

**A Partial  
Correction  
to the  
Representations of  
Earth Culture  
Sent Out to  
Extraterrestrials  
on the  
United States  
1977 Voyager  
Interstellar  
Space  
Probes**

Connie Samaras

New Langton Arts

Octavia Butler

## The Monophobic Response

At the moment, there are no true aliens in our lives. No Martians or Tau Cetians, to swoop down in advanced space ships, their attentions firmly fixed on the all-important us, no gods or devils, no spirits, angels, or gnomes...

Some of us know this. Deep within ourselves, we know it. We're on our own, the focus of no interest except our consuming interest in ourselves.

Is this too much reality? It is, yes. No one is watching, caring, extending a hand or taking on a little demonic blame. If we are adults, and past the age of having our parents come running when we cry, then our only help is ourselves and one another.

This is far too much reality.  
No wonder we need aliens.  
No wonder we're so good at creating aliens.  
No wonder we so often project alienness on one another.

This last, of course, has caused the worst of our problems. The human alien from another country, culture, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class... This is the tangible alien whom we can hurt or kill. This is the one we can blame for all manner of wickedness. This is the one we can feel superior to, the one we can feel certain isn't quite as human as we are. This is "they," "them," "those people!"

There is a vast, terrible sibling rivalry going on within the human family as we satisfy our desires for territory, dominance, and exclusivity. How strange: In our ongoing eagerness to create aliens, we express our need for them. And we express our deep fear of being alone and on our own in a universe that cares no more for us than it does for stones, for suns, for any fragments of itself. And yet we are unable to get along with those aliens closest to us, those aliens who are, of course, ourselves.

All the more need, then, to create more cooperative aliens -- supernatural beings or intelligences from the stars. Sometimes we just need someone to talk to -- someone we can trust to listen and care, someone who knows us as we rarely get to know one another, someone whose whole agenda is us. Like children, we need great and powerful parents and we need invisible friends. What is adult behavior, after all, but modified, disguised, excused childhood behavior. The more educated, the more sophisticated, the more

thoughtful we are, the more able we are to conceal the child within us. No matter. The child persists. And it's lonely.

Perhaps someday it will have truly alien company. Perhaps we will eventually communicate with other life elsewhere in the universe, or at least become aware of other life, distant, but real, existing with or without our belief, with or without our permission.

How will we be able to endure such a slight? The universe has other children. There they are -- the distant siblings we've longed for. What will we feel? Relief? Fascination? Terror? Hostility?

No doubt.

New siblings to rival. Perhaps for a moment -- only a moment -- this affront will bring us together, all human, and much more alike than different, much more alike than is good for our prickly pride. Humanity. "E pluribus unum" at last, a oneness focused on, and in a sense, fertilized by the certain knowledge of alien others. What will be born, then, of such a strange and ironic union?

Octavia Butler is an award winning science fiction writer who has received the Hugo Award twice and the Nebula Award. Her work investigates racial and feminist themes. She has published ten novels: *Parable of the Sower*, *Pattermaster*, *Mind of my Mind*, *Survivor*, *Kindred*, *Wild Seed*, *Clay's Ark*, *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*. She remarks about her work, "I write about people who do extraordinary things. It just turned out that it was called science fiction."