The development of technological expertise requires not only financial resources but also cultural capital. Nerd identity has been a critical gateway to this technocultural access, mediating personal identities in ways that both maintain normative boundaries of power and offer sites for intervention.[1] This essay examines the figure of the nerd in relation to race and gender identity and explores the ways in which attempts to circumvent its normative gatekeeping function can both succeed and fail.

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Nerd Identity As a Gatekeeper in Science and Technology Participation

Turkle (1984) vividly describes nerd self-identity in her ethnographic study of undergraduate men at MIT. In one social event "they flaunt their pimples, their pasty complexions, their knobby knees, their thin, underdeveloped bodies" (196); in interviews they describe themselves as losers and loners who have given up bodily pleasure in general and sexual relations in particular. But Turkle notes that this physical self-loathing is compensated for by technological mastery; hackers, for example, see themselves as "holders of an esoteric knowledge, defenders of the purity of computation seen not as a means to an end but as an artist's material whose internal aesthetic must be protected" (207).

While MIT computer science students might be an extreme case, other researchers have noted similar phenomena throughout science and technology subcultures. Noble (1992) suggests that contemporary cultures of science still bear a strong influence from the clerical aesthetic culture of the Middle Ages Latin Church, which rejected both women and bodily or sensual pleasures. He points out that the modern view of science as an opposite of religion is quite recent, and that even in the midst of twentieth-century atheist narratives, science (and "applied" technological pursuits such as creating artificial life or minds) continues to carry transcendent undertones. Noble's historical argument easily combines with Turkle's social psychology of nerd self-image.

Normative gender associations are not the only restrictions that nerd identity places on technoscience access. In an essay whose title contains

the provocative phrase "Could Bill Gates Have Succeeded If He Were Black," Amsden and Clark (1995) note that the lack of software entrepreneurship among African Americans cannot simply be attributed to lack of education or start-up funds, since both are surprisingly low requirements in the software industry. Rather, much of the ability of white software entrepreneurs appears to derive from their opportunities to form collaborations through a sort of nerd network—either teaming with fellow geeks (Bill Gates and Paul Allen at Microsoft) or pairing up between "suits and hackers" (Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak at Apple).

But if nerd identity is truly the gatekeeper for technoscience as an elite and exclusionary practice, it is doing a very inadequate job of it. First, while significant gaps are still present, there has been a dramatic increase in science and technology scholastic performance and career participation by women and underrepresented minorities since the 1960s (Campbell, Hombo, and Mazzeo 1999); yet during that time period nerd identity has become a more and not less prominent feature of the social landscape. Second, this change has been far stronger in closing the gender gap than in closing the race gap. For example, in the 1990s the gender gap in scholastic science performance for seventeen-year-olds was significantly lower, while the gap between black and white seventeen-year-olds remained the same. Yet Noble and Turkle portray gender/sexuality, not race, as the overriding feature of nerd identity (Turkle does not, for example, offer any reflections about the possibility of racial identity in her comments about "pasty complexions"). Finally, we might note that in comparison to, say, Hitler's Aryan *Übermensch*, the geek image is hardly a portrait of white male superiority.

Indeed, the more we examine it, the more nerd identity seems less a threatening gatekeeper than a potential paradox that might allow greater amounts of gender and race diversity into the potent locations of technoscience, if only we could better understand it. Of course, to the extent that geekdom fails to create such barriers—to the extent that it allows women and underrepresented minorities to fully participate in technoscience without being nerds—one can simply ignore it. But what happens when we fuse the ostensibly white male subculture of nerds with its race and sex opposites? To what extent might nerd identity become one of the *fracta* that can help open the gates?[3]

The Nerd in Historical Perspective

A good history of the American nerd has yet to be written, but its starting point might be in the radio amateurs of the early twentieth century, start-

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ing with teenage "wireless clubs" in the 1920s.[4] In an interview with Mark Dery (1994, 192) science fiction (SF) writer Samuel Delaney notes this connection: "The period from the twenties through the sixties that supplies most of those SF images was a time when there was always a bright sixteen- or seventeen-year old around who could fix your broken radio. . . . He'd been building his own crystal radios and winding his own coils since he was nine. . . . And, yes, he was about eighty-five percent white."

These (predominantly) young white males were, however, distinctly lower in class status than the figure of the intellectual or "egghead" of the same period. A good illustration of the distinction can be seen in the historical drama *Quiz Show*. In this film about a television game show in the 1950s, upper-class WASP Charles Van Doren beats geeky, working-class Jew Herbie Stempel, to the great relief of the quiz show staff: "At least now we got ourselves a real egghead, and not a freak." The implication is that Stempel's nerd challenge threatens both race and class boundaries for intellectual status.

After World War II the broad category of "electronic hobbyist" fused ham radio operators with dimestore science fiction, model trains, stereophonic sound, and mail-order kits. The Cold War era emphasis on science education (as well as veterans' education funding) drove these hobbyists and their more scholarly counterparts closer together. While the wholesome image of a Boy Scout merit badge in chemistry underscores the normative side of these postwar nerds, there was always the danger of their attachments to categories of the artificial or unnatural. In the 1955 film *Rebel without a Cause*, Sal Mineo's character, John Crawford, gives us one of the first screen appearances of the nerd. Nicknamed "Plato" for his bookish habits, he rides a scooter rather than a motorcycle and is seen at one point primping his hair before a photo of screen star Alan Ladd. A loner who lacks the tough demeanor exhibited by his male classmates, he appears to have a crush on the film's protagonist, James Dean. Plato's implied homosexuality is a warning for future generations of would-be geeks. Nerd identity will come at a price, threatening the masculinity of its male participants.

In the cultural logic of late-twentieth-century America, masculinity bears a particular relation to technology. Being a "real man" is to claim one's physiology in muscle and testosterone; male-associated technologies tend to involve physical labor (lawnmowers and power drills), subduing nature through force (trucks and tractors), and physical violence (tanks and guns). More masculine technologies tend to be seen as concrete, massive, and having direct physical effects. The more abstract artifice of science does not seem nearly so testosterone-drenched; it is easy to see how the artificial spaces of mathematics and computing can be framed

in opposition to manly identity. Thus the opposition between the more abstract technologies and normative masculinity keep nerd identity in its niche of diminished sexual presence.[5] How does this normative gender dichotomy compare to similar contrasts in racial identity?

In his analysis on the history of race in biology, Gould (1996, 401–12) notes that although the racial categories proposed by Linnaeus in 1758 were based only on geographic distinctions, in 1776 German naturalist J. F. Blumenbach extended the Linnaean categories to form an evolutionary framework: two lines of "degeneration" from an original "Caucasian" (a term he coined for the supposed origin near Mt. Caucasus) to Asians and Africans. Ironically, Blumenbach was motivated by his conviction in the unity of human beings—he opposed the claim for separate origins of humans on different continents—but that did not stop succeeding generations of racist scholars from using his work for their claims of an evolutionary hierarchy (and thus a hierarchy of genetically determined intelligence). Blumenbach's categories were quickly collapsed into a single ladder of evolutionary "advancement," with Africans at the bottom, Asians in the middle, and whites on top. In the postmodern era we have seen a return to Blumenbach's dichotomy; the best publicized have been *The Bell Curve* by Murray and Herrnstein and the pseudoscience of Phillip Rushton (1995). Much like Emily Martin's analysis of flexibility in postmodern representations of the immune system, these examples of postmodern racism are also marked by a flexible designation of particular characteristics: orientalism and primitivism.

Primitivist racism operates by making a group of people too concrete and thus "closer to nature"—not really a culture at all but rather beings of uncontrolled emotion and direct bodily sensation, rooted in the soil of sensuality. Orientalist racism operates by making a group of people too abstract and thus "arabesque"—not really a natural human but one who is devoid of emotion, caring only for money or an inscrutable spiritual transcendence.[6] Thus exists the racist stereotype of Africans as oversexual and Asians as undersexual, with "whiteness" portrayed as the perfect balance between these two extremes. Given these associations, it is no coincidence that many Americans have a stereotype of Asians as nerds and of African Americans as anti-nerd hipsters. Pop musician Brian Eno, for example, starkly states this race/geek alignment in a *Wired* magazine interview: "Do you know what a nerd is? A nerd is a human being without enough Africa in him" (Kelly 1995, 149). But what does it mean to use nerd identity as the grounds for contesting these links between race, sex, and technology? The following four examples of black nerds illuminate some of the possibilities for dislocating (or at least broadening) these narrow normative roles in the ecology of race and technoculture.
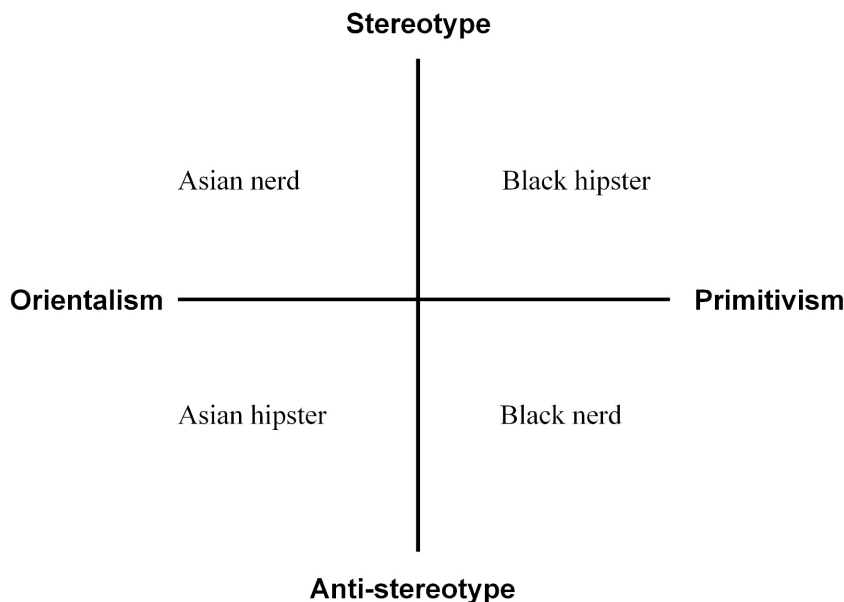
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Figure 1: Racism and Reversal

African American Exemplars

Let's begin with the personal style invoked by Malcolm X. At first nothing seems more incongruous than associating a founding father of black nationalism with pimple-faced computer geeks. But Malcolm's horned-rimmed glasses and insistent intellectualism recall the earlier figure of the egghead—not quite a nerd, but only because he needed to challenge the class restrictions as much as the mental stereotypes (in other words, challenging Herbie Stempel would not be nearly as powerful as taking on Charles Van Doren). In the section of his autobiography covering his dramatic self-education in prison, Malcolm repeatedly attributes all credit to Allah, his messenger Elijah Muhammad, and his struggle for black identity. Yet the most overtly eggheaded example in his autobiography is his passion for the debate over the identity of Shakespeare: "No color involved here; I just got intrigued over the Shakespearean dilemma" (1992, 213).

While the Shakespeare example proves Malcolm's cultural intellectualism, his persistent references to mathematics provide a kind of underlying nerd power: "I've often reflected upon such black veteran numbers men as West Indian Archie. If they had lived in another kind of society, their exceptional mathematical talents might have been better used"

Figure 2: Jaleel White playing Steve Urkel in *Family Matters*. Warner Bros.

(135). "When [Jackie Robinson] played . . . no game ended without my refiguring his average up through his last turn at bat" (179). "Allah taught me mathematics" (quoting Elijah Muhammad, 237). "[The University of Islam] had adult classes which taught, among other things, mathematics" (240). And in a television interview, his explanation for the new surname: "X stands for the unknown, as in mathematics." By invoking the abstract rationality of math, Malcolm stood in shocking contrast to primitivist expectations of white America.

Taking Malcolm's oppositional equation to a logical extreme, in January 1996 African American computer wiz Anita Brown launched the Web site Black Geeks Online.[7] Dedicated to "bridging the widening gap between technology haves and have-nots," she explains the aims of this community service organization in the following introductory passage:

> Why? Our experience indicates that from South Central to South Jersey computing is a hard sell in "the 'hood." Unlike baggy pants, hip-hop music and drugs, Information Technology (IT) is rarely marketed to African Americans. Black "geeks" rarely appear in media ads; there are few (if any) hardware and software ads in *Emerge, Essence, Vibe, The Source, Black Enterprise*; and the "nerd" and "geek"

images associated with computer professionals are still considered "uncool."

Brown's "uncool" assertion is certainly supported by what is probably the best-known public figure of the black nerd, Jaleel White's Steve Urkel from the television sitcom *Family Matters* (figure 2).[8] Urkel was originally written into the show merely as a guest for one episode, but he quickly became the most popular character in the show. The winning combination of Urkel's uncool persona and black racial identity was partly due to White's own comedic genius, but his appeal also derives from a combination of popular American fascinations: on the one hand, opposing the myth of biological determinism, on the other, continuing the myth of Horatio Alger, who in this case must pull himself up not the financial ladder but the social status rungs of youth subculture.

While Urkle's geek persona is a signature, other technology-associated black television figures remain less nerd-identified. Consider, for example, the black characters on various iterations of the *Star Trek* series, such as communications officer Lieutenant Uhura (of the original series), chief engineer Geordi La Forge, chief of security Lieutenant Worf, and Whoopi Goldberg's Guinan (on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), Captain Benjamin Sisko (of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*), Vulcan security officer Officer Tuvok (of *Star Trek: Voyager*), and Travis Mayweather (of *Star Trek: Enterprise*). Out of a total of seven, only two—LeVar Burton's Geordi LaForge and Tim Russ's Tuvok—really qualify as nerds, and neither of them compares with the extraordinary geekiness of the teenaged Wesley Crusher from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.[9] Such limitations for black nerds can be illuminated through a comparison of the first series' Vulcan, Mr. Spock, with *Voyager*'s black Vulcan, Tuvok. Leonard Nimoy's Jewish identity readily orientalized Spock,[10] and as a result, Tuvok comes off as a kind of alien Tiger Woods: less nerdish than Spock since he is a security officer rather than a science officer (thus implying that black Vulcans are more physical or athletic). Even in outer space futures and alien landscapes, white access to technocultural identity remains supreme.

The career of African American actor Samuel L. Jackson also illuminates the figure of the black nerd in popular media. During the 1980s Jackson played a series of drug dealers and junkies,[11] but his increasing popularity allowed him greater control over his roles. As a result, he quickly switched to playing black nerds, including a computer hacker in *Jurassic Park*, a Pulitzer Prize–winning writer in *Amos and Andrew*, and a mathematical prodigy in *Sphere*. His role in *Sphere* is particularly illuminating in light of work by ethnographers of scientific culture such as Sharon Traweek.

Figure 3: Original design for Mace Windu, using the face of Industrial Light and Magic modeler Steve Alpin. © Lucasfilm Ltd. & ™ All Rights Reserved. Original Art by Iain McCaig
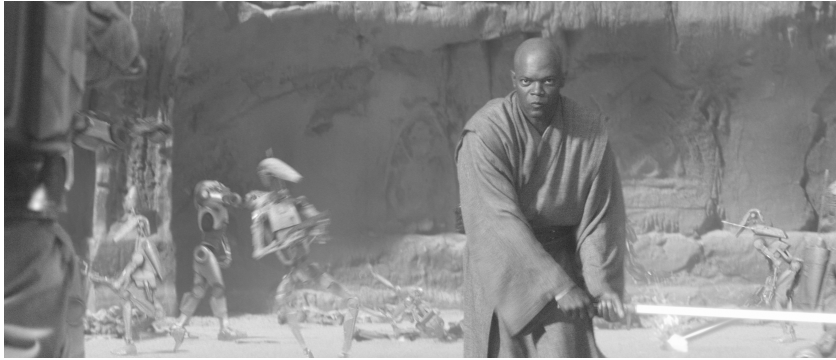
Figure 4: Samuel Jackson as Mace Windu in *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. Digital work by ILM. © 2002 Lucasfilm Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Used under authorization.

Traweek (1982) describes an event in which a graduate student of physics repeatedly stuffed bread into his mouth at a restaurant. Rather than discouraging these poor manners, his professors were delighted, calling the waiter to bring more bread. This and similar scenarios brought Traweek to the realization that the ability to "ignore the social" (and thus express one's dedication to the asocial, universal realm of physics) is considered to be a sign of a good physicist.

Similarly, Jackson's mathematics nerd in *Sphere* is so socially unaware that he unwittingly causes the vessel to run aground (while he is immersed in his favorite science fiction, Jules Verne's *2000 Leagues under the Sea*) with blissful ignorance. Jackson's own real-life dedication to the sci-fi genre is not trivial: after confessing his geek love for the *Star Wars* films to producer George Lucas, he achieved the ultimate nerd fantasy of playing a Jedi knight—Mace Windu—a role that originally called for a white actor (figures 3 and 4).

Promises and Problems in Strategies of Reversal

What can we conclude about the oppositional possibilities for the figure of the black nerd? Even if it was only in the world of fantasy, Jackson's agency in changing the racial composition of the Council of Jedi Knights was a hard-won victory. As Anita Brown of Black Geeks Online maintains, the contradiction between the cool of African American identity and the uncool of nerds is no coincidence; it is precisely this racialized intersection of technology and personal identity that functions as a selective gateway to technosocial power. There are, of course, limits to this strategy of technocultural identity reversal. We might, for example, focus

on the ways in which hegemonic whiteness allows itself to be defined as an unmarked signifier and thus can affirm its own identity through asocial or antisocial behavior, while blackness depends on an explicitly social identity (for example, if Traweek's geek grad student had followed proper decorum, or if Jackson's mathematician in *Sphere* had been obsessively reading Malcolm X, neither would properly perform as nerds). But such limits are best understood not as specific to African Americans but as a general problem in resistance to hegemonic norms. In order to understand the more general problematic, let's see how such reversals operate for other racial groups, such as Asian Americans, and other social categories, such as gender.

The compulsory cool of black culture is mirrored by a compulsory nerdiness for orientalized others such as Middle Eastern groups, groups from India, and Asian Americans. Just as the black nerd fuses the desexualized geek with a racial identity stereotyped as hypersexual, Asian American hip hop allows racial groups stereotyped as desexualized nerds to fuse with the hypersexual funk of rap music. Oliver Wang's superb analysis of Asian American hip hop (1999) points to the oppositional power of these Korean American Seoul Brothers and Chinese American homies; he notes that their work helps to expose some of the realities of struggling Asian immigrants in America. But Wang's analysis runs the danger of turning Asian American hip hop into a narrative of sameness; his argument could be read as saying that Asian American youth and black youth perform hip hop because both encounter similar challenges. Drawing such a conclusion would miss some of the ways that the local contexts of these two varieties of hip hop work in opposite directions. While African American hip hop affirms a kind of unapologetically stereotyped identity (which, as Rose [1994] points out, works as a mode of resistance when the refusal to apologize for "keepin' it real" is linked to demands for broader structural change), Asian American hip hop seeks to challenge comparable stereotypes of Asian American identity. Asian American hip hop is useful not because it embraces previously disparaged attributes, but because it questions what were previously the cherished attributes of America's "model minority"—not affirming negritude, but negating nerditude.

Similarly, female exclusion from the male domain of technology is mediated by the opposition between nerd sexual formations, which focus desire into male antisocial forms, and female youth gender formations, which emphasize strong sociality. Wakeford (1997) makes this point in her analysis of gender in Web site constructions. Focusing on sites such as GeekGirls and NerdGrrrls, Wakeford critiques the easy assumption that sexism is rampant throughout the Web yet makes clear the motivations for

creating these hybrid technogender identities. She suggests that "the words themselves are codes to explicitly subvert the easy appropriation of women, and to resist stereotypes" (60). These stereotypes are both exter-nal—mainstream sexist portraits of women as unable or unwilling to engage with computer technology at the level of personal identity—and internal—stereotypes from what GeekGirl creator RosieX calls "an older style feminist rhetoric which tended to homogenize all women" (60). Sim-ilarly, the triple "r" in NerdGrrrls signifies an alliance to the punk-feminist bands (such as Riot Grrrls) that produce a break with humanist or roman-tic strands of feminism while calling for new forms of gender identity and affinity. Just as Black Geeks Online was battling against both external racism and the internal affirmation of essentialist concepts (essentialism that forced an opposition between black identity and technological prowess), these grrrl geeks vow dual oppositional use of their technocultural identity.

The problem with this line of resistance is that, in the words of Donna Haraway, it is never enough to "simply reverse the semiotic values."[12] Despite their identity violations, these figures of technological and cultural hybridity often reproduce the very boundaries they attempt to overcome: not surprising since they are focused on attaching the "wrong" race to the "right" identity. While the figure of the black nerd contradicts the norma-tive opposition between African American identity and technology, it does so only by affirming the uncool attributes of technological expertise. The consequences can be tragic for the many African American students and teachers whose interest and identification with science and technology lead to accusations that they are "acting white." This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "peer proofing" by education researchers (Ford-ham 1991). But the public reaction to such reports is often problematic, implying that the need for change is purely internal to the black commu-nity,[13] rather than seeing a need to challenge the ways in which nerd iden-tity itself is constituted or to loosen the geek grip on technoscience access.

The Afrofuturist Alternative

It is for this reason that we see the turn to Afrofuturism. Rather than merely reverse the stereotypes, the Afrofuturists have attempted to forge a new identity that puts black cultural origins in categories of the artificial as much as in those of the natural. Afrofuturists blur the distinctions between the alien mothership and Mother Africa, the middle passage of the black Atlantic and the musical passages of the black electronic, the mojo hand and the mouse. Categories like "black nerd" lean too heavily on the crutch of universalism; they assume that nerd identity is only racially aligned by

Afrofuturists blur the distinctions between the alien mothership and Mother Africa, the middle passage of the black Atlantic and the musical passages of the black electronic, the mojo hand and the mouse.

a kind of shallow, arbitrary association and is otherwise universally available. Afrofuturism, in contrast, challenges both the implicit whiteness of nerds and the explicit technological absence of both realist and romantic black essentialisms.

That is not to say there is an absence of oppositional power in the reversal strategies; those who pioneered categories like "black nerd" or "Geek Girl"—Anita Brown, RosieX, the Seoul Brothers, and their fellow travelers—are my heroes. Nor should we have utopian illusions about Afrofuturism; it is fraught with problems stemming from its derivative relations to the original futurist movement, the elitism of academic influence, and, most problematically, its preference for artistic and literary approaches over science and technology, economics, politics, and other disciplines. But its ability to disrupt and redefine the boundaries of technocultural identity—the putative opposition between blackness and technology—rather than merely relocate the figures that inhabit them is important and controversial. Take, for example, the following discussion from the AfroFuturist listserv concerning DJ Spooky:

> I've heard more about who Spooky is than people playing his music. . . . I never hear about how great the music is . . . just that he's a nice guy. . . . Spooky has always seemed to me to be an over-intellectual nerd draped in hip drag . . . sort of like the "Junior" ("My Mama Used To Say") of electronica without the preppy clothes. . . . I'll be through to see if somethin' new is goin' down with Spooky next week on 18 January at Joe's Pub . . . maybe the cat'll put a foot in my grill with his power. . . . I hope so.

Even in the context of Afrofuturism, the figure of the nerd continues to haunt us.

Conclusion

Primitivist racism and orientalist racism maintain their power through mutually reinforcing constructions of masculinity, femininity, and technological prowess; yet mere reversal is never sufficient as an oppositional strategy. *Nerd* is still used in the pejorative sense; its routes to science and technology access are still guarded by the unmarked signifiers of whiteness and male gender. Groups such as the Afrofuturists seek alternative routes to circumvent the technocultural gateways of the geek. Black nerds, Asian hipsters, and geek grrrls both succeed and fail in challenging these boundaries, showing the limits of social transgression and the promise of reconfigured technocultural identity.

Notes

Figure 1 is by the author.

Thanks to Alondra Nelson, Kalí Tal, Nalo Hopkinson, Oliver Wang, Christopher Stackhouse, and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu for their inspiration and guidance.

1. A discussion on the origin of *nerd* ran on the Humanist listserv in May 1990. Although the Oxford English Dictionary cites *If I Ran the Zoo* by Dr. Seuss (1950) as the earliest written occurrence ("And then, just to show them, I'll sail to Ka-Troo and Bring Back an It-Kutch, a Preep and a Proo, a Nerkle, a Nerd, and a Seersucker, too!"), the earliest use in its contemporary sense was cited from student-produced burlesque at Swarthmore College in 1960. The term was not in common usage until the 1970s, when it became a stock phrase on the television show *Happy Days*.

I will be using the terms *geek* and *nerd* interchangeably here only for the sake of reducing repetition. The amount of writing devoted to making this distinction is surprising (see Katz 1997). Coupland's 1996 *Microserfs* offers several comparisons; perhaps the most illuminating is that "a geek is a nerd who knows that he is one."

3. Derrida 1978 (278) introduces the concept of rupture or disruption as an unacknowledged contradiction in what appear to be seamless structures of modernity. Lyotard 1984 (60), referring to these as "fracta" (from Mandelbrot's fractal geometry) more explicitly links such epistemological fissures to beneficial social change and recommends their study through an interdisciplinary "paraology." While Lyotard's account comes dangerously close to implying that fracta *automatically* lead to a more democractic society, I would agree with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) assessment that such "dispersions" or "unfixity" only represent opportunities, not guarantees, toward the praxis of radical democratic politics (in the case of this essay, toward a more democratic technoscience).

4. Bass 1985, for example, notes the obsession with home-brewed radio among two generations of physics students, and Stone 1995 cites the crystal radio as an epiphany in geek self-construction. The popular electronics company Radio Shack still bears this legacy. Smith and Clancey 1998 provides several essays on these "hobbyist worlds."

5. This association is illuminated by the tension it creates in the face of the rising economic value of information technologies; how can corporations mass-market products that are culturally associated with wimps and geeks? The film industry's answer is often to adopt an elaborate apparatus that replaces the keyboard and mouse with impressive physical agility carried out in a virtual reality interface: Michael Douglas in *Disclosure*, Keanu Reeves in *Johnny Mnemonic*, and Matt Frewer in *Lawnmower Man*. Another strategy is providing contexts that try to link information technology with sexual undercurrents; thus the recent spate of television commercials in which potential lovers are in a physically proximate space (a loud rock concert, a sudden cloudburst) but have relations mediated by a gadget they just bought. See Cockburn and Ormrod 1993 for more general discussion.

6. The foundational use of *orientalism* comes from Said (1979), but his definition is more concerned with a Western dichotomy of self/other than the contrast to primitivism used here. For other such contrasting examples, see Gilman 1999 on the orientalist/primitivist contrasts in conceptions of the body and Campbell 2000, 60 on differences in the "primitivizing" and "orientalizing" rhetoric of various narcotics discourse (for example, marijuana versus opium). See Chinn 2000 for a more general discussion in relation to technology.

7. Brown's many achievements range from fashion entrepreneurship to national Web awards. See www.blackgeeks.net for more information.

8. The show ran from 1989 to 1998. A top-ratings performer as part of ABC's Friday family night, the series moved to CBS in its last season.

9. Admittedly, Wil Wheaton's character would be hard to beat; in a recent interview the actor himself admitted: "I consider myself to be really nerdy. I like things that are traditionally nerdy, like role playing games. . . . I consider myself a geeky person and I revel in it. Geek pride and all those things" (see www.aint-it-cool-news.com/display.cgi?id=6627). But the racial roles for *Star Trek* characters have been disappointingly limited; consider, for example, the ways in which Uhura's duties were suspiciously close to those of a secretary. See Bernardi 1998 for a detailed survey.

10. For example, the Vulcan four-fingered "live long and prosper" salute was an impromptu adoption from Nimoy's childhood experience watching the *kohanim* give the hand gesture for *Shin* (first letter of *Shaddai*) at synagogue services.

11. For example, he played "Gang Member No. 2" in *Ragtime* (1981), "Hold-Up Man" in *Coming to America* (1988), and a crack addict in *Jungle Fever* (1991). Jackson recently commented: "We've been given a lot of stock roles over the years. The pimp is one of them, the drug addict another. Criminals, bank robbers, rapists. . . . When you get those roles, people will ask, 'Why did you take a role like that?' Well, number one, I needed the job" (see www.moviemaker.com/issues/21/jackson/21_jackson.htm).

12. This quotation (Haraway 1989, 162) refers to a postcard that reversed the King Kong/Fay Wray relationship: it shows a gigantic blonde woman reaching in through a skyscraper and snatching a terrified gorilla from its bed. Haraway remarks that such reversal always fails; later in her text she notes the same failure for feminist evolutionary theories that attempt to establish a primeval matriarchy in human origins. Her broader point is that hegemony is too much a world-making enterprise to be undone by a simple act of reversal; such acts can become part of, but never fully constitute, the path toward more just and sustainable futures.

13. Similarly, the Asian American community gets blamed for generating the need for stereotype contradictions. A *Time* magazine article titled "Kicking the Nerd Syndrome" concludes: "The fact that the best and brightest among Asian Americans are veering away from programmed patterns of success may be, in fact, another sign that the over-achievers are settling into the mainstream" (Allis 1991, 66).

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