2. The Alien in Us

Metaphors of Transgression in the Work of Octavia E. Butler

If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself . . . you may hate it, or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality, and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. And thus you have fatally impoverished your own reality. You have, in fact, alienated yourself.

—Ursula Le Guin, "American SF and the Other"

Octavia Butler's fiction acknowledges the complex construction of gender in relation to factors such as race and class, and the desire to find representations that correspond to one's own experiences, not those of a "master identity" that constructs them as other.[1] Butler's writing shares with feminist theories examined here the insistence on multiple subject positions grounded in particular historical moments, the idea of "identity as a site of differences" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 157), not sameness. In accordance with these theories, Butler conceptualizes multiple subjectivity as an element that has grown from fragmentation, displacement, and loss. In its contradictory makeup and often painful experiences, this multiple subjectivity creates spaces of disjunction that carry the potential for resistance.

The focus of this analysis of Butler's representations of difference will be on her dismantling of the Western construction of dualisms of self and other, based on categories of sameness (normative) and difference (deviant), which form a relationship of power that is naturalized and not open to change (see Plumwood 47–48). Butler counters the construction of dualisms by assuming multiple, contradictory notions of self that undermine the binary and by creating an alternative way to view difference—as an essential part of the self, not something to create boundaries against. These approaches result in the strategy of em-

bracing difference: neither upholding nor denying it, but accepting it as a part of identity. Her writings respond to Audre Lorde's call for "new patterns of relating across difference" (Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex" 123): "Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other's difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles" (122).

In Butler's work, difference is used as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance: she destabilizes categories of gender as well as race and exposes the process of differentiation. In doing so, she distances herself from feminist writings (theoretical and fictional) that celebrate the general category of "woman," as well as from those who, in a simplified fashion, romanticize ethnic and cultural heritages. Butler writes against mainstream perception, in which the subjectivity of women of color, instead of being conceptualized within its own framework, is understood as sentimental and personal. She always remains critical of unambiguous and seemingly unproblematic approaches to dealing with difference and power. Instead of creating fictional relations based on one-dimensional theoretical models, Butler's narratives are infused with contradictions and dilemmas that mirror unresolved conflicts within feminist discourse. They explore how generalized theoretical implications clash with the specificity of situations in which characters find themselves, and with desires and drives that interfere with simple solutions.

Butler's narratives interweave two main contradictory themes: colonial experiences and resistance (as discussed in Chapter 1), and affirmative encounters with difference—the focus of this chapter. So while the context often is that of a colonial encounter, Butler is interested in exploring the ways in which difference is conceptualized not as oppositional but as complementary to identity.[2] Difference is solidified through *markers* that identify it as nonnormative. These markers in turn are defined by *boundaries* that enclose the subject. Butler's writing is filled with symbolic boundaries that represent the attempt to define the self, to negotiate identity in relation to difference. These boundaries and their markers constantly shift, making it impossible to establish a subject position based on a stable identity.

Thus, boundary crossing is the main characteristic of Butler's representations of difference, the main "ingredient" of her fluid subjectivity, which emphasizes a denaturalization of categories—it means refusing

the limits set by those in power, as well as those derived from one's own prior experiences. Boundaries that are subject to negotiations in Butler's fiction manifest themselves externally as well as internally, and they are symbolically represented on various levels: from physical differences between species, which in turn are converted into social structures (in *Patternmaster, Wild Seed, Mind of My Mind,* and the *Xenogenesis* series), to mental networks (such as that of the Patternists), sensory fusion (in *Parable of the Sower*), and permeability of temporal dimensions (in *Kindred*). Butler undermines the establishment of these boundaries in two ways: through transgression and transformation of divisions of difference, and through integration and acceptance of the other. The *embracing of difference,* in which these two mechanisms (deconstruction of existing structures and acceptance of that which is not-I) are combined, makes a clear demarcation of "I" and "not-I" (the dualism of "us" versus "them") impossible. It destabilizes the discursive opposition of identity and difference (the basis for dualisms in Western thought) and constitutes the main hopeful element in Butler's writing.

Butler creates various figures that transgress boundaries in her narratives. Aliens occupy a special position: they signify boundary crossing per se—as a metaphor, they *are* difference. They are the focus of the first part of this chapter. The second part examines Butler's deconstruction of categories such as race, gender, and sexuality through her alien figures and through the relationships between humans, and between humans and aliens. Like her aliens, female figures in Butler's narratives engage in boundary crossing, often triggered by "states of emergency" (Zaki 242) that place them outside conventional social formations and force them to cross boundaries to prevent the destruction of themselves and others. Her female characters are the focus of the last part of this chapter. Butler emphasizes contradictions her heroines have to negotiate—there are no simple choices or stable positions in the character's interactions. This rejection of any one-dimensional theoretical approach is one of Butler's most powerful contributions to feminist debates, and her "alien constructions"—aliens, hybrids, and other denaturalized subjectivities—which grow from her theoretically heterogeneous stand, serve as metaphors of transgression.

Representations of Difference: Deconstructing the Alien as the Other

One of the main symbolic representations of difference in science fiction is the "un-human being" (Scholes and Rabkin 179). "Un-human beings in science fiction take either of two forms. Either they are constructs, artificial creations such as androids, robots, or golems, or they are the products of some unearthly evolution—aliens" (Scholes and Rabkin 179). These un-humans take many shapes: cyborgs, constructed from both organic and inorganic materials; artificial intelligence; independently thinking computers, which often appear in the form of androids; and the phenomenon of the doppelgänger, often a nonmaterial apparition that is physically explicable. Traditionally, aliens and other un-human beings have signified the other in a dualistic relation to the human hero. In *Aliens and Others,* Jenny Wolmark observes that the alien is therefore one of the most commonly employed metaphors: "it enables difference to be constructed in terms of binary oppositions which reinforce relations of dominance and subordination" (Wolmark 2). Feminist science fiction, together with other postmodern science fiction, moves beyond the dualistic construction of self/other in the representations of aliens and uses the science fiction metaphor of the alien to "explore the way in which the deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender [and class] are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of dominance and subordination" (Wolmark 27).

Destabilizing Human Identity

Butler's un-human figures supersede conventional definitions: she incorporates elements of fantasy and mythology, thereby transforming otherwise familiar science fiction mechanisms to utilize them for new definitions and approaches. Consequently, it is not only the moral and ethical component of human-machine constructions and relationships that she addresses.[3] Butler's constructions take place on a biological level that mediates human experiences through the body. She confronts the reader not just with creatures, either man-made or alien, but also with hybrids between aliens and humans, with human mutants, and with humans with apparently supernatural abilities such as telepathy and shape-shifting. Her constellations question the (seemingly) most notable element of our identity: our humanness. Instead of accepting humanist assumptions, she asks: What is *human?* How

is this category constituted, and how is it symbolically estranged/complicated?[4]

As earlier studies of feminist science fiction demonstrate,[5] feminist science fiction since the 1970s enhances the understanding of *man-made* through portrayal of *woman-made* technology (and ideology); in these texts, in a much more radical fashion, universal "humanness" itself is disclosed as a patriarchal concept—and as a white-supremacist one. Butler uses science fiction to create new categories based on biological pre-givens and thus destabilizes essentialist notions of "humanness." Butler's strange, intelligent species who are agents of change, such as the Oankali, challenge our ideas of what constitutes a (human) subject. These new forms of "humanness" are presented, not necessarily as "better" (what is *better?*), but as *different,* as revealed in an exchange between an Oankali and Lilith: "'And you think destroying what was left of our cultures will make us better?' 'No. Only different'" (*Dawn* 32). By questioning the category "human," especially through mutation in *Clay's Ark* and through the fusion of alien and human genes in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy and *Survivor,* Butler problematizes any pre-given notion we have about our identity and anything about it that we might take for granted. "The *real,* nothing else than a *code of representation,* does not (cannot) coincide with the lived or the performed" (Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other* 94; emphasis hers). Representations, then, become tools of redefinition.

In her destabilizing of boundaries, Butler crosses the physical boundary between un-human and human creatures, and thus undermines the privileged position of humans. The constructs in the *Xenogenesis* series, who are born from the union of humans and Oankali ("true" aliens), and the Clayarks—human mutants that develop from an alien virus—are examples of this type of boundary crossing. Butler also approaches the definition of humanness through internal and often psychic boundary transgressions. She thus problematizes human characteristics that go beyond visual (i.e. physical) markers. Patternists, with their mental network, and Anyanwu, the shape-shifter in *Wild Seed,* are examples of these inner "un-humanizations." The biological metaphor that describes the "process by which humanity becomes other to itself" (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others* 40) is complicated by Butler's depiction of human violence based on familiar categories of sexual and racial difference, such as rape and racial murder, which she juxtaposes with her alien constructions.[6] Existing categories, insufficient for de-

fining various life-forms, are exposed to be nothing but mechanisms for delimitation. Both inner and outer boundary transgressions become apparent in the elusiveness of Doro's figure in the *Patternist* series: "A mutation. A kind of parasite. A god. A devil. You'd be surprised at some of the things people have decided I was" (*Mind* 88). Butler writes against the liberal "general call for diversity, pluralism" (Crosby 131), which keeps power relations intact, by refusing to accept the boundaries of categorized differences.[7]

Otherworldly Creatures

Many descriptions of aliens in traditional science fiction narratives are limited to representing either warring opponents, who resist colonization of their planet by the heroes or terrorize a sector of the universe; or gentle, often dumb creatures, who, as "sympathetic aliens" (Le Guin, "American SF and the Other" 209), shyly shake the hero's hand in farewell.[8] There is no identity confirmation through acts of demarcation and exclusion, such as colonization or wars against other species, in Butler's work.[9] She does not offer clear distinctions between "us" and "them"; she presents an other that is, or will become, a part of the "we." Often without a choice to act, forced into passivity, her characters are subject to those at whom the (metaphorical) laser gun is usually pointed (see Butler in Kenan 498). By constantly shifting narrative positions, Butler tries to break from a tendency toward separate identifications that is based on viewing difference as an inherent division.

Both extraterrestrials and mutants in Butler's texts take on diverse forms: the humanoid Kohns have fur whose changing colors express emotions, and whose base color determines their status within the society. The Clayarks' form resembles a Sphinx; the massive T'lics in "Bloodchild" are worm- or insect-like. Sensory organs that are reminiscent of tentacles cover the humanoid torsos of the Oankali in the *Xenogenesis* series. Clayarks are mutated humans whose species is especially characterized by their drives and animal-like sensory organs —making them the antipode to the "civilized" human. Patternists are human but have "un-human" abilities that enable them to enslave others and to program them like robots.

The Oankali are classic aliens: they are intelligent, and despite some humanoid elements (they have both arms and legs and walk upright), they possess plenty of attributes from the realm of the abject (tentacles being the most prominent). They are unique mainly because of their

goal to blend genetically with humans, to create a diffusion of boundaries. The Kohns, aliens in *Survivor,* accept a human into their society and integrate the offspring of this "miscegenation" into their community. The offspring of the T'lics, "bug-monsters" typical for science fiction, are carried to term by human bodies. Here, the differences of the dominated other become part of the self—"they" become part of "us," and the self becomes a carrier of difference. This blurring of boundaries, the growing inability to draw clear distinctions between self and other, is what constitutes the most threatening and fascinating aspect of Butler's alien constructions.

In her dealings with difference, Butler does not resort to liberal fantasies of mutual acceptance based on enlightened and rational minds. Instead of creating either a pleasant and romantic first encounter or a (at times regrettable) conquest of the noble savage/alien, she begins her *Xenogenesis* narrative by acknowledging the threatening aspect of inviting the other "in." After a long period of imprisonment by her anonymous captors, Lilith, the protagonist in *Dawn,* is confronted visually with what she thinks are her human opponents. Her first contact with an alien describes an emotional turmoil of familiar fears and unfamiliar facts: the realization that the one looked at is not human, combined with the negative associations that this realization generates, turns her meeting with the Oankali into the "ultimate confrontation with the Other" (McCaffery, "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler" 56). The woman's reaction to the alien recalls fears of what Julia Kristeva terms "the abject": creatures most alien to human self-perception remind us of the fundamental psychic fear of that which threatens our illusion of a whole self, the primal fear of the (m)other.

> "Oh god," she whispered. And the hair—the whatever-it-was—moved. Some of it seemed to blow towards her as though in a wind —though there was no stirring of air in the room. She frowned, strained to see, to understand. Then, abruptly, she did understand. She backed away, scrambled around the bed and to the far wall. When she could go no farther, she stood against the wall, staring at him. Medusa. Some of the "hair" writhed independently, a nest of snakes startled, driven in all directions. . . . The tentacles were elastic. At her shout, some of them lengthened, stretching toward her. She imagined big, slowly writhing, dying night crawlers stretched along the sidewalk after the rain. She imagined small, tentacled sea

> slugs—nudibranchs—grown impossibly to human size and shape, and obscenely, sounding more like a human being than some humans. (*Dawn* 11–12)[10]

By foregrounding the fears that accompany a confrontation with difference, Butler critically addresses the "philosophy of 'differentiation' " (Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other* 82) that contains "diversity" within the ideology of domination. Different reactions of humans to aliens' otherness include fear, contempt, depreciation, and ignorance. Humans' definition of what constitutes humanness, therefore, is always the standard of measure. Human reactions to difference differ from those of the aliens due to a fundamental fear of the other, a fear to become what is marginalized from socially accepted experiences. Thus Rane in *Clay's Ark* justifies her rejection of the Clayark community: " 'I can't stand them,' she said. 'They're not human. Their children don't even look human . . .' " (*Ark* 145).

Difference and Power Structures: The "Politics of Differentiation"

In Butler's narratives, manifestation of this human/un-human demarcation does not take place in typical science fiction pattern, and it disrupts the familiar narrative of the successful (or tragically unsuccessful) erection of boundaries. Positions of power are switched; the other becomes the norm, becomes the position from which decisions are made and from which control over others is exerted. By placing "us" *into* the other, Butler undermines the ideology of separatism. Instead, the reader is forced into Henderson's concept of a dialogue with the aspects of "otherness" within the self, "the other[s] in ourselves" (161).

The inevitable attempts of humans to dominate an other are placed within an uncomfortably *biological* framework by Butler. In the *Xenogenesis* series, the Oankali detect a deadly combination of intelligence and hierarchical tendency in humans, which causes the fatal nuclear war on earth. It is a genetic condition that predestines human self-destruction. Butler presents the destruction of human habitat and humanity's own species, not as a process embedded in a historical context (such as the Cold War), but as an inevitable given. So an Oankali evaluates the possibility of a Mars colony, where humans could procreate without the aliens, as follows: " '[Y]ou will give them the tools to create a civilization that will destroy itself as certainly as the pull of gravity will keep their new world in orbit around its sun.' . . . Its cer-

tainty was an Oankali certainty. A certainty of the flesh. They had read Human genes and reviewed Human behavior. They knew what they knew" (*Rites* 233–34). Butler seems to assess human nature as inherently violent: the "Human Contradiction," developed through evolution, privileges *hierarchical* behavior (which contains difference) over *intelligence* and results in an inability to tolerate (especially physical) differences. Butler elaborates on this violent propensity in *Dawn* when Lilith has to confront hostilities from the people whom she awakes from suspended animation to prepare them for life with the aliens. Increasingly, she needs to defend herself against the growing animosity of members of her own species, once they realize that she has had contact with the Oankali, the other, and as a result has changed physically.[11] The conflict seems a foregone conclusion. Even before everybody in the group is awakened, Lilith has to consider possible violent acts, fend off rape attempts, and cope with fights (*Dawn* 115–96, 199–241). Intolerance, magnified through loss of control and fear at the realization that difference cannot be contained, suppresses any rationality: "We're nervous. We don't know what's going to happen. We're scared. You shouldn't have to take the brunt of our feelings, but . . . but you're the different one. Nobody knows how different" (*Dawn* 214).

Based on their frameworks of genetic dispositions, both the *Patternist* and the *Xenogenesis* series paint desolate, dystopian outlooks for the future, especially in their depiction of human relations. Thus the mental ability of the Patternists is hereditary, even inbred, as are the colors of the Kohns' fur in *Survivor,* which decide the social status of members. Diut, a Tehkohn, reflects in *Survivor:* "Respect for the blue was inborn with us. No one questioned it. It seemed impossible not to value it" (*Survivor* 109). These genetic markers produce categories that define not only human relationships but also social orders. Like the hierarchies of gender and race in Western cultures, these markers indicate the differences on which hierarchical structures are based. Discrimination and slavery are present in these worlds as much as in ours; since differences are connected to values and functions, racism and sexism seem to be transferred onto different contents without being truly transformed. By constructing these alien worlds, Butler posits that it is not differences themselves that are foundational, but *categories.* She destabilizes the naturalization process that defines difference as a given and instead points out that how we *deal* with difference is what creates the binary of self and other.

FEAR VERSUS EMBRACING OF DIFFERENCE

Unlike humans, many of Butler's un-human beings react positively to difference and consequently do not attempt to shut out humans; instead, they try to achieve unification and/or mix with humans—*their* Unknown. In "Bloodchild," the T'lic, T'Gatoi, points out to the human boy the fundamentally different reactions of the two species when encountering each other: the humans' attempt to colonize the aliens fails, and instead they find themselves forced into a symbiotic relationship with the alien species. In *Survivor,* the Missionaries accept the help of the Garkohns yet view them as inferior and avoid any rapprochement of their cultures. In contrast, Alanna's integration into Tehkohn society, coupled with the love her Tehkohn-mate Diut feels for her, demonstrates an acceptance of her otherness. Unlike the people of his tribe, Diut does not judge Alanna based on her otherness; instead, he is attracted to her because of her difference: "My difference repelled her. Her differences interested me. She was ugly almost beyond description, and yet her appearance was as natural to her as mine was to me" (*Survivor* 72). It is through Alanna's and Diut's acceptance of their differences that the Missionaries' and Kohns' racist separatism is transgressed. This starting point of each encounter between her creatures is crucial for Butler—a basic acceptance that other forms of being exist, outside one's own realm of experience.

The main narrative developments in the *Xenogenesis* series also reflect the conflicting approaches to dealing with difference that Butler explores: while humans categorically reject any transformation of their form and immediately translate difference into categories and delimitation, the Oankali view difference as elementary to the existence of their species. The aliens understand the active element in establishing difference; they recognize it as a *practice* that ensures the destabilization of identity. By welcoming and appreciating connections with the other and simultaneously deconstructing familiar categories, the Oankali embrace difference. Lilith explains the contrasting standpoints of aliens and humans to her construct son, Akin.

> "Human beings fear difference," Lilith had told him once. "Oankali crave difference. Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status. Oankali seek difference and collect it. They need it to keep themselves from stagnation and overspecialization. If you don't understand this, you will.

> You'll probably find both tendencies surfacing in your own behavior. . . . When you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference." (*Rites* 80)

The contrasting concepts of difference that Butler describes engage with women of color's criticism of difference as pre-given or natural. Constructed difference is defined by those in power in ways that do not threaten their own positions but instead confirm their identity; it is "a difference or an otherness that will not go so far as to question the foundation of their beings and makings" (Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other* 88). Instead of denying difference, Trinh contends, those in power control it, place it into a framework of stasis: "We no longer wish to erase your difference, We demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert it. At least, to a certain extent" (89). Here, difference is treated simply as a counterpoint to identity and ends up controlled by sameness, as we see in the liberal discourse on "multiculturalism" that "celebrates" difference by creating spaces where it can be contained (e.g., on "special days" and in "special events" where "authentic" multicultural practices are displayed). As Trinh sees it, the view of differences as "pre-givens" grew out of dualistic Western thought, which locks the notion of difference into relations of power: "The differences made *between* entities comprehended as absolute presences—hence the notions of *pure origin* and *true* self—are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought" (90, emphasis hers). These "politics of differentiation" that Trinh Minh-ha theorizes create hierarchies by presenting difference as a static opposition to sameness/self.

Difference can be reconceptualized in a way that perceives identities, not as stable and autonomous, but as multiple and changing. This concept of difference constitutes a fundamental threat to the "illusion of continuity" (94) and wholeness that our craving for sameness instills in us, and it is reflected in Butler's boundary crossing, which renders distinctions between "I" and "i" impossible.

Thus the binary of self/other, identity/difference, is undermined by the notions of multiplicity, layers, and flexibility that are part of Butler's narratives.[12] Agency and political resistance become possible when the sense of fragmentation and separation is overcome by accepting difference as *part* of the self. Most interesting for this analysis is how the notion of multiple selves undermines binary constructions of self/other, in that the self has no sense of stability beyond context. It is the

situation that forms the self, and not vice versa—difference then becomes less a threat than an orientation for the self. Since the formation of subjectivity is a fluid process, with no coherent closure, difference becomes relative as well. Boundaries become negotiable instead of forming demarcations for rejection.

DIFFERENCE AS IDENTITY—BECOMING THE OTHER

The concept of layers of multiple identity components is reflected in the Oankali. They live for constant transformation of their species through "gene trading" (*Dawn* 39), that is, reproduction with other life forms. As Eric White points out in "The Erotics of Becoming," the Oankali possess a "genetically-encoded instruction to become other" (403)—their inevitable change as a species represents their embrace of the other per se. Motivation for gene trading grows, not from a desire for power over others, but from the search for permanent diversity and adoption of new genetically induced abilities that will facilitate the next gene trade. "The Oankali thus become other in order to . . . become other" (White 404).[13]

The Oankali define themselves, not through their form, but through the genetic exchange—therefore they *are* difference. The constitution of identity through physical appearances does not exist, and therefore there is also no exclusion of an other: the "not-I" has no physical markers. The alien species does not choose one form, a sacred image, to define themselves; instead, the very *tool* that enables change is their defining trait. So the only consistent make-up of the species is a specific cell: the "organelle" that carries the potential for gene manipulation, which is transferred with every gene trade. The group in each generation that does not partake in the latest gene exchange and therefore differs in form from the other Oankali, are still considered Oankali: "It was as Oankali as any intelligent being constructed by an ooloi to incorporate the Oankali organelle within its cells" (*Rites* 209). Identification through and with the possibility of gene trade is mirrored in the name of the alien species: "One of the meanings of Oankali is gene trader. Another is that organelle—the essence of ourselves, the origin of ourselves. Because of that organelle, the ooloi can perceive DNA and manipulate it precisely" (*Dawn* 39).[14] The Oankali have no choice but to give in to the drive for constant development: "We do it naturally. We *must* do it. It renews us, enables us to survive as an evolv-

ing species instead of specializing ourselves into extinction or stagnation" (*Dawn* 39).

The Oankali's reason for existence comes to its full completion at the end of the trilogy: the ooloi children who grow from the human-Oankali connection, so-called constructs, become able to change form individually through the control of fast-growing (human) cancer cells. (Previously, transformation was possible only from one generation to another; characteristics of the new genetic material were given to the offspring, who kept a constant form during their life span.) In addition, as shape-shifters, constructs become able to adapt physically to the next gene trade partner, preventing the formation of boundaries and categories of "us" and "them" from the beginning. With constructs, acceptance of the other is complete; instead of having to await the offspring of a genetic exchange, constructs as individual members of the species can embody, and thus mirror, the other whenever it is encountered.

The shift of narrative perspective in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy from Lilith to her children signifies the development of subject positions that are increasingly removed from familiar oppositions that define difference (see Wolmark, *Aliens and Others* 36), which enables Butler to speculate on alternative ways of relating to difference. The voice of the ooloi-construct Jodahs—the narrator in *Imago,* the third novel—reflects Trinh's point that difference is not an identity, and that to declare a tolerance of difference (as identity) is to perpetuate the dual character of self/other. Instead, "[d]ifference . . . is *that which undermines the very idea of identity*" (Trinh 96, emphasis hers). Thus Jodahs's voice is generated, not by a core self (that is different from *my* core self) that speaks from a place conventionally referred to as "elsewhere" and that we agree to listen to, but by the "infinity [of] layers whose totality forms 'I' " (Trinh 96).[15] Because the Oankali crave difference, their differences are perceived as threatening by humans, who operate from the delusion of a stable identity, from their insistence that "human" (i.e. "white" or "male") is a pre-given, normal state, instead of a process.

The negotiations that a rethinking of difference demands are painful and disconcerting—at times, even disempowering. Wolmark identifies this painful process as a "tension between sameness and difference" (*Aliens and Others* 39) that Butler places at the center of her tales. Human fears of difference are at times too much to bear and result

in tragedies. Butler does not paint the picture of a tolerant pluralism that preaches "acceptance of difference"; instead, she points to the difficulties that negotiations of power relations bring. Her constellations of hybrid offspring and xenogenesis, of humans "going native" in alien societies and the sensual pleasure this change evokes in the reader, serve as metaphors for what Robert Stam in "Multiculturalism and the Neoconservatives" defines as "polycentric multiculturalism." According to Stam, polycentric multiculturalism does not ignore the "political realities of injustice and inequality and the consequent existential realities of pain, anger, and resentment." Instead, it "calls for a kind of diasporization of desire, the multiplication, the cross-fertilization, and the mutual relativization of social energies" (200).

Constructions of Difference: Race, Gender, and Sexuality

Butler's narratives problematize issues of difference mainly through two of their major structural manifestations: gender (based on "sexual difference") and race (based on "racial difference").[16] To address these issues, she uses both metaphors (aliens) and concrete references—relationships between humans, especially her black female protagonists' relationships to (often nonblack) men. With both narrative devices, Butler is able to disclose the construction of demarcations based on difference and the power structures legitimized by them.

Racism and sexism are always linked to power relations that are legitimized by social hierarchies and by relationships that are declared "personal," such as between husband and wife (see Salvaggio, "Black SF Heroine" 79). Both are constructed and enacted within particular historical communities. Accordingly, Butler's discussions of gender always imply the construction of race and vice versa.

Alien Others: Denaturalization of Racial Difference

Xenophobia and racism in science fiction are usually transferred onto representations of aliens. These symbolic representations often replace any direct discussion of racism and fail to really address the problem, as Butler states:

> Science Fiction has long treated people who might or might not exist—extraterrestrials. Unfortunately, however, many of the same

> science fiction writers who started us thinking about the possibility of extraterrestrial life did nothing to make us think about here-at-home human variations. (quoted in Govan, "Connections" 87)

At the same time, science fiction metaphors do constitute powerful tools to transgress boundaries through analogies, and Butler uses these tools in a critical way.[17]

Butler does not simply turn strange creatures into objects of xenophobia (fear of the unknown); her critical representations of racism are much more complex. She places racism within relationships of humans with the other—both human and un-human. By problematizing racism, not only in terms of existing categories of difference but also in terms of new ones, she discloses their inherent absurdity and randomness. Whether due to a genetic illness that isolates ill people from others ("The Evening and the Morning and the Night"), a mysterious infection that robs humans of their capability to speak and read and produces chaos and jealousy ("Speech Sounds"), or a phenomenon that turns humans into mutants (*Clay's Ark),* in Butler's worlds, humans differ from each other in ways beyond their control. The classification that differences bring is therefore horrifyingly familiar: "Patternists and Clayarks stared at each other across a gulf of disease and physical difference and comfortably told themselves the same lie about each other . . . : 'Not people' " (*Patternmaster* 122).

While Butler points to the ways in which existing categories are constructed, she also makes clear that although race is an ideology, it has real consequences for people. Without trivializing the power that discourse produces, Butler resists naturalizations of categories in our thought; she reflects on the Foucaultian fact that biology is not the body itself, but a discourse that constructs the body and our knowledge about it. Butler confronts the reader with new "biological" facts (i.e. forms of difference) that find their place within a discourse whose mechanism of separation might change in content, but not in consequence.[18] Therefore, it is not the "fact" of racial differences that is significant for social order, but the positions assigned to those differences within the social hierarchy.

In her discussion of race, Butler employs various forms of representation. In *Survivor,* she places her heroine, Alanna, between two highly hierarchical societies: the Missionaries' community, which is

grounded in a belief in their own spiritual superiority; and the Kohn tribes, whose social stratification is based in the color of their fur. Just as Missionaries are exclusive in their definition of "human," Kohns rely on a social order reminiscent of human racism, in which color determines one's status in society—as leader, judge, artisan, and so on. Alanna is the only one who refuses the respective categories, thus forcing those close to her to change the ways they deal with difference. In *Kindred, Wild Seed,* and the *Parable* novels, the emphasis lies on the historical construction of race in the United States. The close connection between race relations and power structures becomes apparent in the *Patternist* series. Here, new markers of difference create stratifications that result in control mechanisms reminiscent of those during slavery. The Patternist society consists of telepaths and humans without telepathic abilities—*mutes*—who are controlled by the telepaths and at times even held as their slaves.[19] In this hierarchy, Butler reconstructs the historical construction of racial difference in the United States, through which power structures such as slavery are legitimized. The *stigma* of being a "Negro" is what makes a human a slave or not; it is the power of the sign, not the skin color itself. In *Mind of My Mind,* at the birth of the pattern, Emma/Anyanwu confronts Doro with the parallel:

> "Mutes!"
>
> . . . "It's a convenient term. People without telepathic voices. Ordinary people."
>
> "I know what it means, Doro. . . . It means niggers! . . . And if you don't think they look down on us non-telepaths, us niggers, the whole rest of humanity, you're not paying attention." (*Mind* 155)

Familiar categories of difference brand the undirected Patternists (the inbred offspring of Doro's attempts to create a "super race") as mad and insane until their power is channeled through the pattern. It seems as if Doro's ambitions undermine existing categories. His utopian legacy, passed down to his descendents, lies in the possible transcendence of differences—through his un-human, bodiless existence he transgresses external markers, such as race. Yet Doro's transcendent element ultimately fails to come through: from his breeding attempts, he creates a "super race" that produces new mechanisms of separation and power.

The problematic category of "human" in Butler is frequently symbolic of the signifying power of racial markers: to be "human" is to be racially "pure"—that is, "white." Humans' reproduction with the Oankali in the *Xenogenesis* series points to the dissolution of external attributes that define a race. In *Survivor*, Alanna's relationship with the alien Diut evokes negative reactions in Missionaries that are similar to those that racial miscegenation triggered in the past, and still does today (*Survivor* 156–57). However, once visual demarcations of "pure humanness" are blurred, power relations reliant on markers of sexual and racial differences are challenged and need to be redefined.

Conceptualizing Gender and Sexuality

Just as she decenters the point of reference by recounting the events from the perspective of the racialized other, Butler breaks with the homogeneous male "us" as it is constituted in traditional science fiction and in its reception.[20] A woman, in her narratives, is never merely the object of or reason for the actions of a masculine hero. She acts and reacts in direct relation to the events around her. Violence is part of her resistance to power, both in self-defense and in defense of others, echoing black women's centuries-long resistance. By concentrating on the relationships of her heroines with often powerful men or aliens (with the latter, like the women, representing an other), Butler shifts the debate on race and gender away from traditional discourse, toward the perspective of the other. The relationships of her women characters with powerful men mirror relations to power that are defined by both gender and race, relations that Butler's protagonists consistently challenge. Butler destabilizes the model of center-margin by placing her characters into more complex relationships of power. While the primary relationships between humans that Butler creates are usually heterosexual, her cross-species sexual encounters take place outside heterosexual norms.[21] A queer reading of Butler's narratives makes visible her deconstruction of normative heterosexuality and desire.[22]

According to Foucault's theory of discursive power, gender roles and functions that supposedly are based on sexual differences in reproduction and in desire do not develop from "biological facts" but are produced through discourse. Bodies themselves (and the desire that supposedly comes with them, based on their "natural" sex) do not determine relations between the genders, but their interpretation does. Paralleling Foucault's insistence on the "de-naturalization" of

categories relating to sex, Butler undermines Western dualistic thinking, which assigns social value to sexual difference and is extremely inflexible.

Butler continually reminds the reader of this dualistic thinking within power relations and the extent to which it defines their control over our lives. Consonant with the experiences of women (especially those of women of color), loss of control over the body connotes female attributes, as a human explains to Lilith about a man's reaction to his sexual possession by an ooloi:

> He's not in control even of what his own body does and feels. *He's taken like a woman.* . . . He knows the ooloi aren't male. He knows all the sex that goes on is in his head. It doesn't matter. It doesn't fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can't let them get away with that. (*Dawn* 203, emphasis mine)

Butler makes clear that power in Western societies is not associated with women. Their powerlessness is comparable to the helplessness experienced by a whole species controlled by aliens. Thus a man tells a construct ooloi, "You treat all mankind as your woman" (*Imago* 77).[23] In *Dawn,* when a skeptical ooloi, who has studied human cultures and thought, questions Lilith's ability to lead her people, Butler leaves no doubt that gender/sexual difference is linked to ascribed functions: "I didn't want to accept you, Lilith. Not for [the partnership with the ooloi] Nikanj or for the work you'll do. I believed that because of the way human genetics were expressed in culture, a human male should be chosen to parent the first group. I think now that I was wrong" (*Dawn* 110).[24]

Butler challenges the seemingly inevitable social order built on sexual difference with her female protagonists who demand new structures. One example is Amber in *Patternmaster,* who rejects marriage, the legitimized form of being together in Patternist society. Considering the price she would have to pay, her independence is more important to her than the relationship with the hero.

> "Stay with me, Amber. Be my wife—lead wife, once I have my House." . . .
>
> "No." The word was a stone. "I want what I want. I could have given my life for you [. . .]. But I could never give my life *to* you." (*Patternmaster* 134)[25]

Butler discusses gender relations and sexual difference also in terms of reproduction. In this way she evokes historical violations, especially of women of *color*'s bodies, sexualities, and reproductive choices. In all of her fiction, children play a central role—they are the future, and they define affiliations. Especially in the *Xenogenesis* series and in "Bloodchild," Butler "reflects on the extent to which patriarchal cultures find it necessary to use ideology, violence, and oppression to force women to participate in 'natural' reproduction" (Green 171). In the *Xenogenesis* series, both women and men are made infertile by the Oankali unless they agree to have children with alien genes, and in *Dawn*, Lilith is made pregnant by her ooloi without her consent. In *Adulthood Rites* she speaks about that moment of exploitation:

> "They forced you to have kids?" the man asked.
>
> "One of them surprised me," she said. "It made me pregnant, then told me about it. Said it was giving me what I wanted but would never come out and ask for."
>
> "Was it?"
>
> . . . "Oh, yes. But if I had the strength not to ask, it should have had the strength to let me alone." (*Rites* 25)

Butler explores outcomes of power relations beyond one-dimensional concepts of winning and losing. By including unresolved contradictions and their consequences (which contribute to the at-times frustrating experience of reading Butler's narratives), Butler resists the temptation of basing fictional exploration on the simplified and generalized solutions that theoretical discourses offer.

In "Bloodchild," Butler reminds us that the reproductive function of women does not produce "natural" social structures, but that these structures are constructed by power. In the cross-species breeding between humans and T'lics, a young man is in the position of a person who gives birth under life-threatening circumstances. He ends up questioning the reduction of his existence to his reproductive function—creating a bizarre reversal of familiar sexual difference. The figures of the "pregnant man" and the "impregnating woman" (Helford 264) in "Bloodchild" destabilize the reproduction process as we know it, and therefore make the "natural" construction of categories impossible.[26] "When 'woman' emerges through the metaphor of an impregnated young boy, as it does in 'Bloodchild,' we are invited to examine

and challenge our understanding of the construction of gender" (Helford 261).[27]

In addition to challenging the naturalization of gender roles and reproduction, Butler problematizes aspects of violent (hetero)sexuality and power. Especially in her depictions of alien sex with humans, we find decidedly queer elements where desire and physical stimulation are physically decentered. Homosexuality and heterosexuality become insufficient labels to categorize sexual encounters between five people of two species and three gender/sexes. Butler explores aspects of power and desire as they shape notions of female sexuality as a site of victimization as well as agency.

Oankali sexuality is physically decentralized: sexual activities are not concentrated on sexual organs. Ooloi-produced stimulation includes the whole body surface. As Eric White notes, "Undoing the privileging of genital over other erogenous zones, alien sex is polymorphously perverse" (404). Thus the prescribed, determined functions of sexual organs are diffused; concepts such as the Oedipus complex, fear of castration, and penis envy become obsolete. During sexual contact there is no separation between self and other(s); pain as well as pleasure is felt by everyone. "[S]he discovered that if she touched me now with her hand, she felt the touch as though on her own skin, felt pleasure or discomfort just as she made me feel" (*Imago* 111).

Even though Oankali society seems to disrupt conventional gender definitions through their reproductive unit of five, Butler paints a picture of compulsory heterosexuality based in the Oankali's drive for reproduction (just as arguments based on reproduction are brought against human homosexuality). There do not seem to be sexual relationships between alien partners beyond either a "monogamous" household or an act of reproduction, and there are no cases of homosexuality described in alien and/or human constellations anywhere in the trilogy.[28] Nevertheless, the family structure of the human/alien families seems to entail implicit homosexual patterns: the act of reproduction takes place with five people—one ooloi, a human heterosexual pair, and an Oankali heterosexual pair. Oankali do not have problems with this arrangement, but Butler portrays homophobia, especially between men, manifested in male paranoia about intimacy with same-sexed people: the human male in Lilith's family cannot meet his male Oankali partner without feeling inhibited after a sexual act but is comfortable interacting with his female Oankali partner (*Rites* 179). So

even though homosexuality is not conceptualized outside the reproductive unit, it is an integral and necessary part of the process. In addition, Oankali are constantly physically and emotionally close, especially when they belong to a kinship group, which includes same-sexed relations.[29]

In her depiction of the human/Oankali relationships, Butler portrays "sexual relationships between beings of unequal power" (Bonner 58). Queer theories have extensively explored relationships between power and pleasure (most noticeably in pornography and S/M debates). At first glance, sexual violence, especially rape, seems impossible considering the nature of the Oankali's sexual contact, which transports any sensations, including pain, to everyone involved. The horror and pain of the victim would assault the rapist simultaneously.[30] However, people who are resistant to sexual contact are "seduced" through biochemical stimulation by the ooloi, and as Bonner points out, this stimulation produces a *physical* consent, but the act remains a rape through forced change of mind (see *Dawn* 158–62). The aliens' assurance that they know what humans "really want" is reminiscent of men's disregard of women's "no" in rape cases.[31] This "pleasure within oppression" is the object of queer theorists like Carole Vance, who, in her introduction to *Pleasure and Danger*, demands an exploration of the link between patriarchal interference with female desire and women's experiences of their own passion as dangerous. Butler complicates matters further by placing *men* into the subject position usually inhabited by women: women's sexuality is culturally coded as passive (i.e. feminine), while men are associated with an active (i.e. masculine) sexuality (see Vance 6). Her ambivalent depiction of human sexuality in an Oankali context concurs with Vance's position that "to ignore the potential for variation [in what might constitute women's sexual pleasure] is to inadvertently place women outside of culture except as passive recipients of official symbolic systems" (Vance 15).

Reading Butler's representations of sexuality as queer also discloses the links between race, power, and sexuality. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick demands in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, feminists need to develop a theoretical framework to explore sexual and power relationships that goes beyond gender violence. Literary texts, she argues, offer insights into the inconsistencies in how the sexual relates to the social. Sexual meaning is always produced from a particular standpoint, shaped by race as well as by gender: rep-

resentations of a violent sexual encounter between a white man and a white woman have different implications than depictions of an encounter between a white man and a black woman.[32] The act of sexual violence (rape) is informed by power and domination based on race as well as gender relations, complicating definitions and analyses of representations of sexual violence: "the white male alienation of a Black woman's sexuality is shaped differently from the alienation of the white woman's, to the degree that rape ceases to be a meaningful term at all" (Segdwick 10).

Butler problematizes the link between sexual violence and power in the relationships her female protagonists have with men—both human and alien. Alanna "consents" to intercourse with Diut because a sexual relationship with him will secure her freedom—yet he factually rapes her. As a black female human, Alanna's status in the highly stratified Kohn society is close to nothing, while Diut's blue fur reflects his high social position. Only acceptance by the Tehkohn leader can secure her a minimum social status. Thus race, sexuality, and domination intersect, echoing colonial historical realities (*Survivor* 99–100).

Butler's narratives destabilize familiar categories of race, gender, and sexuality and disclose them as both ideologically constructed and real in their social consequences. Her characters' resistance to and negotiations of these categories challenge normative social roles. At the same time, Butler engages with questions around desire, pleasure, and violence that trouble feminists' explorations of female sexuality, and she depicts sexuality as inextricably linked to power.

Feminist Subjectivities: Metaphors of Subversive Transgressions

> To be different, or alien, is a significant if familiar cultural metaphor which marks the boundaries and limits of social identity. It allows difference to be marginalised and any dissonance to be smoothed away, thus confirming the dominance of the centre over the margins. (Wolmark, *Aliens and Others* 27)

Butler uses aliens and mutants as symbols that destabilize markers of difference and redefine social relations. Another major strategy she employs to explore the relationship of identity and difference is creating feminist subjects based on notions of resisting identities (such as

the feminist cyborg). These models for feminist subjectivities share a new approach to identity, portraying it not as an enclosed, stable entity but as one that is relational and shifting. By exploring elements of these alternative ways of envisioning identity in Butler's female characters, we are better able to understand transgressive metaphors and may find new ways of thinking about their (theoretical) implications.

Geographical displacement forms the metaphorical and actual foundation for many of these feminist subjectivities: in Carole Boyce Davies's migratory subjectivity as well as in Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subject, the notion of movement and flexibility of social location are central. Similarly, in the writings of Chicana feminism, the idea of the *mestiza,* a woman of Mexican/Indio descent, represents a new consciousness that emerges from collisions between cultures and their violent histories. One model of feminist subjectivity that grew from feminist science fiction texts, and in return shaped feminist theory, is the cyborg metaphor developed by Donna Haraway. The cyborg represents a political identity that emerges from contradictions produced by the historical moment of global capitalism and the consequent implosion of boundaries between nature and culture. What all of these models share, however, is the thought that identity is a fluid and transforming process that is never completed.

Boundary Crossing: Cyborgs, Nomadic and Migratory Subjects, and the Mestiza

Elements of feminist subjective theories run through Butler's narratives. Her main thematic and narrative device is the crossing of boundaries reflected in the conflicting and contradictory figure of Donna Haraway's cyborg, a metaphor for a feminist political identity whose main characteristic is its crossing of culturally defined boundaries. The cyborg shares this characteristic with other politicized feminist identities: the nomad's subversions of "conventional views and representations of . . . female subjectivity" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 3); the *mestiza*'s borderland identity, which rejects the control of multiplicity by the "logic of purity" (Lugones 462); and the migratory subject, which undermines discourse by consistently changing positions and locations. In cyborg feminism, the figure of the cyborg emerges beyond its manifestation in science fiction; its meaning is developed from the context of the texts in relation to social conditions and power relations.

The cyborg is one of the "boundary creatures" (Haraway, "Actors Are Cyborgs" 21) that has been marginalized within the critical rationalist discourse and has developed a perspective from its unique position—a position that is inherently one of agency. It is in the fusion of differences, including those between women (not the liberal "celebration" of them), that the potential for new political strategies of change is situated. "So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 154). The innovative approach to the cyborg, a hybrid constructed through conflicting social factors, is not to reject but to embrace its contradictions: "There are several consequences to taking seriously the imagery of cyborgs as other than our enemies. Our bodies, ourselves—bodies are maps of power and identity. . . . We are responsible for boundaries; we are they" ("Manifesto" 180).

The notion of the cyborg as a political identity results from the changing relations between machines and organisms. The main factor in the development of a cyborg identity is therefore contesting ideologically constructed categories of difference: "The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically" ("Manifesto" 163). This is where Butler's narratives are most closely related to the cyborg: they contest existing definitions of difference by undermining the very notion of sameness. The attempt to control the dissolution of boundaries is characterized by Haraway as a "border war." Battles of this border war take place in social spheres of production, reproduction, and imagination, and in the past decade have reached new dimensions through advanced technoscience, including genetic engineering. The battlegrounds of the border wars are often semiotically manifested, representing (often hidden) struggles to define and rearrange racialized and gendered interactions. Related to representations are economic interests, which are a major factor in the contestations of boundaries and affect the everyday lives of people in the (ideological as well as economic) margins.

Another site of these border wars are the borderlands Gloria Anzaldúa describes in "La consciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness." They represent a terrain where exploitation of labor, rac-

ism, poverty, and denial of citizenship are terms the *mestiza* needs to resist. Anzaldúa proposes a concept of feminist subjectivity that is derived directly from the subject position of the *mestiza*,[33] "a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (377) that denies sameness as the basis for identity. Grown from the "cultural collision" (378) between Mexican, Indio, and American cultures, the *mestiza*'s homeland is the "borderlands" of the Southwest, the geographical site of economic, political, territorial, and sociological conflicts. A woman without a homeland that is not constantly culturally contested (she is neither Anglo nor Mexican nor Indio) is a "countryless woman," as Ana Castillo describes it in *Massacre of the Dreamers* (21). At the same time, she needs to meet the demands of each cultural space.

This multiple subject position, which grows from geographical and cultural "homelessness," results in a "schizophrenic-like existence" (Castillo 39) as the *mestiza* is confronted with representations and power structures that deny her reality. In order to transcend this traumatic state of being, she needs to reject what Maria Lugones calls the "logic of purity" (462), which denies the complexity and heterogeneity of social reality and of oppression. Instead, Lugones argues, *mestizaje* needs to be recognized as a metaphor for impurity and resistance, as "impure resistance to interlocked, intermeshed oppressions" (459). The mixed racial and cultural backgrounds that make up the origin of the *mestiza,* the "hybrid progeny" (Anzaldúa 377), should inspire a consciousness in her that opposes a fixed sense of self and is devoid of internalized oppression: "a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una consciencia de mujer*" (377). Thus impurity becomes an act of resistance. Confronted with constant demands to renegotiate terms of identity, the *mestiza* is characterized by a "tolerance for ambiguity," grown from the realization "that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (Anzaldúa 378). She therefore "operates in a pluralistic mode" (379), enabling the *mestiza* to redefine relations based on oppressive categories of difference. The becoming of this multilayered consciousness is at times painful: Anzaldúa argues that the struggle to become a self is inseparable from our surroundings—the *mestiza*'s psyche mirrors the geographical borderlands, their economic hardships and their strengths. In defining resistance against oppression, Anzaldúa insists, we need to start with ourselves and the representations we hold:

> The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio,* American Indian, *mojado, mexicano,* immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (385)

The *mestiza*'s agency, which grows from positions declared as marginal by mainstream discourse, is related to that of the nomadic subject and the migratory subject. These metaphors of identities transgress *national* as well as cultural boundaries, as well as the link of identity to one particular place. In *Black Women, Writing, and Identity,* Davies uses the metaphors of migration and exile to suggest that black women's writing cannot be located and framed in terms of one specific place but exists in myriad places and times. It constantly eludes terms of the discussion and creates a subjectivity that is flexible and in motion, never static. The main characteristic of this subjectivity is that it is defined by migration, by movement, and therefore constantly reclaims new forms. This migration of the subject, argues Davies, is the basis for agency and subverts discourse by evading its static definitions. "In the same way as diaspora assumes expansiveness and elsewhereness, migrations of the Black female subject pursue the path of movement outside the terms of dominant discourses" (37). The metaphor of migration as process is grounded in black women's experiences and history of diaspora.[34] "It is the convergence of multiple places and cultures that re-negotiates the terms of Black women's experience that in turn negotiates and re-negotiates their identities" (3).

The question of what constitutes home becomes central in black women's writing, as does the question of how to have community. As Braidotti states in *Nomadic Subjects,* the nomadic subject, with its shifting relationship to identity positions, calls for an alternative concept of community that does not rely on the shared notion of a "homeland," and offers an alternative to the subject constructed by the modern nation.[35] The nomadic subject is unlike some aspects of diaspora, which bind identity to a mythical homeland.[36] In contrast, the nomad does not have a homeland but "carries her/his essential belongings with her/him wherever s/he goes and can recreate a home base anywhere"

(Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 16). The knowledge of home-making as a process is the strength of the nomadic subject; it constitutes the flexibility that comes with shifting subject positions, and it allows the transgression of boundaries without losing a sense of the necessity of location.

Postmodern theories that rely on non-Western social orders for metaphors and theoretical formulations have been criticized by feminists and race theorists alike for romanticizing and overgeneralizing these societies. It is just in these problematic aspects that Butler's narratives are so valuable; they caution against utopian generalizations and insist on the specificity of negotiated power relations. In her fiction the liberating implications as well as the limits of these theories are explored. In this context, metaphors need to be understood as *theoretical tools* (as well as comments on material realities), which have the power to transform not only systems of representation but concepts of identity as well. Thus, within the discussion of transgressive, nomadic identities, it is paramount to emphasize that a lack of any fascist or absolute elements is the only guarantee of a liberated society.

While the *mestiza*'s consciousness develops from the erosion of cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries, and nomadic and migratory subjects evolve from experiences of changing places, the figure of the cyborg, according to Haraway, has developed analogously to three main dissolutions of boundaries in our society. First, the boundary between human and animal is increasingly effaced. According to biotechnological research, the genetic material in humans and animals differs only minimally (e.g., 90 percent of the idioplasm of Homo Sapiens is identical to that of primates). Genetic science and biotechnology are the main areas in which these borders are being explored. The figure of the cyborg appears where the boundary between humans and animals is transgressed. The second dissolution of boundaries takes place between humans and animals as a group (organisms) and machines. Their realms and opportunities for action increasingly overlap—machines are becoming more intelligent and even assume cognitive processes. In science fiction, the cyborg therefore is usually the main figure in the discussion about the "human" status of a creature. Finally, the boundary between the physical and nonphysical is collapsing; our technologies are chiefly designed electronically, and their controlling processes are not visible. The figure of the cyborg similarly eludes every fixation and stands outside visible structures (see Har-

away, "Manifesto" 151–55). These figures defy Christian-Western narratives of a pure, innocent beginning of the subject: "An origin story in the Western humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss, and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate" ("Manifesto" 151).

The main feature of the metaphor of the cyborg is its evasion of culturally constructed categories and their ascribed social positions. This evasion entails radical implications for politics in its emphasis on agency developed from spaces that conventionally are defined as disempowered. The cyborg intersects with other models of feminist identity: by rejecting the notion of sameness and of a stable identity as a position of resistance, these models locate power between the fixed boundaries of those in dominant subject positions and represent the subjectivity of the disempowered from their perspective.

Transgressive Elements in Butler's Narratives

The two aspects of the cyborg within feminist discourse, the metaphorical and the literal, are also present in the science fiction produced by women in the United States. Some science fiction writers create cybernetic organisms, or states of consciousness shaped by cyberspace, as narrative devices to problematize the issue of technology.[37] Others, such as Octavia Butler, discuss cyborg identity through the creation of aliens, human hybrids, and genetic engineering; this kind of science fiction "translates" the idea of the technological cyborg into a feminist identity of boundary crossing and acceptance of differences.[38] Discussion of her work reveals the liberating potential of the cyborg metaphor and also discloses its limits.

How is technology's political power represented in Butler's work? She does not create high-tech science fiction narratives; instead, new senses and biological abilities dominate her futuristic worlds. Her stories are characterized by a diffusion of boundaries reminiscent of high technology's impact on our social interactions, yet it is symbolized more through the elaboration of relations between humans and un-humans, and less through relationships between humans and machines. In Butler's work, technology's effects, such as the implosion of cultural categories, are displaced as cross-species breeding. This cross-breeding evokes extreme anxieties in the characters (as well as in the reader!), thereby problematizing notions of authentic racial purity.

The fusion between animals and humans in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy

is displaced onto the Oankali's gene exchange with other species: as genetic engineers, they consistently collect the genetic information of both plants and animals, integrating it into their gene pool, thereby renewing and transforming it. "[They] collect life, travel and collect and integrate new life into their ships, their already vast collection of living things, and themselves" (*Rites* 166). The "animalization" of the Clayarks conceptualizes the boundary between humans and animals in a more direct way than the relationship between aliens and humans. The Clayarks' attempt to separate their humanness from their beastness is disconnected from appearance; it dismisses biological makeup as a defining factor in boundary setting: " 'We've changed, but we have ethics. We aren't animals" (*Ark* 37).

Transgressions of boundaries between machines and organic life forms are also present in the Oankali: their technology is purely organic, ranging from building materials and transportation means to their spaceships. The Oankali's main technology is signified through its symbiotic relationship with other life forms: genetic engineering. It creates machines from organisms through reproduction, thus destabilizing boundaries between machine and organism.

Finally, the communication systems in the *Patternist* series, which are based in mental mechanisms, echo the growing invisibility of communication technology, such as cell phones and wireless Internet access. Strength and perseverance are measured, not in physical terms, but in terms of mental power—they are invisible and unpredictable (reminiscent of cyberpunk's celebration of mental capacities within cyberspace), creating new dimensions of strength and competence. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, sexual encounters between aliens as well as between aliens and humans are established through neurological stimulation that resembles an experience within virtual reality—caresses from the sexual partner are experienced without being executed (see *Dawn* 161–63, 169).

Within the context of science and technology, the boundary-defying connection between human (the self) and animal/alien (the other) symbolizes the reversal of subject and object positions, the reversal of the "field" with the familiar empirical reality. In *Dawn,* Lilith experiences this shift when the Oankali keep her under observation: " 'I was majoring in anthropology.' She laughed bitterly. 'I suppose I could think of this as fieldwork—but how the hell do I get out of the field?' " (*Dawn* 86). As an agent of boundary crossing, Lilith is recruited into terri-

tories whose boundaries are impossible to differentiate. Subject becomes object, and vice versa, as fields of study are reversed and mixed up, authorities are undermined. "The cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual identity, or body" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 178). The semiotic structure of the meaning of her fictional characters regarding their genetic impurity, especially in her *Xenogenesis* series and *Wild Seed,* is akin to Haraway's analysis of the meaning of the genetically engineered OncoMouse™ in *Modest Witness.* All of Butler's hybrid creatures challenge the authority of normative systems of knowledge and their role in the socioeconomic system.

Boundary Transgression in Butler's Female Characters

In most of Butler's stories, female figures fulfill the function of the cyborg in their transgression of boundaries.[39] All of them take up special places in their society and often have experiences in which they are marginalized, and sometimes these experiences make them into powerful agents. All are what Audre Lorde termed "Sister Outsiders" (see also Haraway, "Manifesto" 174), located one step outside the norm and acting from this position. Most of them do not posses extraordinary abilities while others have almost magical powers. None are technologically enhanced like the classical cyborg figure although some are genetically altered. Alanna in *Survivor,* Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents,* Dana in *Kindred,* Keira in *Clay's Ark,* and Lilith in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy are women who do not possess extraordinary abilities. It is the epistemological standpoint that they acquire in their social position as black women or women of color that sets them apart from their environment and gives them specific ways of knowing and understanding situations of conflict and of power. All of them are survivors and have been geographically displaced, made into migratory subjects whose "journeys redefine space" (Davies, *Black Women* 1). They are characterized by their strong will and their ability to adapt to situations forced upon them. It is their perspective from the margins, disconnected from positions of power, which enables them to shift boundaries and which makes them so valuable to the creatures inhabiting these shadowy territories. These women exist in a constant state of negotiation with their environment; as survivors, they test limits and set limits for those in power. They are permanently con-

fronted with the fact that "[y]ou think you can choose your own realities. You can't" (*Clay's Ark* 79).

Even though she is critical of generalizations, Butler embeds her female characters into migratory experiences: they become metaphors of displaced feminist subjects, whose diasporic experiences force them to reimagine and renegotiate their identity in relation to their environments. In *Survivor,* Alanna is forced to negotiate her identity first when Missionaries adopt her, and again when the aliens on the planet (whom the Missionaries are trying to colonize) kidnap her. In *Wild Seed,* the shape-shifter and healer Anyanwu possesses a subjectivity defined by "slipperiness, elsewhereness" (Davies, *Black Women* 36), which allows her to escape subjugation and finally to negotiate the terms of her existence. And in both *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents,* migration becomes the metaphor not only of resistance but also of survival. It is inherent in the aspirations of the protagonist, Lauren, to fly her people to the stars in order to evade the destructiveness of people on Earth, and it is deeply engraved in the novels' narrative form (particularly in *Sower*) as the journal of a journey: "Black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates and so reclaims as it re-asserts" (Davies, *Black Women* 37).

In addition to Butler's female figures, the nomadic Oankali, with their transgressive subjectivity that understands difference as part of identity, are a people without a homeland. Beyond that, they share with the cyborg a disconnection from any psychosocial Genesis narrative, which determines gendered subjectivity for humans and which strongly influences our conception of truth and moral purity; the cyborg has no dream and no goal of a higher unity of self. Butler's figures have no past to draw on, no creation myth of innocence to which to return. In the *Xenogenesis* series, Lilith asks about the Oankali's homeworld and whether they desire to return there: "No, Lilith, that's the one direction that's closed to us. This is our homeworld now" (*Dawn* 34). The Oankali correspond with the "nonoriginal" (Haraway in Penley and Ross 13) character of the cyborg. They are "space-going people" (*Imago* 11), whose origins take multiple forms and whose future is oriented, not to the past, but to the infinite diversity of the unknown. As such, the Oankali become metaphors for the nomadic subjects that Braidotti conceptualizes, who—like the cyborg—are not bound by a concrete or a mythical homeland. Because the promises of Western

myths do not apply to them, these myths hold no authority over the cyborg: "The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 151).

Thus Butler's characters negotiate situations that are always linked to displacement and the boundary crossing we find in feminist nomadic theories. It is not the fact that they are displaced that turns Butler's characters into figures of resistance, but how they position their experience in relation to difference. Only in this combination (both displacement and the embracing of difference) do they develop their particular feminist elements.

In *Wild Seed*, the progenitrix of the Patternists, Anyanwu, who is an immortal shape-shifter and healer, is Butler's most explicit translation of the technological metaphor of the synthesized human into a consciousness, demonstrating a connection with the *mestiza*.[40] In Anyanwu, the principle of a new knowledge that defies the oppressive application of conventional science and technology finds its strongest expression. She comprehends the structure of other living things through her shape-shifting—her transgression of boundaries is complete. She *becomes* the other, lives their experience, and knows their being. Other female protagonists share the power to dissolve demarcations between themselves and those around them. Lauren, in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, experiences this form of boundary transgression through an affliction that affects her neurological transmitters: she "shares" the pain and pleasure of other living beings through visual and acoustic contact. Finally, in *Mind of My Mind*, the *pattern* that Mary controls becomes the center where all boundaries meet and dissolve.

These women's extraordinary ability to manipulate boundaries is the basis for Butler's explorations of political resistance. Their talents place these women in positions of influence, yet they refuse to misuse power on any level. The rejection of the use of power for personal goals is defined by Butler as an explicitly female trait, born out of a marginalized social location—a position shared with the cyborg inhabiting Haraway's texts. In her narratives, Butler associates the concepts male/masculine with the abuse of power, and female/feminine with life giving and the rejection of power. This polarization of gendered power engages both with cultural feminists' assumptions of the essentially benign nature of women and with radical constructionist femi-

nists' claim that men and women learn approaches to power through an ideology that prescribes gendered relations to it.

The gendered use of power is inherently problematic and forms one of the contradictions that Butler consistently explores.[41] When viewed within the context of feminist standpoint theories, however, her constellations of female versus male power can be understood as metaphors for social location and resulting epistemological differences. These differences also entail conflicting ethical approaches, especially regarding power. Lilith, the heroine in *Dawn*—who is less a leader than a mother to the group of humans assigned to her care by the aliens who are planning to cross-breed with them—constitutes a doubly marginalized figure as a woman of African descent. In actions taken from a position of influence, she forms an antipode to the aggressively dominating figure of the white man. The Dankali chose her because of her standpoint and her relation to power as a (black) woman.

Feminist standpoint theories examine the development of particular knowledge systems that are based on shared social experiences. The concept of "epistemic privilege" is based on Marx's idea that the proletariat has revolutionary potential because of its relation to the means of production. This concept has been developed into notions of a feminist standpoint based on the sexual division of labor. Since early feminist standpoint theories, such as the work of Nancy Hartsock and Dorothy Smith, feminist standpoint theorists have developed increasingly sophisticated models of social consciousness. One example is Patricia Hill Collins's work on black feminist thought, which examines the relationship of gender to race/class standpoints. The most important innovation in standpoint theory is the differentiation between an essentialist and a materialist approach to epistemological patterns, that is, a "biological" versus an "achieved" standpoint, as Michelle Renee Matisons describes it in *Systems, Standpoints, and Subjects: Marxist Legacies in U.S. Feminist Theories.* Instead of basing analysis on the vague and imprecise category of "women" (who are somehow "different" from each other yet still form one analytic category), standpoint theorists believe that complex demographics, based on race and class as well as gender, shape knowledge.[42] The notion of epistemic particularities is also present in the *mestiza.* Here, economic and racial positioning are joined in their production of knowledge by psychosocial processes particular to the cultural borderlands

the *mestiza* negotiates. Her transgressive consciousness is not a biological essence, but a product of the repressive conditions in which she finds herself. Accordingly, while Butler's female protagonists are always women of color, she is careful not to essentialize their standpoint. For Butler, standpoint is not rooted in biological factors, nor based in an exclusive, transcendental, racial and cultural memory, but developed from material and cultural experiences grown from social formations. Thus the opposition of female versus male power is a metaphor for differing epistemic positions, not an essential polarization.

Monstrous Bodies

Despite the displayed power of some of Butler's female figures, they are mostly positioned as others. The creatures in Butler's work, her symbolic cyborgs, have in common their "marked bodies" (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 378). In addition, they also *reproduce* marked bodies, deformed monsters who redefine embodied subjectivity. This state of being marked represents the boundary experience, which on one hand lies outside of any power position, but on the other is firmly grounded in the system of power that repudiates the existence of the other. "Monsters share more than the word's root with the verb 'to demonstrate'; monsters signify" (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 378). Butler discloses symbolic and sociological markers of bodies defined by power. Before Rufus, Dana's white ancestor in *Kindred,* begins whipping slaves himself, he is one of the oppressed. The welts that his father inflicts on him define him as heteronomous and turn him into an ally of the slaves: "Tom Weylin had probably marked his son more than he knew with that whip" (*Kindred* 39). This subject position changes the instant that Rufus finds his place within the system as a white male: "He's no good. He's all grown up now, and part of the system. He could feel for us a little when his father was running things—when he wasn't entirely free himself. But now, he's in charge" (*Kindred* 223). Butler thematizes this aspect of marked subject positions, especially through representations of women's bodies marked by experiences and stigma. Dana loses an arm when she returns from her time travel after killing Rufus. Her maimed condition represents the scars inflicted by the system onto her body: she is "not coming back whole" (Butler in Kenan 498). The experience took a part of her—literally.

Lilith fears the marking her children will suffer; these markings will marginalize them from central human experiences and will define

them as other: " 'But it won't be human,' she whispered. 'It will be a thing. A monster' " (*Dawn* 246). In the end, it is the monster that promises a new beginning: with her alien-human hybrids—babies with tentacles—Butler creates what Haraway calls an "other order of difference" (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 379), which is not formulated in the context of the order governed by the white man's story of the Oedipus complex.[43] This order of difference is not situated in the realm of the father, where the narrative of traditional science fiction so often takes place.[44] Instead, these monster children, signifiers of both racial impurity and a lack of origin and history—and thus of a prescribed social order—redefine the basis of "human" subjectivity.[45]

In addition to rejecting patriarchal family narratives, Butler contrasts (human) stigma with the acceptance of difference, especially with her use of metaphors of shape-shifting and transformation. Alanna, as a "mental chameleon," and Anyanwu, as a shape-shifter, both have transformation at the center of their identities. Constructs, products of Oankali-human cross-breeding, gain transformational ability through the gene exchange: "You'll be able to change yourself. What we can do from one generation to the next—changing our form, reverting to earlier forms—you'll be able to do within yourself" (*Imago* 26). The hybridity of construct children also reflects the notion of the *mestiza* as a metaphor for impure resistance. Like the cyborg, she represents a consciousness that grows from more than one origin, which cannot be separated into fragmented parts.

All of Butler's female figures share a marginalized position, an origin that is somehow connected to African ancestors, and the ability to live between and cross boundaries and to negotiate power.[46] It is in these characteristics that their power lies. Similarly, the figure of the cyborg is utopian in a postmodern sense of boundary transgressions; it does not correspond to the traditional sociopolitical definition of the term "utopian." Recombination and transmutation are emphasized, rather than conquest and assimilation. Butler's female protagonists adapt to new situations, refuse power over others, have compassion, and accept and respect differences. Butler utilizes the typical science fiction metaphor, the cyborg, in innovative ways, especially in regard to its boundary-transgressing function. She does not create "real" cyborgs, creatures made from organic and inorganic material, but creates figures that can be understood as "cyborgian," especially on a mental level.[47] The confusion of boundaries that Haraway advocates is mani-

fested in Butler's symbols of integration and appreciation of difference, which reveal the "politics of differentiation" at the same time as they suggest alternative forms of approaching difference. Like the cyborg, her figures are situated within the system, but outside its power structures. Only from that position can power be redistributed.

Butler's transgressive narratives, in their often painful negotiations of power and violent boundary crossings, never offer simple, one-dimensional solutions to feminist concerns. Yet, as complex tales of colonization, as well as of migration, they do create powerful moments of resistance, even if these are never without contradictions. Butler's most valuable contributions to feminist discourse lie in the concepts of feminist agency within her strange worlds and alien constellations—in her creation of places that the cyborg, nomad, *mestiza,* and migrant would recognize as their own.

of the Mother-Goddess with her infinite forms, finds an origin, whereas the masculine divine principle that Doro represents fails. With Anyanwu and Doro, Butler also introduces elements of African mythology. Doro, in Nubian, means "the direction from which the sun comes, East," whereas in the language of the Igbo Anyanwu means "sun;" the figure of Anyanwu is modeled after an Onitsha-priestess in Igbo mythology. According to the myth, Atagbusi was a shapeshifter, who aided her people with her medical healing powers (see Butler in Kenan, 499–500).

22. This epistemic privileging of the slave perspective is also the basis for feminist standpoint theory, such as Patricia Hill Collins's concept of black women's standpoint, which she introduces in *Black Feminist Thought* and further develops in *Fighting Words*. See also Donna Haraway's theory of situated knowledges in "Situated Knowledges."

23. Even though the Missionaries' reverence for the "One" also corresponds with Judaic and Islamic monotheism, they are distinctly "coded" as Christian, so their name reflects the Christian tradition of systematically converting "heathens."

24. Teri Ann Doerksen's "Octavia E. Butler: Parables of Race and Difference" discusses in detail the colonial oppression suffered by the humans at the hands of the alien natives of the destination planet in "Bloodchild." She convincingly argues that in the short story, "Butler has highlighted the racial problems evident in contemporary culture by creating a close allegorical parallel, a parable, of Western culture, replacing our dominant racial paradigm with another in order to create an awareness of oppression in a reader blinded by familiarity" (26). However, Doerksen does not credit Butler for the subtle complications of the narrative. She observes that "the human colony has tried to escape its 'otherness' as defined by Terran prejudice and has instead stepped into a closely parallel situation of domination by an alien race" (25), yet she fails to mention the hostility the humans bring with them, their refusal to engage in negotiations with the native alien race. Thus the alien tells the human child: "We saw them as people and gave them the Preserve when they still tried to kill us as worms" (25). The containment of the humans on Preserves, of course, echoes the genocide of Native American tribes and the banishment of the few survivors onto reservations. The complication (and historical irony) added by Butler is that it is the *arriving* people who are colonized—the image of British royal subjects or American "Patriots" on reservations is quite powerful. The oscillating slave-master-slave positions in "Bloodchild" are mirrored in the colonizing aspirations of the Missionaries in *Survivor*, who flee persecution by the Patternists and end up trying to oppress others—ultimately failing in their attempt to do so.

2. The Alien in Us

1. See Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* in which she discusses the dominating character of Western dualisms. Dualisms construct identities similar to those in Hegel's model of master and slave, in which the master denies his dependence on the slave's existence and bases his worldview on his own experiences (Plumwood 42–68).

2. One narrative element in which both of these contradictory themes are manifested is in the ambivalent role of the Oankali, the alien species in the *Xenogenesis* series. While I examine their oppressive presence as colonizers in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2, I focus on their alternative, anti-essentialist logic of identity, which allows for a progressive rethinking of difference and identity. Butler resolves these contra-

dictions less on a theoretical level—it is precisely the ambivalence of these relations that she emphasizes—than through narrative closure: through plot developments and the characters' relationships with each other.

3. The fundamental conflict of the human as creator of independently acting creatures was introduced into English-speaking literature with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* first published in 1818. The ethical question of the "becoming human" of machines did not begin to be frequently discussed in science fiction literature until the 1950s (see Scholes and Rabkin 168, 180–83). In film, this issue was problematized as early as 1926, in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis.*

4. In her early work, Butler anticipates the current revived debate on humanness and the definition of human rights. For example, Judith Butler, in her explorations in *Undoing Gender* of "livable lives" and "unlivable lives," which are governed by norms, returns to the fundamental question of what constitutes the category "human" in the face of global violence, terrorism, and racial, sexual, and gender oppression.

5. Examples include Robin Roberts, *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction;* Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine;* and Marleen Barr, *Future Females: A Critical Anthology, Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond,* and *Alien to Femininity.*

6. This juxtaposition is discernible in the violence that Lilith encounters from humans she "wakes," and is staggering in *Clay's Ark,* where the animal-like mutants are contrasted with the extreme violence of the "car families," who in a mind-numbing scene rape one of the girl protagonists to death. As I discuss elsewhere, in *Parable of the Sower* Butler portrays human violence uncurbed by social control, and in *Parable of the Talents* she presents social control based on hatred of difference (see Melzer, "'All that you touch you change': Utopian Desire and the Concept of Change in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*").

7. In "Identity, Meaning, and the African American," Michael Hanchard quotes Ellen Rooney as defining "liberal pluralism in its critical form as a 'heterogeneous yet hegemonic discourse'" and adds: "It masks struggle for voice inherent in symbolic encounters with a myth of egalitarian representation" (232).

8. Only since the New Wave of the 1960s and 1970s has a more complex approach to un-humans appeared in science fiction literature (and, in the 1970s, in film), in which the perspective of the other becomes part of the narrative's structure. It is interesting that in the late 1990s a backlash has taken place, especially in mainstream Hollywood films, that returns to the tradition of constructing the other as evil and a threat to humankind. This backlash can be seen in films such as *Independence Day, Starship Troopers,* and *Pitch Black,* some of which stand in the tradition of the *Alien* series, which links horror with science fiction. But even science fiction movies that tap into the adventure-tale marketing pool, such as the *Star Wars* film *The Phantom Menace* (1999), are surprisingly racist in their depiction of aliens. In the *Star Wars* film, Jar Jar, the gentle but rather stupid alien with a Caribbean-English accent, is a racist representation.

9. The typical science fiction themes of colonization and war, which—despite *Star Trek*'s prime directive—are still prevalent in popular science fiction, are heavily criticized by Butler.

10. See Wolmark's *Aliens and Others* for a discussion of this scene in regard to Butler's use of gendered language: the alien immediately is referred to as "he" since power is associated with a patriarchal order (Wolmark 31).

11. This problem of being forced into the position of "collaborator" echoes conflicts within colonized/occupied peoples' identities and their relationship to the colonizers.

12. Multiplicity is also the main component of the subjectivity developed in Jane Flax's *Disputed Subjects.* According to Flax, a person perceives herself, not as one constant personality, who gradually develops with a basic core as an ultimate reference point, but as *being* more than one, echoing Trinh Minh-ha's "infinite layers that form 'I' " (Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other* 94). In correlation with Trinh, Flax locates political agency within this structure of identity: "I believe a unitary self is unnecessary, impossible, and a dangerous illusion. Only multiple subjects can invent ways to struggle against domination that will not merely recreate it" (93).

13. The Western subject's fear of being absorbed by some consciousness with no separate identity (and thus no difference) is prevalent in science fiction film as well. This fear is manifested in the Borg in *Star Trek—Next Generation,* who attempt to assimilate humanity into their collective in the film *Star Trek—First Contact.*

14. The "essence" of the Oankali is not based on a homeland/place or on an original form, but transcends geographical and genetic boundaries. This fact gives the term "essence" a new meaning that is derived, not from stagnation and stability, but rather from transformation and flexibility.

15. Concerns with the simultaneous ideological construction and appropriation of difference by dominant culture are also part of feminist postcolonial theory. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat warn of the depoliticizing effect of the new hype around "multiculturalism" in their introduction to *Dangerous Liaisons:* "The ever present danger in the formulation of multicultural agendas has been the risk of sliding into forms of liberal pluralism to which existing cultural regimes can easily prove hospitable" because those forms are not threatening (5).

16. In *Clay's Ark* and the two *Parable* novels, she also emphasizes class and its connections to race.

17. Teri Ann Doerksen analyzes some of the analogies between science fiction metaphors and race relations in "Octavia E. Butler: Parables of Race and Difference."

18. Butler destabilizes behavior based on gender ideologies that we perceive as "natural" when she constructs Kohns' behavior in *Survivor* as guided by the color of their fur, rather than their gender. While male humans try to protect the "weaker sex" (i.e. women), Kohns try to protect their "nonfighters," who are Kohns with little or no blue in their fur (see *Survivor* 125). Both categories are disclosed as constructed.

19. Even though telepathic abilities are not externally visible markers of difference, their categorization is mirrored in external consequences. Also, the ability of the telepaths to communicate mentally with each other makes the "passing" of mutes as telepathic nearly impossible, just as passing for a person of a different race is made difficult by the visibility of skin color as an external marker.

20. The traditional reception of science fiction is apparent in Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin's history of the genre. In a discussion of the hero's relationship to the father of the heroine, they refer to her as the "sexual object" (184) that makes possible within the world of science fiction a reconstitution of order "that the father figure and the hero share" (184). The authors then conclude: "Hence, the imaginary being reminds *us* of *our* ambivalences toward *our* father figures, those who stand for the rules of society which, as *we* are growing up, *we* question" (185, emphasis mine). The "we" is obviously aimed at a male audience.

21. Only Amber in *Patternmaster* is openly bisexual; the shape-shifter Anyanwu in *Wild Seed* partners with women when she takes on a male form, and Lauren in *Talents* admits a sexual attraction to a woman but does not act on it.

22. See Chapter 6 for a queer reading of Butler's narratives.

23. Butler criticizes gendered anticolonial, nationalist rhetoric, as well as colonial ideologies, that treat colonialism as a struggle between colonizing *men* and colonized *men,* and in which native women become objects/symbols of the contested territory.

24. In Butler's work, aggression, and the potential for violence, is a male-defined characteristic. Lilith's son, Akin, who is the first male construct child, is a threat to the genetic exchange between humans and Oankali. He carries the (male human) potential to be aggressive, which, together with his Oankali abilities, could be lethal (see *Rites* 9–10). The Oankali make biology responsible for men's higher level of aggression, whereas, as Green observes, "the women attribute [the higher level of the human contradiction in males] to conditioning that trains women to demonstrate their skills through nurture rather than force" (186). This provocative and unresolved contradiction within her narratives is typical for Butler.

25. Tension between formal marriage, representative of social order, on the one hand, and personal independence, on the other, is often an issue in Butler's narratives. Anyanwu in *Wild Seed* and Mary in *Mind of My Mind* are being forced into marriage by Doro; Amber decides against marriage in *Patternmaster;* and in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents,* marriage is depicted as an outdated social custom that is modeled after the (white) upper middle class and is especially restrictive for women (*Sower* 79–80). In the *Xenogenesis* series, marriage becomes obsolete—bonds are defined through family relations and reproduction. In *Survivor,* reproduction is primary: Alanna becomes "automatically" the wife of Diut, a Tehkohn, once she expects their child; only after conception do partners enter a monogamous relationship. The ceremony to welcome the child into the community is simultaneously the parents' wedding ritual (*Survivor* 179–80).

26. Butler further destabilizes binary categories of gender/sexuality through Anyanwu's androgyny in *Wild Seed* and a three-gender/sex system in the *Xenogenesis* series, as well as through the concept of shape-shifting in both.

27. See Elyce Helford's analysis of "Bloodchild," " 'Would you really rather die than bear my young?' " for a detailed discussion of Butler's treatment of differences based on gender, race, and species.

28. See Wolmark for an elaboration of the lack of portraits of homosexuality in *Xenogenesis* (*Aliens and Others* 37).

29. The only boundary established by Oankali is through smell: kinship groups differ in their smell. Within the kinship group, individual families possess their own distinct smell, developed during the time the family is founded, which finds its origin with the ooloi. These differences function less as exclusion than as a connection; the effects of the smells are mainly affirmative.

30. The crossing of sensual boundaries that enables (or rather forces) an inclusive dealing with difference is echoed in the symptom of "sharing" in the *Parable* novels. A neurological disorder, induced by drug abuse by the parents, transmits any physical condition (pain or pleasure) that the sharer witnesses, no matter what her/his relationship is to the person experiencing the pain/pleasure.

31. See Wolmark for a discussion of the gender-specific violence the enforced insemination of Lilith represents (*Aliens and Others* 35).

32. See Angela Davis's *Women, Race, and Class* for a discussion of the construction of sexual violence between the white man (slave owner) and the black woman (slave) as racial power over black people.

33. Ana Castillo points out the complexity of the identity commonly described as Chicana or Latina: "The woman in the United States who is politically self-described as Chicana, mestiza in terms of race, and Latina or Hispanic in regards to her Spanish-speaking heritage, and who numbers in the millions in the United States cannot be summarized nor neatly categorized" (1).

34. It is important to remember the different dislocations produced by different trajectories of migration, a point that sometimes recedes into the background of Davies's use of the term "migratory subjectivity," which emphasizes the experience of dislocation per se as its defining factor (Davies, *Black Women*).

35. The concept of nomadic subjectivity is not restricted to physical migration/travel, but is a metaphor that refers to a "critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 5).

36. As Davies puts it for the African Diaspora, "The political basis of identity formation is a central issue in all of these interrogations. . . . [T]he reconstruction of 'Africa' as homeland occurred, also for management of reality" (Davies, *Black Women* 10).

37. Two examples of cybernetic organisms are those imagined by Joanna Russ in *The Female Man* and Marge Piercy in *He, She, and It.*

38. Other writers who problematize genetic engineering include Rebecca Ore and Ann Thomson.

39. It is interesting that the protagonists in Butler's work who come the closest to the "technical" definition of the cyborg as a half-human are nonfemale: Akin, Lilith's first construct son in *Adulthood Rites,* and a later child of hers, Jodahs, the first construct ooloi—the Oankali's third gender. Both possess both human and alien gene material. In "Bloodchild" the connection between aliens and humans is established through a boy who significantly inhabits the gender role usually prescribed to "woman."

40. In "Cyborg Feminism: The Science Fiction of Octavia E. Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa," Catherine S. Ramirez gives a good overview of boundary transgressions inherent in the writings of Octavia Butler, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Donna Haraway.

41. See "The Wise Witches" by Thelma Shinn in *Conjuring* for an article that argues for elements of conjuring in Butler. In contrast, Madhu Dubey, in "Folk and Urban Communities in African-American Women's Fiction: Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*," argues that Butler actually counters culturally exclusive notions of black women's subject positions, a point I also explore in "'All that you touch you change': Utopian Desire and the Concept of Change in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents.*"

42. In *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice,* Patricia Hill Collins develops the idea that complex demographics, based on race and class as well as gender, shape knowledge. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between gender and racial/class consciousness, see Matisons, Chapter 3, in which she further differentiates the "achieved" standpoint into "immediate" and "mediated" standpoints.

43. Classical Freudian theory, which rests on the white, bourgeois model of the nuclear family whose gender roles are based in social power, has been challenged by critical race theory. The American slave family is one case study where gender roles (father/mother)

do not correspond to classical Freudian family structures since the slave father is not legally and socially the father (and often not part of the family as such), and frequently the father is the white slave owner. Butler's narratives contribute to the debate that destabilizes traditional approaches to psychoanalysis.

44. See Scholes and Rabkin for a historical discussion of the father-son narrative in science fiction (165–83).

45. In "Posthuman Bodies and Agency in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis,*" Naomi Jacobs discusses the un-human, alien bodies in Butler's narratives in the context of the discourse on the "posthuman" and reads them as a critique of the humanist subject.

46. The secondary female characters in Butler's writing often mirror the tense relationships/situations in which the protagonists find themselves. They complete the characters of the protagonists, produce contradictions, or serve as explanations for circumstances that are challenged by the protagonists (see F.S. Foster 40–42).

47. Examples of "actual" cyborgs in feminist science fiction may be found in Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It;* Vonda McIntyre's short stories, such as "Fireflood"; and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man.*

Introduction to Part II

1. Feminist scientists have shown how scientific theories and methodologies, instead of being neutral, construct sexual, racial, and class differences by interpreting biology in connection with existing ideologies. See Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women;* Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men* and *Sexing the Body;* Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions;* Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism;* and Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science.*

2. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, in *Film Art: An Introduction,* list and explains different filming techniques and their role in the viewer's interaction with the film. Also see Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction.*

3. I am referring here to the cinematic privileging of the "male gaze" in narrative films, which psychoanalytic feminist film theories problematize. The most frequently cited article in this context is Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published in 1975, in which she introduces her psychoanalytical analysis of traditional narrative film. Mulvey argues that "mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (30), locking the image of woman into the fantasizing gaze of the male spectator. Mulvey's theory has been extensively criticized for its exclusive psychoanalytic framework, which does not account for identities outside of the heterosexual, white matrix, yet the idea of a privileged gaze (i.e. a privileged identity within the audience) is still a useful concept within film studies.

4. One example of positions of counter-readings is the lesbian viewer, who resists the heterosexual structure of the narrative. This point is developed in Shameem Kabir, *Daughters of Desire: Lesbian Representations in Film;* Patricia White, *unInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability;* and Tamsin Wilton, ed., *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image.*

5. In his study of British youth subcultures, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* Dick Hebdige examines how groups of young people appropriate mundane objects of mainstream culture and, by giving them specific meanings, create styles (such as the safety pin in punk culture) that reflect their subcultural affiliation and posi-