beyond race, to move to a vision of *one* humanity, because to do so we need to focus back upon ourselves. The vision may (at best) be a transcendent one in which the vision of a smiling, unified humanity happily holding hands, buzzing rapidly through space (with daddy at the



helm), provides a vision of social harmony that reinscribes nineteenth-century visions of progress and perfection, but it is also recursive.

The Federation's mission is not one of colonialist expansion; rather, the crew's literal journey to the outer reaches of space is also a figurative one toward both social and individual perfection. The concept of human perfectibility is rooted in an essentialist definition of human nature.... TNG always emphasizes humanity in general, but as in nineteenth century humanism, the term human is in many ways conflated with a concept of Western Man. (Boyd, 1996:100–101)

### CLASSICAL GASEOUS CLOUDS

Looking back on Marvin's narrative, I begin to resolve many of my own dilemmas with *Star Trek*. *Star Trek* is obsessed with both the nineteenth century and with classical Greece. During the past eight years in which I have been negotiating the ever-shifting world of the final frontier (in this world), I have listened to Trekkerteachers continuously quote Emerson, Thoreau, Twain, and Melville. The references are actually referential, perhaps self-referential but completely Trekerential. In other words, the teachers are quoting the television program, not the original source of the literature itself.

The simulacrum has tremendous purchase value in this construction; it remains tied to the founding discourse of Western philosophical tradition by virtue of its dichotomy. "Between the discovery of the value of the simulacrum and the ruse by which this value is hidden" (Melehy, 1994), a hierarchical order is maintained, an elite order is maintained. "After all," Marvin says, "Trekkers are much smarter than your average television viewers, so it makes sense that they would put scientific and literary masters on the show." When the Trekkers cite Mark Twain (who made an appearance on the episode "Time's Arrow"), intellectual thought is reduced to commodity form. Additionally, Twain's "guest role"

Underscores the extent to which t.v. programs themselves may unintentionally reproduce ideological assumptions. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a show about the future's altruistic exploration of life on other planets, tacitly helps to perpetuate the conventional U.S. wisdom that acts of imperialism by our government against third world nations are benevolent rather than self-serving, benign

rather than aggressive. Clemens's appearance on the episode in question as an inquisitive and bothersome fixture of the western American frontier situates him firmly in a past where the imperial self was a fixture both dominant and heroic. This portrayal does more than belie the strong anti-imperialist tenor of Clemens's later work. In being asked to consume the writer as a frontier artifact we are not only encouraged to believe that Star Fleet Command—and, by extension, the television viewer—has progressed beyond the sort of “frontier mentality” Americans have come to associate with acts of wrongful acquisition; we are simultaneously discouraged from practicing the kind of intellectual self-scrutiny that might produce alternative modes of discourse and lead toward social change. (Fulton, 1994)

Katrina Boyd writes:

TNG makes many references to nineteenth century figures (Mark Twain, William James, Charles Dickens) and characters (Sherlock Holmes, Cyrano de Bergerac, Scrooge). These overt references are reinforced by the show's championing of a humanist perspective originating in the late nineteenth century, even when dealing with the twentieth century. For example...Lt. Commander Data plays cards with holograms of Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein and contemporary physicist Stephen Hawking, the scene is in keeping with a nineteenth century view that a series of Great Minds create continual progress in the sciences and that Great Men generate history. (1996:97)

When Marvin speaks of a program he is starting in his school labeled *Star Trek: The Best Voyages* or when he informs me that “*Star Trek* is permeated with American history; a perfect example of it is the battle in which Data makes a reference to Yankee traders,” and when a myriad of Trekker teachers (including Marvin) make constant reference to the episode entitled “Time's Arrow,” I needed to ask myself why. And the only answer that seems to fit is that the atavistic notions of progress that emanate directly from the nineteenth century parallel the atavistic notions of progress presented on *Star Trek*.

But there is something else embedded in the constant “literary references” to what is typically called “high culture.” The illusions to the allusions give the show a greater sense of artistic legitimacy because of the high capital it supposedly accesses and privileges. So, while

Trekkers tell me, “My school has been studying Mark Twain...and because of his appearance on *Star Trek* the students began an in-depth investigation of Twain.” Or because Captain Picard quotes *Moby Dick*, “the students fell in love with Melville.” Or “because of *Star Trek* the students discovered an author they hadn’t studied yet: Jack London. He was a bellboy in the hotel where Samuel Clemens stayed. So, they had to go find out what he did. Well, there was the *Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and” (on and on). Or “the students developed a love of Shakespeare because of *Trek*.” And the students “all learned mythology through *Star Trek*” I realize the teachers are privileging high culture, an esoteric form of high culture.

Marvin explained, “According to the Star Fleet time line, television disappears in the next century. As we move to the next world. In the world of *Trek*, we listen to great music, great books, and read great literature, all the crap is gone.” Which is true (according to the time line and the program). After all, perennialism does know, it searches for the truth, it seeks a balanced and harmonious life, and it acknowledges time-honored traditions. Traditions like *Star Trek*. In the Trekkoid future, people listen to Beethoven, quote Shakespeare, and play only classical music. Rock ‘n’ roll or rap just didn’t seem to make the cut (but Frankie Avalon did, because he plays a Las Vegas lounge singer on *Deep Space Nine*’s holosuite). Although Isadora isn’t frolicking among any “Ode to Grecian Urns,” there are lots of planets in the universe where people dance around in togas and sandals (and not for an *Animal House* party). When our heroes play, they hang out with Leonardo da Vinci (as Captain Janeway does), or go into the holodeck to cavort with Sherlock Holmes. Nevertheless, the truth is nobody is taking any of Arthur Conan Doyle’s opium from holographic bongos. *Star Trek* is a puritanical, temperate utopia. As Mark2 wrote in his “mega-rant” on *Star Trek*, “Life in 2370 is perfect. We know, because they never stop saying so” (<http://www.xibalba.demon.co.uk/>).

### CALLING ALL GREEKS (AND I DON’T MEAN FRATERNITIES)

Back in 1991, the Greek national tourist board ran a series of advertisements beckoning to tourists with “alluring images of Aegean seascapes, classical monuments and mythological icons anchored by the caption ‘Greece, Where it all Began’ and ‘Greece, Chosen by Gods’ (Shohat & Stam, 1995:55). According to Surfer-Dude, in *Trek* world:

The civilization of ancient Greece has many admirers.... There were a race of powerful aliens who told us that they were gods, but they were aliens. We came upon them almost accidentally when the original Enterprise from classic Trek got wrapped up in their powers. There was also a different race who called themselves the Platonians, settled in ancient Greece, and adopted the ideas of Plato before moving to their new world.

Enrique knew “the story of Apollo from canon, not the canon of Western civilization but the canons of *Star Trek*:

Apollo is now over four billion years old. He was born on the planet Pollux IV. He was the last survivor of a race of aliens who came to Earth many centuries ago and created Greek mythology. He was worshiped by Earth’s population. But then...well...you know the rest.

It was fascinating to hear Enrique use the words “Earth’s population,” a prestigious, apparently prodigious myth projecting shared origins. The melting pot apparently really must have heated up after World War III (from which *we* recovered relatively unscathed).

In the classic episode “Who Mourns for Adonais,” Captain Kirk tells Apollo, “We have outgrown you...you have asked for what we can no longer give.” Drawing on explicit Greek classical themes that are available to those viewers schooled in Western civilization, “*Star Trek* makes a direct appeal to those of us who are well versed in the various mythologies of the past” (Blair, 1979a:308). There is tremendous conceit involved in a pan-European imaginary that invokes the “all.” (Even Mark Twain did not notice that Guinan [Whoopi Goldberg], a visitor from another planet and another time, was black. She made her Earthly debut at a pristine tea party, with upper-crust sensibilities in the nineteenth century.)

In another Greek tourist ad titled “The Greek Miracle,” the text read: “We are all Greeks, the poet Shelley said. Born of democracy. Invention, Philosophy, Theatre, History, Sciences.... For out of 5th century Greece modern man was given life” (Shohat & Stam, 1995:56). Marvin explained: “Because our culture, our notions of democracy are founded on the Greeks, *Star Trek* must acknowledge its debt to its origins.” “What about the other planets in the Federation, I asked?” He smiled. “Doesn’t matter that the first human being may have been African or a woman?” He remained silent. “Didn’t the Vulcans

precipitate first contact?” He remained as stoic as Spock. I had a feeling he was going to go home and consult his Nitpicker’s Guide, or post the question on the net. I got pretty much the same type of response from Enrique, who ultimately turned on the charm and said, “It’s all Greek to me!” *Star Trek* maintains a particular canon “giving a neutral, timeless, unproblematic representation of what it means to be human (Boyd, 1996:97). The perennialist tone reinforces European power in all of its resplendent whole-holistic-self-hood. In *Star Fleet Academy*, even education reverts to the *Paper Chase* perennialist language of curriculum supporting the “study of humanities in ways even contemporary universities no longer do, requiring a study of Latin and Ancient philosophies” (Boyd, 1996:97). Bakhtin would contend that this functions to legitimate dominant forces in society, ultimately wedding the society to a doom-laden eschatology, an apocalyptic vision (Bakhtin 1981:421; Gardiner, 1992:43). “I kind of feel sorry for Apollo,” Enrique said.

Maybe he was wrong about him being the last of his fellows... they live on in us, in our traditions in our civilization. They provided the building blocks. Without him we would still be jumping in the jungle, trying to build a fire with two sticks. And the thing is he was not, as we learned much later, the most powerful force in the universe.

### A BLAST FROM MY PAST

I wasn’t building anything; rather, I was taking things apart. I wasn’t deconstructing, I was moving to Arizona. The phone rang in my apartment. I bounded up the stairs to answer it. It was Marvin. I didn’t remember him initially. It had been a couple of years since I had interviewed him. I apologized to him.

MARVIN: Well, you’ve gone on to bigger and better things. Do you like living in California?

KAREN: No, I hate it. Actually, I am moving to Arizona soon.

MARVIN: I guess that’s some form of professional progress.... I was thinking of having the honors humanities class come to California to go to some of the museums and see other things like Disney, and Universal, and the whole Hollywood scene.

KAREN: Are you teaching Hollywood humanities?

MARVIN: Well, my real reason for going is that I want to see the Getty. I heard it was fabulous.

KAREN: I wouldn't go there.

MARVIN: That's what I was afraid of, it's not safe.

KAREN: No, that is not why I wouldn't go there...it's more personal. It is also political. Well, yes, it is like the maxim, the personal is political, except that I don't mean to just flip off an expression. Still using *Star Trek* in your classes?

MARVIN: Of course, what else would I use? I thought we would start our trip with the episode "Who Mourns for Adonais?" Then we could go to the New Mount Olympus.

KAREN: You mean Olympic Boulevard.

MARVIN: You're kidding. They named a street that? I was being sarcastic. I was referring to the Getty.

KAREN: The street was there before. It was named for the Olympic Games, not for Zeus, not for Trek, not for Roddenberry, not for Getty.

Marvin navigated our conversation, plotting an esoteric curricular course. He spoke to me about his passion for DBAE (discipline-based arts education). It seems perennialism is alive and well and living in the Carolinas. Apollo would be proud. Much later in our conversation, he told me his school had removed Latin from the curriculum. He was appalled. I looked at the clock and, although a chariot did not await me, more cartons did. I hastily tried to tie up our conversation. I wanted to sound nice, I didn't want to seem rude, especially since I forgot who he was. So, I blurted out, "Come on west, young man! Come west and manifest your destiny and ascend to the Acropolis in the stars."

### GO WEST, YOUNG TREKKER

I am not sarcastic, not for a moment. The universe of the Starship Enterprise is silly but also exalted. Ronald Reagan thought that if the Soviet rulers could only see America up close, they would come around to its superior virtue. That is naive, yes; but also rather grand, and utterly American. The barrel-chested culture of Victorian Britain, brilliant though it was, could never have produced a *Star Trek*; neither could the scintillating, cynical culture of ancient Greece, or the bluntly brutal culture of imperial Rome, or any other

imperial culture before America's. I predict *Star Trek* will be watched 50 and 100 years from now. More than books I can think of, it embodies the American aspiration, or, if you prefer, the American myth. It captures us, perhaps, embarrassingly well. (Trekker teacher)

Sometimes I'm just rather caustic. Greek culture may have been cynical, Roman culture may have been brutal, but *Star Trek* (for Trekkers at least) is a utopian performance, perfect in almost every way. Trek enters into the American media-tinged vernacular resonating with *something* that resides in a particular class fraction (in this world, in this frontier). *Star Trek* would not have lasted this long if it did not feel *right*.

But that is the wonder and horror of the Trek narrative. Like any other narrative, the *present* constructs the story. *Star Trek* remains in constant process, it is always becoming. *Star Trek* mutates and transforms as political, economic, social, and material conditions transform. The narrative adapts to suit current exigencies, crises that transpire not in the Delta Quadrant, but right here on Earth. However, the narrative is presented as constant, as a moral vision transcending time and place.

I still think that my caustic, impatient comment to Marvin was an appropriate metaphor. I was schooled in the idiomatic, listening to variations on the same theme, educational shorthand for intricate enigmatic notions "such as the City on the Hill...the Virign Land... The American Dream... Manifest Destiny and the Marlboro Man" (Rodgers, 1996). Each of these concepts is extraordinarily complex and contradictory. *Star Trek* is another version of this shorthand. Equally complex, equally contradictory: Whose American dream? Whose destiny? Enigmas, conundrums, big white blind spots wrapped up in even larger myths. Myths that hang like a veritable noose around many people's necks. Keeping others warm and fuzzily secure while they weave their own (self) righteous paths. Where does the righteous (Trekker) path lead? Westward, of course. After all, the capital of the entire Federation is in San Fransisco. Space becomes a metaphor for the pioneering spirit. The Federation is a glorious vision of the American dream that never was. That dream is a fantasy. *Star Trek* is another version of the fantasy.

## MYTHIC GEOGRAPHIES

The geographic myth of America is “written from east to west” (Rodriguez, 1996:37). Mexico does not have an east-west myth. Neither does Canada. But the United States does. The Western myth remained a repository of hope. It never really was a destination. It was more of a mystique, an image. A bill of goods sold as the place where the American fantasy could be fulfilled. But like any utopia, it is both everywhere and nowhere. “The west may be a vast and ongoing theatrical production, a case of Disney’s frontierland vastly enlarged” a place of rhinestone cow-boys, totem poles, kachinka T-shirts, lime green and magenta teepees standing in front of trailer parks, and “Indians in Santa Claus hat[s] with arrow[s] planted in the middle of [their] chests” (Shore, 1995). It may be a Friday night rodeo in Davie, Florida, watching German and English tourists wrestle six-inch-long alligators and lasso plastic steerheads with their imitation Stetsons on their heads. It may be Tweetsie Railroad in Boone, North Carolina, where *The Little Engine That Could* always has a *Great Train Robbery*. The United States begins to carve out its never-ending manifest destiny with dreams of the West. Change comes, and the West fills in. “Every four minutes, one acre of working land in Colorado is developed. Feed stores metamorphose into espresso bars, hay meadows become golf courses and four-lane highways whisk you across the Great Basin or Mojave Deserts, but not into them” (Shore, 1995:6a). The Western space cannot be defined. Its borders, its boundaries are slippery. It is an ideological-imaginary space, a space that is constantly consuming and growing; it spreads everywhere and nowhere. Rodriguez (1996) asks, “Where does the West begin”? Maybe we ought to ask, Where does it end? Or When will it end?

“In Warner Brothers’ cartoons, the sun went down with a ker-plop and a hiss into an ocean that had to be the Pacific” (Rodriguez, 1996). The dream of the West does not end, even when the sun finally begins to set (on the British Empire, or on any colonial empire, or even when the Empire tries to strike back).

*Star Trek* picks up where we thought the narrative ended. How the West was won is how space becomes the final frontier. John Muir, writing about California in 1869, understood “America comes to an end here” (Rodriguez, 1996). How could an expansionist ethos end? Growth and progress and limitlessness are central to the American imperialist myth. *Star Trek* picks up the story when the sun starts to fade, in the twilight (between hyperreality and utopia). There really was no place



else to go, except up to the stars. Going West, then, means going up. *Star Trek* is the Western frontier transposed in limitless space. It really is the pinnacle of the kingdom on a hill.

### STAGECOACHES AND STARSHIPS

“Some people say it didn’t happen that way” (Kasadan has just shown us in flashback that it did). “Never mind them,” Josie Earp tells him. “It happened that way,” and the viewer is urged to share her affectionate take on history, a clumsy paraphrase of John Ford’s “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” (Dowell, 1995)

The Western is, in fact, the modern American epic, and as such performs an equivalent cultural role to that of the Iliad in Classical Greece: It defines the qualities necessary for those heroes who will build civilization out of wilderness.

I sing of arms and men, not of presidents, kings, generals, or passing explorers, but of those who survived their personal, lonely Alamos, men who drove the cattle, plowed the furrows, built their shelters against the wind, the men who built a nation. I do not need to go to Thermopylae or the Plains of Marathon for heroism. I find it here on the frontier....

These are the American stories, the stories I wish to tell, and if I have not told them well, I shall have tried. Louis L’ Amour (in Blundell & Ormand, 1997:533)

I now live in the West, but I don’t understand its draw. I grew up watching Westerns, which dominated the airwaves (or at least it seems) in the late 1950s and early 1960s. *Bonanza*, *Rawhide*, *Rin-Tin-Tin*, *Maverick*, *F-Troop*, and *Gunsmoke* would blare from my parents’ huge sixteen-inch television screen. My cousin Billy and I would mount our *Romper Room* stallions and chase each other around the block, landing up in a fistfight in my backyard’s OK corral. I never saw myself in Westerns. I didn’t really like the game. But Billy did. He always made me play “the Indian.” Sometimes he said it was because I had long hair; on other occasions, he said it was because he was older and bigger. But I was rougher, tougher, and faster. I wanted to prove myself. But, I never could. The game was always constructed on his terms. When I

would ask my father why I always had to be the Indian, he would say it was because I was “so wild.” In reflection, I realize it was because I was a girl. That in itself invariably framed me as Other in the Western tale. Macho, hypertestosterone-laden masculinity is so central to the Western that any attempts to wrest the genre from white men prove futile. The myth is so pervasive that even if I did play it out my way, I would forever be constructing my West in relation to the “normal” or “real” West.

*Star Trek* is nothing more than a Western told in galactic terms. It is nothing more than a drag performance of a Western, although it is the Western’s modern-day analogue (Roth, 1997:9). The similarity between genres cannot be underestimated. “The Western is perhaps the only... mythic narrative of the White American” (Tyrrell, 1979:711), speaking to the complete array of historic shorthand representing contemporary American ideological indoctrineering. The Western is invoked frequently to define civic America (or to create a national identity). *Star Trek* reifies the Western genre, projecting it into a futuristic setting. Gene Roddenberry called *Star Trek* “the wagon train to the stars,” (Blair, 1979a:308). Greta (a teacher in suburban Long Island, New York) said “I call it Bonanza in space!”

### I WANT A HERO TO SHINE HIS LIGHT ON ME

*Kirk was my hero. It was like playing cowboys and Indians only with phasers and photon torpedoes! What a blast! For me growing up in the world of space travel, it just seemed more realistic than anything else.*

—TYRA

The cowboy tale emerged at precisely the same time as industrialization. I wonder how the myth of the loner riding his horse through vast empty spaces unencumbered by the hustle and bustle of the city was an image that shielded us (like so many deflector shields) from the reprehensible and destabilizing events occurring in an increasingly urbanized United States. Industrialization transformed humans into machines, cogs in a mechanized wheel. The mode of production became increasingly obscured. Labor was cruelly exploited for the ever-increasing coffers of the few. But like the myth of Horatio Alger, the West constructed a

dream world of democratic possibility. Like most dream worlds, it was a mirage.

*Star Trek* came into the turbulent world of the sixties, presenting a dream of a happy, peaceful Earthly family, giving us a positive vision of the future, a future that has already happened. We need not pay attention to the problems that confront us now. It will all be okay. We just need to wait it out.

Enrique believes “Kirk is a frontier hero. He has to shoot Indians, because he is a trigger-happy cowboy. But the world has changed by the time Picard became captain, with all the treaties we made with practically everyone. Picard cruises in a more civilized era.” In the Admiral Kirk’s Preface, Kirk (writing about himself and his fellow Star Fleet officers) says:

We are a highly conservative and strongly individualistic group. The old customs die hard with us. We submit ourselves to Starship discipline because we know it is made necessary by the realities of deep space exploration. We are proud that each of us has accepted the discipline voluntarily—and doubly proud when neither temptation nor jeopardy is able to shake the obedience to the oath we have taken. (Selley, 1986:80)

For Enrique (who is representative of so many Trekkers), “Kirk was, is, and always will be my hero, I can’t help but look at him and dream of the stars and dream of space and dream of vanquishing evil and making the universe a safe place for all.” It seems that old cowboys, cavalry, and Starship captains find sanctuary only in the wilderness, in the West. Enrique explained, “That is why Kirk went climbing on the rocks. The constraints of civilization make him uncomfortable. It is the pioneering American spirit in him.” Several minutes later, he said, “There is a mythology surrounding Kirk, you know, that he was invincible. Even in *Star Trek II* he talks about how he has cheated death, how he has skirted it, and gotten away with it. It took a lot to kill him, he had to die twice in *Generations*. But I think he is in the nexus, riding his horse, screwing that chick, and cooking steak on his ranch.”

## HEGEMONIC HEROICS

*We have every right to dream heroic dreams.*

—RONALD REAGAN

Rudyard (a French teacher, showing me his collection of Star Trek memorabilia) knows for certain that “Kirk, Spock, Picard, even Sisko and Janeway are heroes. You cannot have a universe without heroes. The finest role models I know of are the moral leaders of the various Starships. I know if I have a question, I reflect on what they would do.”

The heroes of Star Trek (both Spock and Kirk) are seen by the Trekkers as embodying the rarest of all things among men... unbroken integrity...each remains dedicated to the striving, extravagantly willing to pay the price. But when one measures this moral quality against standards forbidding deceit, adultery, and violence, the lack of restraint is striking. What we have here is moral zeal attached solely to the mission and to their own vision of what amounts to the “American Way.” It is a zeal transcending both due process and the moral code of the Federation’s non-interference directive, which Kirk has sworn on pain of death to uphold. This directive is consistently broken in *Star Trek* episodes when “necessary” for the fulfillment of the mission. (Jewett, 1977:6)

It seems fairly obvious that the heroes of Trek reinscribe rather than repudiate a heroic mythopoesis justifying the mission of a civilizing colonizing force, part of the mythopoesis of Western superiority. *Star Trek* as cultural arbiter defines the qualities necessary to build civilization—which has always been defined as elite, white, and male. Columbus understood the past as a “premonitory sentence that argued his providential calling” (Kadir, 1992:4), therefore transforming himself “from a mere sailor into a prophet and Pilgrim” as he voyaged to the west. The Puritans compared themselves to the ancient Israelites, considering themselves to be a chosen people, active agents of divine providence. The Trekkers consider their heroes active agents creating a moral and just universe.

### THE USS MAYFLOWER

The United States is so extraordinarily beautiful. The geographic space certainly must have appeared alien to the Pilgrims, progressing over the Atlantic. The magnitude and magnificence of the continent interanimated with the narrow binaries of puritanical paradigmatics. Puritans seemed to be obsessed with dualities: good and evil, damnation and redemption, a cosmic Ping-Pong game moving back and forth from

totality to totality. The Pilgrim's paradigms are the crucifix to which (white) American consciousness ultimately became nailed. It was either/or, never ever and/both (see Bakhtin, 1984). It was a universe where separation (from the mother country or mother Earth) invariably became the prequel (or precursor) for transformation, transformation that would precipitate an entirely different trajectory than the static life with mother (England or Earth).

The Puritanical narrative is not random. It doesn't move haphazardly (there is no chaos in this theory). Rather, the story moves in progressive linear gesticulations (there were no *leaps of faith*; this was a slow, sequential pattern) going on an existential two-lane highway (with *No Exit*), otherwise known as the path to heaven (or the road to hell). The road to paradise is paved with Puritanical intentions (a concept that becomes exceedingly *self-evident* in Turner's frontier thesis or in Roddenberry's philosophical treatises). It is embedded in all forms of Americana. Westward ho! feeds (back and forth) because the (Puritanical highway) system is "arranged to keep people consuming so new aesthetic and cultural territories must continue to be discovered and colonized" (Root, 1996:201). The struggle over resources, over consumption, diverts attention away from those who own the means of production. To discover is to divert, and to continue to consume and commodify everything in the path of Western righteousness and civilization.

Robert Zubrin sits on the board of directors of the National Space Society (Roddenberry was also a board member of this group). Contemporizing the puritanical narrative, he invokes nothing less than Turner's frontier thesis to justify a Mars mission.

In one bold sweep of brilliant insight Turner laid bare the source of the American soul. It was not legal theories, precedents, traditions, national or racial stock that was the source of the egalitarian democracy, individualism and spirit of innovation that characterized America. It was the existence of the frontier. "To the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics," Turner roared. "That coarseness of strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes from freedom—these are

the traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.” Turner rolled on, entrancing his audience, “For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestrained is triumphant. There is no *tabula rasa*. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of the environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier.” Without a frontier from which to breathe life, the spirit that gave rise to the progressive humanistic culture that America has offered to the world for the past several centuries is fading. The issue is not just one of national loss—human progress needs a vanguard, and no replacement is in sight. The creation of a new frontier thus presents itself as America’s and humanity’s greatest social need. Nothing is more important: Apply what palliatives you will, without a frontier to grow in, not only American society, but the entire global civilization based upon Western enlightenment values of humanism, reason, science and progress will ultimately die. I believe that humanity’s new frontier can only be on Mars. *Why Mars?* (Zubrin, 1999)

The answer to Zubrin’s rhetorical question resides in marketing and desire (something *Star Trek* does particularly well); after all, “fruits of conquest must be displayed in a way that is attractive to buyers” (Root, 1996:201). It is marketing; the West was sold (not won) as much as space (*Star Trek*) is sold. Marketing serves both economic and existential (spiritual) needs, and *Star Trek*’s appropriation of the frontier satisfies never-ending consumption patterns. Can the Trekkers’ utopian dreams be nothing more than a version of postmodern Puritanism?

### FINALIZING FRONTIERS: WEST OF EDEN

The dominant symbol of the Western myth remains the inhospitable frontier. And for that reason, above all it must be tamed. Faced with the barren wasteland of the West, “the myth of the garden so essential to Jacksonian democracy prevailed.” The plow was invoked, that “most sacred of agrarian symbols, the instrument whose magical stroke calls down the life-giving waters of the land” (Blair, 1979:315). The land

was domesticated, brought into the fold and brought into God. After all, God is on our side. Power can never be benign. To go and seek out new life and new civilization means to control life. Zubin as a modern-day Turner (or the embodied prequel to Captain James Tiberius Kirk) pleads passionately for the establishment of a Mars colony. Zubin contextualizes the conquest of space as the only means for human salvation. But what do discovery and conquest really mean?

More than one Trekker said to me, “Discovery is in our genes, we are explorers. To just stay put means certain death. We have to seek out new life, there is no choice.” In a two-part episode of *Deep Space Nine*, “The Macquis,” Captain Benjamin Sisko says, “Sainthood on Earth is easy because they have achieved a utopian society.” Why is Sisko out “on a frontier outpost”? Especially since the Earth is perfect. In Trek, paradise is always stagnation. The Garden associated with wholeness and fulfillment also means death. Paradise remains a constant theme in Trek plots (we’ve seen paradise as a drugged stupor, as poison, and as purgatory). In the most recent movie, *Star Trek: Insurrection*, paradise is depicted as “a commune of hacky-sack-playing Caucasian Luddites growing organic veggies in what is obviously a rural valley... in Northern California” (O’Hehir, 1999).

Paradise, as Blair noted (1979:314), comes from the Persian word *paridaeze*, meaning a wall or an enclosure. A pastoral pruned rose garden, which is nothing more than a pristine prison. None other than Captain James T. Kirk himself (in all his hyperreal glory) said, “Maybe we weren’t meant for paradise. Maybe we were meant to fight our way through. Struggle. Claw our way up. Scratch for every inch of the way. Maybe we can’t stroll to the music of the lute. We must march to the sound of drums” (Tyrell, 1977:117). Zubin’s space-race imperative marches to the drum of Western civilization in search of paradise.

To see best why 21st century humanity will desperately need an open frontier on Mars, we need to look at modern Western humanist culture and see what makes it so much more desirable a mode of society than anything that has ever existed before. Then we need to see how everything we hold dear will be wiped out if the frontier remains closed. The essence of humanist society is that it values human beings—human life and human rights are held precious beyond price. Such notions have been for several thousand years the core philosophical values of Western civilization, dating back to the Greeks and the Judeo-Christian ideas of the divine nature of the human spirit. Yet these values

could never be implemented as a practical basis for the organization of society until the great explorers of the age of discovery threw open a New World in which the dormant seed of medieval Christendom could grow and blossom forth into something the likes of which the world had never seen before.

Enrique feels, “We need to plant the seeds to tame the wild frontier and then move on, for man by nature is curious. We always try to see what is over the next ridge or the next star.”

### HEY, HOMER

*However, in the real world, as such that we all (well, most of us) live in, these things are a defining factor in many everyday situations and occurrences. Star Trek has been, and always has been, and hopefully, always will be, political in nature, plot, and substance. Culture matters. Assumptions matter. And Western Christianity uniquely provided the worldview which science at its inception required. This is the larger story. A story that begins with Aristotle.*

—TREKKER TEACHER

When Columbus set sail, who knew what lurked beyond the safe shores of Europe? Could Briareos, Typhon, perhaps Leviathan be lurking in deep in the Atlantic waves? When the Puritans made their passage across the Atlantic, they left everything behind. Did they have any idea what awaited them here, on this continent? “Although, Kirk and Spock bend over computer consoles rather than over campfires, they too have forsaken the comfortable world of the safe and the civilized for the final frontier” (Selley, 1986:90). The monsters Kirk and crew encountered were equally as terrifying as any Cyclops on any Odyssey. They remained undeterred in their mission (at least until the original series was canceled). “It was the only position they could take,” Enrique asserted.

*Star Trek*, the American space program, pioneers, and cowboys all have iconic roots. The Western metanarrative begins with the Greeks (Root, 1996; Shohat & Stamm, 1997). Anything that came before was relegated to prehistory. Since fifth century B.C., Athens was considered (within the Western canon) to be unlike anything the world had ever



seen before. Athens became the central pillar of Western identity, the iconic column that planted itself firmly in the consciousness of rational-progressive discourse. The populist (white) re-vision of the American frontier was (and is) a flower in the iconic column of Western narrativity.

Tom Wolfe's...book (*The Right Stuff*, 1979) and the movie it inspired... *Apollo 13* and the TV series *Space*, buy into the frontier myth of the challenging vista that must be tamed and the lone helmsman who can conquer it. It's a patricidal vision of course.... *The Right Stuff* is a love letter and *Apollo 13* is a love letter from the front line. (Hand, 1999:46)

*Star Trek* is a love letter, too, a narcissistic love letter to (white) America. Grant (a teacher education candidate in Ohio) explained, "*Star Trek* is the best of America. It shows who we are at our finest." Marvin explained:

I don't see, I haven't seen for the past ten years, a willingness on the part of the American people to go forward. There is almost this desire to go backward. This enamoration of things from the fifties, all pre-Sputnik. There is this desire on the part of great areas of the population to somehow turn the clock back to a time before all this happened and even with *Star Trek* there. I see that happening. It's incredibly sad. It doesn't bode well for our society. You can't go back, but you can't lie down.... That is why I feel so compelled, almost obsessive at times about *Star Trek*. It shows possibility. It presents what we can do if we can get past the differences that divide us. I think *Star Trek* brings out the best in people. How can it not?

Nog, who named himself after the Ferengi Star Fleet ensign serving on *Deep Space Nine*, concluded:

The Federation is not a Paradise, but a work-in-progress. Not Eden. Just a bit closer to our ideals. It is a place where cooperation is fully acknowledged as the genuine driving force behind the advancement of culture. We have even seen the greedy and selfish Ferengi culture (especially in Quark) develop a sense of morality beyond the end game of total selfishness. The realization that striving for wealth and power are not the highest

goals—nor the most satisfying (unless one is without a soul at all). Peace in an unsettled universe is possible only when it is defended.

We have seen again and again how important these ideals are to the members of Star Fleet and the Federation. Like Liberty itself, sometimes they must be fought for. The individuals of the Federation and Star Fleet have never been presented as anything close to being perfect. Just good and decent. As the *best* of humans, but human (and humanoids), not saints on starships. Just as the movie *The Best of Times* was not about a perfect time or people but what was best *in* people and the society.

#### FOUR PLOTS, NOT FOUR HORSEMEN

Many years ago, a friend who works in the film industry in Hollywood told me that there are only four plots in the world. Perhaps he was right. *Star Trek* is a tale of epic proportion. A tale of descent into the underworld where the hero rises like a phoenix transformed and reborn. Scientific rationalism just exchanged a toga for some spurs, progressing ultimately to one of those funky unitards that Star Fleet officers wear (I guess it really must be an optimistic philosophy. I know I wouldn't want to see most people I know wearing skin-tight Lycra). *Star Trek's* majestic mythic roots of a glorious past (set in the future) is much more indicative of fascism than of democratic justice. *Trek* merely puts a different twist on Superman (or Schwarzenegger).

Superhuman abilities reflect a hope of divine, redemptive powers that science has never eradicated from the popular mind. The presentation of such figures in popular culture has the power to evoke fan loyalties that should be compared with the more traditional forms of religious zeal; among those who resist overt fandom, the superheroes seem to offer a mythic message that soothes and satisfies. It imparts the relaxing feeling that society can actually be redeemed by anti-democratic means. (Jewett, 1977:xx, emphasis added)

David Gerrold, one of the writers of the original series, "Classic Trek," explains, that "the background is subordinate to the fable" (Jewett, 1977: 11). Although science has replaced God as deity, the mythical tradition remains untarnished and omnipresent on the series, in the movies, in the books, in the comics, in the fanfiction, and on the Web. Epic formulas

are central to the pervasive power of *Star Trek*. “*Star Trek* ransacks the entire tradition of Western storytelling” (Crawford, R., 1997). We know the story; we have been there before. Bakhtin understood that epic tales are not merely text “designed for leisure or entertainment” (Gardiner, 1992:43); rather, they have an enormous capacity to shape contours of mass consciousness and can play a decisive role in the organization of ideological hegemony. What *Star Trek* also accomplishes is a “distortion in the time space continuum” (sorry, I couldn’t resist the wordplay) by placing mythic heroic visions in the future as completed and already achieved. Bakhtin also understood the epic as a genre tied to apocalyptic eschatology, functioning to legitimate antidemocratic dominant forces.

Rudyard looked serious, almost like Clint Eastwood, when he looked at me with his steely gray eyes and stated, “The Enterprise knows how to bring law and justice to the universe. It is a civilizing force.”

### **JOSEPH CAMPBELL, WHERE ARE YOU NOW?**

Myths deflect ideology, serving an important ideological and “organizational function” (Himmelstein, 1984:4), dissolving any oppositional tendencies that may emerge. Myth obscures the social relations of production (which becomes odder still because commodification is ubiquitous in television). The (ped)ideological practices of Trekkers highlight the manner in which constructed meanings and hegemonic practices are produced in television texts. The particular praxis of Trekker teachers perpetuates particular ideologies deeply embedded in the larger social order, finding expression in mythic representations.

At best, *Star Trek* is a bourgeois myth. The elimination of the economic in the myth depicts a Utopian status quo. The elimination of inequities and struggles of race, class, gender, and ethnicity presume a successfully melted pot where everyone works together for “the supreme male leader,” what Byers (1987:331) calls resurrecting our WASP fathers.

In this fantasy, the emergent faith in American technological genius, wedded to the older faith in America’s manifest destiny, engenders ascetic visions that would enable America to defeat all evil empires, wage war to end all wars, and make the world eternally safe for democracy (Franklin, 1994:151–152).

Yet the eternal vision is clearly one of temporal confusion, for nothing remains static, not even Trek. Nevertheless, by attempting to use the myth of Western progress and manifest destiny, “mythic repetition becomes a substitute for historical development” (Andrae, 1987:137). Everything becomes connected to the four plots of the apocalypse, as an ever-identical moment in time is repeated over and over and over in different settings. The future that never was inhibits both needs and desires, and, by grounding the future in the past, the Trekkers consign possibility and agency to what unerringly is.

# Afterword

PETER McLAREN

Attempting to navigate the ideological pulsations of *Star Trek* is a daunting task, especially for those who, like Karen Anijar, were initiated into the apocalyptic knowledge and oracular proclamations of Gene Roddenberry in the 1960s. Fed by Roddenberry's imperialist nostalgia, *Star Trek* became white background noise for an entire generation who had been ordered by the United States government to "go kill gooks" in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Fearing the diversity within its own population, faced with reconciling the demand of particular groups for the recognition of the equal worth of their cultures, and forced by the civil rights movement to make democracy accountable to all of its citizens, the culture industry was called upon to intervene and revitalize—in sublimated fashion—the glory days of the empire by teleporting the wild west (Anijar comments on the geographic myth of "America" as "written from east to west")—with its sheriffs, posses, wranglers, Rangers, rustlers, and "savages"—into the future, into galaxies unknown. Anijar describes it as an exchange of "togas for spurs," a "Western told in galactic terms." Self-immurement and impudicity not being "American" traits the United States boldly set its sights on the conquest of outer space, knowing full well that what it claimed as "outer" was destined to become "inner" (Anijar cites approvingly Bourdieu's idea of "internalizing the externality") such that the conquest of "outer" worlds became internalized to justify the subjugation of "other" worlds, other people, and this meant that the world of the individual—human subjectivity—became colonized accordingly. *Star Trek* is not a simple transmission of ruling ideologies. While they didn't use the term *hegemony*, the *Star Trek* creators knew what the term meant and how it operated.

The "other" conjured by the Trek creators—and admittedly achieved with the boundless imaginary dimensions, technopoiesis, and genius that an exorbitation of discourse is hard pressed to capture—is historically

specific to the relentless scourging of late capitalism and its imperial market forces. Anijar is adept at uncovering the ideological legerdemain that links the “other” to the demonic forces within us and then displaces them onto populations and ideas “alien” to our cultivated Western sensibilities. Anijar recognizes how the fear of the unknown horrors that we harbor in our own unconscious can be displaced onto African Americans and Latino populations or communist or socialist states—the wild, untamed Klingons of the universe, and the enemies of possessive individualism known as the Borg. And while the Trek creators surely made attempts at showing the world how consensus and harmony can be achieved—such harmony was usually brought about by bringing (or hijacking) the “other” on board the holodeck of white male bourgeois values and social practices handed down by our “WASP” fathers.”

At its most basic level, *Star Trek* represents the imperial culture of history’s Great Men trying to write itself out of its unknowing perplexity, its false certitude, its own Eurocentric skin. Yet in attempting to do so it wraps itself deeper and deeper inside of it. Beckoned by the emaciated and aestheticized phantoms that populate space, Anijar ascends—like Enoch—to the heaven of heavens on her “existential two-lane highway.” She confronts spinning wheels and beholds God in his throne-chariot and shares the secrets of the universe. Within the celestial halls of the Great Ship (decorated with “pruned rose gardens,” attended by blonde men in togas, and resembling Athens), she receives her commissioning by the Kirk-God who orders her in a voice filled with dread to return to the terrestrial world in order to contemplate the glory of the universe and the manifest destiny of the Federation (not to mention its Supreme Commander sporting a Federation-issue lycra unitard and a green toupee).

Yet Anijar is not content to remain in technological heaven, to map the solar system from the vantage point of the most technologically developed and powerful, or to transform knowledge into something that is only relevant if it is measurable, calculable. She knows what the universe of the Kirk-God is made to mean and she has her own story to tell.

The story she tells makes her book of inestimable value in our understanding of the workings of popular culture and the construction of subjectivity. She recognizes that in its quest for progress, the Kirk-God must obliterate the distinction between nature and technology. In order to fabricate out of the formless potentiality of the universe a new society based on a technological fatality and brought about by planned obsolescence (under the cover of “egalitarian homogeneity”), the Kirk-

God must likewise effect the delirious transformation of science into religion where the future has always already arrived ahead of schedule and has time to rehearse its own inevitability and predict its own impossibility. Anijar is only too aware of the power of what she calls the “gnostic” underpinnings of Trek and its ability to establish a covenant between capital and the future and in her words, to put “an American accent on universalism.”

In her desire to escape the constraints of the self-centered confusion and turmoil brought about by commodity culture, Anijar is unwilling to synchronize humanity’s most intimate vital rhythms to the pulsations of the phaser, to take refuge in a Trekkoid spirit of false humanism or the “doom-laden eschatology” of Surfer-Dude, to abandon herself to the turbulent patterns of habitual dependence on technology, or to be snatched away without a fight by the seductive twilight of the unknown. Regardless of her craving for a fixed identity in a world swimming in uncertainty, in contingency, in commensurability, Anijar refuses to abandon the cries of the Other, or to avoid her responsibility to her community. Unlike the Trekkers she writes about, she refuses to extinguish herself in the Kirk-God, or to merge with his simulated vision. Pedagogically, Anijar recognizes the “hyperreal hegemonic disciplinary discursive practices” of Trek for what they are—mechanisms to reposition subjectivity so that it is functionally advantageous for the consumption of hyperreality and for marketing our desire. Ultimately, the production of hyperreality not only diverts our attention from who owns the means of production, it *becomes* our attention, expanding to occupy all the precincts of our mindfulness. Anijar writes that “to discover is to divert and to continue to consume and commodify everything in the path of Western righteousness and civilization.”

In a world of feigned signifiers, simulacra, and imploding binarisms, a world that the postmodernists tell us is governed by the principles of reversibility, where the code that enables reproduction generates the hyper-real and occludes the difference between the real and the imaginary so that the universe becomes infinitely undecidable, \* Anijar does not lose her grounding in the political project of resisting the concreteness of pain and oppression or lose sight of the complex totality of capitalist social relations.

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\* E.San Juan (1998). *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

Anijar's book stands as a landmark investigation of a popular cultural phenomenon that lies at the very center of the structural unconscious of the United States. Her striking and eerie accounts of the world of Trekkdom are of profound significance for educators and cultural workers. Her analysis provides us with powerful insights into the challenges that we face as critical educators and points the way to creating oppositional pedagogies able to contest the type of imperial logic that recently had so many U.S. citizens gleefully cheering the Trek-like precision of NATO's bombs, yet blithely resigned to the "collateral damage" (read "human lives") that goes with the territory of being the world's only "civilizing force."



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# Index

## A

- Abbe, M., 191  
Adams, Barbara, 91–92  
*Admiral Kirk's Preface*, 220  
Aldrin, Buzz, 108  
Alexander, D., 69, 76, 77–79  
alien abductions, 164–165  
*Alien Nation*, 164  
aliens (extraterrestrials)  
    allegory of, 174  
    fear of, as metaphor, 187  
    as illegal, 160–161  
    looking for, 183–184  
    sightings of, 181  
    as types of humans, metaphor of,  
    131  
aliens (non-U.S. citizens), illegal,  
    162–163  
Andrae, T., 229  
Andreadis, A., 202  
anthropomorphism, 165–166, 169  
apocalypse, 81  
Apodaca, P., 68, 75  
Arnold, R., 172  
*Arrival, The*, 181, 182  
art galleries, 14  
artificial languages, 140.  
    *See also* Klingon language  
Aryan Web site, 157  
Asherman, A., 8  
assimilation, 180  
Atkinson, D., 200

## B

- Bakhtin, M., 215, 222  
Bammer, A., 140  
Barrett, Majel. *See* Roddenberry,  
    Majel Barrett  
Barthes, 178  
Bass, J., 186  
Baudrillard, J., 124, 192–193  
Beers, D., 109–110  
Begley, S., 31  
Bentley, R., 27  
Berman, Rick, 76  
Bernardi, D., 148, 150, 152, 187  
Bernstein, A., 89  
Best, S., 63  
bilingualism, 144, 145.  
    *See also* language  
Blair, K., 214, 224  
Bloch, Ernest, 104  
Blundell, M., 219  
“Body, The ,” 80  
Borg, 172–174  
Bormanis, Andre, 83  
Boutin, P., 83, 85, 97, 112, 113  
Bowman, R., 70  
Boyd, K., 210–211, 212, 214, 215  
Braun, Wernher von, 110  
Brimelow, P., 164  
Brooks, M., 102  
Brown, J., 68  
Brown, S., 111  
Brugge, D., 160, 182

Bukatman, S., 125–126  
*Butterfly Plague*, 174  
 Byers, T., 229

## C

Calavita, K., 160  
 Canadian Klingons, 24.  
   *See also* Klingons  
 canon of *Star Trek*, 25, 214  
*Canticle for Leibowitz*, A, 55  
 capitalism, 195  
 Caprio, B., 450  
 Carollo, K., 180  
 Casey, K., 207  
 Castillo, D., 179  
 chaos theory, 61  
 character names, 136  
 Chen, L., 161  
 chess, 86.  
   *See also* games  
*Childhood's End*, 178  
 children as fans, 17–18.  
   *See also* Trekkers  
 Chion-Kennedy, L., 11  
 Cho, J., 15–16  
 Christensen, M., 121–122, 124  
 Christianity, 49–52  
 church activities, 19–21  
 “City on the Edge of Forever,” 9  
 Clarke, Arthur C., 178  
 classroom decorations, 207–208  
 Clemens, Samuel. *See* Twain, Mark  
 clichés, 2  
 clubs, 22–25.  
   *See also* fandom  
 Cole, J., 60  
 commercialism, 108, 109–112, 121–122.  
   *See also* marketing  
 commodification, 136.  
   *See also* Klingons  
 communion metaphor, 77–79  
 community of Trek, 4.  
   *See also* fandom

community service, 26.  
   *See also* fandom  
 Concerned Christians Web site, 69  
 consciousness, 176  
 conspiracy theories, 174–175  
 consumerism, 195.  
   *See also* mar- keting  
 conventions, *Star Trek*, 6–7, 7–8, 17–18  
 Conway, D., 114, 116–117  
 Corson, T., 82, 89  
 Covert, C., 19–21  
 Crawford, 228  
*Crying Seals, The*, 167  
 culture, Klingon, 153.  
   *See also* Klingons  
 Cummins, C., 10  
 cyborgia, 89

## D

Dallmayr, F., 125  
 Data, 169  
 Davies, J., 115  
 Davis, E., 35, 131, 133, 137, 149  
 Dean, J., 164, 165, 166, 179, 181, 186  
 DeBarros, C., 178  
*Deep Space Nine*, 46–47, 224–225  
 de Lancie, John, 60.  
   *See also* Q  
 devolution, 179–180  
*diakona*, 69  
 Dillon, P., 190  
 dirt metaphor, 185–186  
 Disney, Project on, 197, 198  
 Disney, Walt, 198  
 Doctor, the, 169  
 Doohan, James, 108  
 Dooley, T., 68  
 Dorn, Michael, 130, 147, 149, 150  
 Dowell, P., 218–220  
 Downs, H., 100  
 Duke, Charlie, 108  
 Dukes, David, 164, 182

## E

- Eagleton, T., 142  
 Ebonics, 139, 146  
 education, 15–16  
 Edwards, S., 133  
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 208–209  
 “Emissary, The,” 148  
 Engel, J., 76  
 English First Foundation, 144–145  
 English language, 169–171.  
   *See also* Klingon language;  
   language  
*Enterprise*, 107, 111–112  
 episodes  
   “City on the Edge of Forever,” 9  
   “Heart of Glory,” 150  
   “Let This Be Your Last Battle-  
   field,” 57  
   “Mirror/Mirror,” 167  
   “Spock’s Brain,” 102  
   “The Body,” 80  
   “The Emissary,” 148  
   “The Icarus Factor,” 148  
   “Time’s Arrow,” 211, 212  
   “Unnatural Selection,” 22–25  
   “Who Mourns for Adonais,” 214,  
   215  
 Esperanto, 141–142  
 ethics of twenty-first century, 49–52  
 ethos of *Star Trek*, 16  
 extraterrestrials, 159–166, 181.  
   *See also* aliens (extraterrestrials)

## F

- family values, 16–21  
 fandom.  
   *See also* Klingdom;  
 Trekkers  
   church activities, 19–21  
   clubs, 22–25  
   discipleship of, 8–9  
   love themes in, 9  
   as religion, 68

- Starships (fan-run), 12–16, 21–22,  
 133  
   views of Star Fleet, 84–86  
   Web sites, 213  
 fans. *See* Klingdom;  
 Trekkers  
   fear of aliens as metaphor, 187  
 Federation, 152, 227  
 Federation Science exhibit, 193, 194–  
 195  
 Federation standard language, 170–  
 172.  
   *See also* language  
 Ferriss, S., 67  
 films. *See* movies  
 Fjellman, S., 193, 194  
 Foote, S., 116–117  
 Foster, N., 146  
 Foucault, M., 64, 143  
 Frakes, Jonathan, 36, 123  
 Franklin, H., 229  
 Freire, J., 146  
 French, J., 72–75  
 Fulton, V., 195  
 future of *Star Trek*, 216–217  
 future vision, 26, 57  
 Futurist, 98, 101

## G

- games  
   military, 123–124  
   role-playing, 94–98  
   games (*cont.*)  
     *Trek*, 98–100  
     Vulcan chess, 85  
     war games, 85–86  
 Gardiner, M., 215, 228  
 Garrett, N., 134  
 geekdom, 56–57  
 geek factor, 24  
 Gerrold, David, 228  
 Getty, J. Paul, 201  
 Getty Center museum, 190–191, 195,  
 196–197, 200–201

- Gingrich, Newt, 121–122, 145  
 globalization, 64  
 gnosticism, 1–2, 4, 35–36, 174, 204–207  
 Goldberg, Whoopi, 63.  
   *See also* Guinan  
 Goldblum, Jeff, 187  
 Goldin, Daniel, 106–108  
 Gore, Al, 116  
 Gorman, J., 139  
 Gorman, T., 175  
 Gray, L., 99, 105  
 Greece, ancient, 213–214  
 Grenwald, J., 202  
 Guinan, 172, 214.  
   *See also* Goldberg, Whoopi  
 Guitierrez, R., 184, 186
- H
- Haffner, E., 152  
 Hale-Bopper cult, 1–2, 36  
 Haraway, D., 54–55  
 Harrison, T., 172, 174  
 Harvey, R., 22, 23  
 Hastie, A., 172  
 Hawking, Stephen, 30, 115–116  
 Haysom, I., 8, 24, 75  
 “Heart of Glory,” 150  
 Heaven’s Gate cult, 1–2, 36  
 heroism, 220–222  
 Heston, Charlton, 163–164  
 Hexham, I., 35  
 Highfield, R., 83  
 Himmelstein, H., 229  
 Hogan-Albach, S., 66  
 homogeneity, 210  
 Hoover, S., 68  
 Horgan, J., 30  
 Hoversten, P., 102–103  
 Hughes, A., 99  
 humanism, 76–77  
 humanity, 210  
 human soul, 38  
 humor, 157–158, 159
- Hurd, D., 210
- I
- “Icarus Factor, The,” 148  
 iconic roots of *Star Trek*, 226  
 iconography, 2  
 idealism, 26–29, 79–80  
 ideology, 117, 134, 165–166  
 IDIC, 23, 66, 109  
 illegal aliens, 160–161, 162  
 insect metaphors, 176  
*Invasion of the Bee Girls*, 175  
 ion propulsion, 102  
 Isaacs, J., 121
- J
- Jacobs, Bob, 100  
 Jameson, F., 136  
 jargon, 38  
 Jarvis, D., 124  
 Jastrow, R., 100  
 Jewett, R., 7, 10, 11, 54, 59–60, 221, 228  
 Jindra, M., 10–11, 202  
 Johnson, S., 23  
 Jordan, J., 160  
*Jurassic Park*, 187
- K
- Kadir, D., 222  
 KAG (Klingon Assault Group), 24, 130  
 Kalansky, Z., 99  
 Kane, P., 30  
*Keep the River on Your Right*, 178–179  
 Keith, M., 179  
 Keizer, G., 98–100  
 Kellner, D., 69  
 Kennedy, F., 37  
 “Ketracil,” 188  
*Kingdom of the Blind*, 206  
 Kirk, James T., 220–221.  
   *See also* Shatner, William

- Klingdom, 131–137, 149–150, 151.  
*See also* fandom;  
 Trekkers
- Klingon Assault Group (KAG), 24, 130
- Klingon Bible Translation Project, 139
- Klingon language  
 and Esperanto, 141–142  
 and Hebrew, 140  
 Klingon Language Institute, 130, 137–139  
 learning, 134  
 origins of, 127–128  
 translation projects, 130–130, 139
- Klingons  
 “blackness” of, 152  
 Canadian, 24  
 culture of, 136, 147, 148  
 race issues and, 136–137  
 as representatives of Soviet Union, 147
- Klingon Web site, 148
- Koidin, M., 183
- Kozinets, R., 3, 16–21, 76
- Kuznik, F., 174
- L
- Lane, C., 205
- Lange, E., 106, 114, 115
- language.  
*See also* Klingon language  
 alien, 179  
 artificial, 140  
 controversies over  
 multilingualism, 146  
 Federation standard, 170–172  
 lack of, 178  
 meaning of, 139–140  
 language discrimination, 144, 146
- Latinolink Web site, 156
- Laurel, A., 65
- Lavie, S., 140
- Laviola, K., 73
- Lawrence, L., 128, 143
- Leach, J., 157  
 “Let This Be Your Last Battlefield,” 57
- Lev, P., 165
- Leveen, L., 157–158
- Levidow, L., 89
- Libicki, M., 89
- Lieb, M., 196
- life forms, 169
- lifestyles, 57–58, 72.  
*See also* fandom
- Lileks, J., 80
- Lind, M., 155, 162
- Literature of Exhaustion, The*, 178
- M
- Macedo, D., 146
- Macquis, the, 224
- Marine Corps, 89–91
- marketing, 24–25, 68, 224.  
*See also* commercialism;  
 conventions, *Star Trek*;  
 merchandise
- Mars, 225
- Martineau, P., 26
- Marx, K., 169
- Marx, L., 54, 125
- Maurant, M., 11
- McCutcheon, C., 121–122, 124
- McLaren, P., 151, 191
- McLeans, 133, 143
- Men in Black*, 156–158, 181
- merchandise, 108.  
*See also* commercialism;  
 marketing
- meritocracy, 105, 196
- metaphors  
 aliens as types of humans, 131  
 communion, 77–79  
 fear of aliens as, 187  
 insects, 176  
 Klingons as representatives of Soviet Union, 147



- mountain, 192  
   viruses as foreign entities, 185–186  
 MIB (*Men in Black*), 156, 181  
 military, relationship of *Star Trek* to the, 116–119  
 military-industrial complex, 117–124  
 military training, 82  
 Miller, W., 55  
 Mills, C., 190  
 Milrod, J., 7, 17  
 “Mirror/Mirror,” 167  
 Moniz, D., 82–83, 101  
 Morales, R., 172  
 morality, 166–167  
 Morgan, 87, 89  
 Morin, R., 70  
 Morrow, T., 24–25, 25  
 mountain metaphor, 192  
 movie reviews Web site, 175  
 movies  
   *The Arrival*, 181, 182  
   *Invasion of the Bee Girls*, 175  
   *Jurassic Park*, 187  
   *Men in Black*, 156, 181  
   *The Right Stuff*, 226  
   *Star Trek: First Contact*, 182  
   *Star Trek: Insurrection*, 122  
   *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, 111–112  
   *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, 127, 221  
   *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, 58  
   *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, 58, 130, 147–148, 152, 153  
   *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, 175  
 MTV generation, 99  
 MUFON (Mutual UFO Network), 29–30  
 Mulder, Fox, 177–178, 179  
 multilingual education, 145  
 Murdock, G., 136  
 museum exhibitions, 190–193  
 mythical tradition, 228  
 mythology of creation, 35  
 myths, 217–218, 222, 229  
  
 N  
 narrative of *Star Trek*, 216–217  
 NASA, 53–54, 106–109, 114–116  
 Nelson, S., 7, 17, 47  
 Nichols, Nichelle, 106.  
   *See also* Uhura  
 nihilism, 81  
 Nolen, S., 66  
 non-interference directive, 221  
 Nord, W., 79  
  
 O  
 Ockham’s Razor, 39–40  
 O’Conner, M., 11  
 Odo, 163  
 O’Hehir, D., 225  
 Okker, P., 151  
 Okrand, Mark, 127–128, 142  
 Ormand, K., 219  
 Ouroussoff, N., 191  
 Overing, J., 140  
  
 P  
 Paradise, 225  
 paramilitary, 124–126  
 Parker, R., 26  
 Parks, L., 108–109  
 past-as-future model, 194  
 Patureau, A., 188  
 Pease, R., 102  
 phage, the, 186  
 philosophy of *Star Trek*, 73–75  
 Philosophy Sphere, 77, 202  
 Picard, Jean Luc, 204  
 Pierce, G., 131  
 Pile, S., 179  
 Piscopo, N., 21  
 Pitsch, 95, 145  
 place names, 136

- Planetary Society, 122  
 Poewe, K., 35  
 Powell, 98, 154  
 Prime Directive, 221  
 prognostication, 193–194, 198  
 progress, notions of in *Star Trek*, 212  
 Project on Disney, 196, 197  
 prophecy, 55–60  
 public image, *Star Trek* marketing  
   and, 24–25  
 public image of fans, 24–25  
 public service, 22–25  
 Puritanical narrative, 222  
 Putkamer, Jefco Von, 108–109
- Q
- Q, 44, 60.  
   *See also* de Lancie, John  
 Quinn, P., 174
- R
- race issues  
   animals as a race, 166  
   ideology, 165–166  
   Klingons and, 136–137, 149,  
   language discrimination, 151–155  
   145–146  
   racism, 158–159, 182  
   species as race, 155  
   *Star Trek* morality, 166–167  
 racial encodings/signifiers, 154–155  
 Radford, T., 102  
 Rand, Janice, 9–10  
 Rangers, 96–97  
 reality, 83, 100, 101–104  
 Reed, T., xiii  
 religious themes  
   Christianity, 49–52  
   existence of God, 63  
   having faith, 31–32  
   human soul, 40–45  
   morality, 65–66  
   papacy, 67–68  
   science as religion, 60–62  
   sermons with *Star Trek* themes,  
   72–75  
   *Star Trek* as a religion, 58–59  
   theological messages, 60, 70–71  
 research, 101, 103  
 Rifkin, J., 144  
*Right Stuff; The*, 226  
 Robertson, P., 134  
 Robins, K., 89  
 Roddenberry, Gene  
   advice to NASA by, 53–54  
   life of, 76–82, 103, 201–202  
   message of, 198–200  
   NASA tribute to, 107  
   as prophet, 50–52, 56, 58  
   quotes by, 37, 60, 76  
   Roddenberry, Gene (*cont.*)  
   relationship of with military, 116–  
   117  
   vision of humanity, 71–72  
   vision of the future, 26  
 Roddenberry, Gene Jr., 77, 202  
 Roddenberry, Majel Barrett, 106–107  
 Rodgers, P., 114, 217  
 Rodriguez, J., 144, 217  
 Rodriguez, R., 191, 218  
 Roediger, D., 151  
 Rogerson, B., 69  
 role-playing games, 94–98  
 Root, D., 130, 134, 222, 224, 226  
 Rosenberg, M., 17  
 Roth, M., 219  
 Russ, Tim, 12
- S
- saluting, 94  
 Sandage, Allen, 31  
 Sanderson, H., 174  
 Schaffler, A., 17  
 Schell, H., 174, 186  
 Schneebaum, T., 178  
 science as religion, 60–62  
 science of *Trek*, 31, 38–39  
 Scott, D., 66, 68

- Selley, A., 209, 220–221, 226  
 SERENDIP, 123  
 SETI program, 122–123, 181  
 Shatner, William, 6–7, 17.  
   *See also* Kirk, James T.  
 Sheen, Charlie, 181  
 Shepard, Alan, 108  
 Sherwin, B., 192  
 Shohat, E., 214  
 Shore, 95, 218  
 Simmons, S., 14  
 Sisko, Benjamin, 224  
 Sloteck, 96, 108  
 Smith, 178  
 “smoking mirror,” 134–136  
 souvenirs, 193  
 species, races as, 155  
 Speers, D’Armond, 143  
 spiritualism, 45–49  
 “Spock’s Brain,” 102  
 Stamm, R., 214, 226  
 Star Fleet, 84–86  
 STARFLEET Marine Corps, 89–91  
 Star Fleet uniforms, 91–92  
 Starships (fan-run), 12–16, 21–22, 133.  
   *See also* fandom;  
   Klingdom  
*Star Trek*  
   as an epic, 227  
   global presence of, 170–171  
   universal appeal of, 206  
   as a western, 218–220, 219  
*Star Trek: First Contact*, 182  
*Star Trek: Insurrection*, 122, 224–225  
*Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, 111–112, 128  
*Star Trek* clubs, 22–25  
*Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, 127, 221  
*Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, 58, 72  
*Star Trek* schools, 15–16  
*Star Trek* The Experience, 75, 202–204  
*Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, 58, 130, 147–148, 152, 153  
 Steelman, B., 5, 23, 73  
 Stewart, Patrick, 204  
 Stone, R., 52, 126  
 Streisand, B., 190, 193, 201  
 Stuckey, J., 146  
 Sulu, 148.  
   *See also* Takei, George  
 Sweeney, T., 37  
 symbolism, 4–5
- T
- Tachibana, J., 11–12  
 Takei, George, 59.  
   *See also* Sulu  
 Taylor, J., 187  
 technology, 37–39, 52, 117  
 Temin, C., 191, 200  
 Ten Commandments of Trekkdom, 55–57  
 theology of *Star Trek*, 70–71.  
   *See also* religious themes  
 “Time’s Arrow,” 211, 212  
 Toll, R., 153, 154  
 Toolan, J., 40  
 tradition of *Star Trek*, 213  
*Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, 175  
 Trekkers.  
   *See also* fandom;  
   Klingdom  
   children as, 17–18  
   dream of *Star Trek* to, 114–116  
   funerals, 18  
   IQs of, 194  
   Klingon lifestyle, 133  
   learning Klingonese, 142–145  
   numbers of, 9–10  
   public image of, 24–25  
   public service of, 22–25  
   purchase of merchandise by, 108

- recruitment of new, 12–16
- views of themselves, xiii–2, 25, 56–57
- weddings, 18, 19–21
- Treklore, 76–82
- Treknology, 37–39, 52–55, 83
- Troi, Deanna, 11
- Tucker, E., 192
- Turan, K., 156, 157
- Turkle, S., 52
- Twain, Mark, 211–212
- Tyrell, W., 36, 219, 225
  
- U
- UFO Gazette*, 34
- UFOs, 32–35, 181
- Uhura, 106.
  - See also* Nichols, Nichelle
- uniforms, 91–92
- universalism, 210–211
- “Unnatural Selection,” 22–25
- UNZ initiative, 170–171
- USS Cochrane Chapter Web site, 22
  
- V
- Verniere, J., 58–59
- virtual reality, 82
- virtual-reality simulators, 100
- viruses as foreign entities metaphor, 185–186
- virus metaphor, 185–186
- Vollentine, B., 17–18
- Vulcan chess, 86
  
- W
- Walker, J., 165, 166
- Wallace, M., 195
- war games, 85–86, 87–89
- Web sites
  - Aryan, 157
  - Concerned Christians, 69
  - David Dukes’s, 164
  - fan’s, 213
  - Klingon Assault Group (KAG), 130
  - Klingon Language Institute, 139
  - Klingon organization, 148
  - Kozinets, 76
  - Latinolink, 156
  - movie reviews, 175
  - number of *Star Trek*, 69
  - Philosophy Sphere, 77
  - SETI, 122
  - STARFLEET Marine Corps, 91
  - Ten Commandments of Trekkdom, 56
  - USS Cochrane Chapter, 22
  - Yale, 200
- Weiner, J., 197
- Wengenroth, U., 38–39
- Western genre, 218–220
- Westley, M., 31
- White Noise*, 81
- Whitney, Grace Lee, 9–10
- “Who Mourns for Adonais,” 214, 215
- Whorf, B., 142
- Williams, A., 151
- Wilson, K., 99, 101
- Witham, H., 92, 131, 149, 162
- Wolfe, Tom, 226
- Wood, D., 100
- Worf, 148, 149
- Wright, Q., 99
- Wuthnow, 63
  
- X
- X-Files, The*, 176–178, 179–180
  
- Z
- Zimmerman, M., 193
- Zubrin, Robert, 223–224
- Zulli, L., 5