

neously the end of radical social dreaming and the achievement of an instantaneous "utopia" of the market. While drawing on the classical dystopia, writers such as Cadigan, Robinson, Butler, Piercy, and Le Guin transformed the genre into what has come to be known as the critical dystopia.⁴ These works carry out an intertextual intervention that negates the 1980s negation of the critical utopian moment and thus makes room for a new expression of the utopian imagination. These historically specific texts negotiate the necessary pessimism of the generic dystopia with a militant or utopian stance that not only breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the text's alternative world but also self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation that lingers in every dystopian account. Thus, Sargent has added "critical dystopia" to his list of definitions: "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" ("US Eutopias" 222).

In our own work, we read critical dystopias as texts that maintain a utopian impulse. Traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story, dystopias maintain utopian hope *outside* their pages, if at all; for it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape its pessimistic future. This option is not granted to the protagonists of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*. Winston Smith, Julia, John the Savage, and Lenina are all crushed by the authoritarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them. Conversely, the new critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work. In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective "ex-centric" subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule.

Another device that opens up these texts is an intensification of the practice of genre blurring. By self-reflexively borrowing specific conventions from other genres, critical dystopias more often blur the received boundaries of the dystopian form and thereby expand its creative potential for critical expression. Drawing on the feminist criticism of universalist assumptions—fixity and singularity, and neutral and objective knowledge—and recognizing the importance of difference, multiplicity, and complexity, of partial and situated knowledges, as well as of hybridity and fluidity, the critical dystopias resist genre purity in favor of an impure or hybrid text that renovates dystopian sf by making it formally and politically oppositional. In *Kindred*, for example, Butler revises the conventions of the time