Chapter 12
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Gaius Baltar: Colonialism Reimagined in *Battlestar Galactica*

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> *Brumaire was the second month in the French Republican Calendar. The month was named after the French word brume (mist) which occurs frequently at that time of the year.*
> Wikipedia – accessed 26 August 2007

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx notes that the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel had observed that "all the great events and characters of world history occur twice" (Marx 1852/2002:19). To this Marx added the wry observation that this repetition meant that the second time round things happened as farce. Few would disagree that this sentiment captures a key element of contemporary political drama. The U.S./British presence in parts of the Middle East seems to be a restaging of the old colonial script. The son follows the path of the father, not so much with a coup d'état as the 'little nephew' had followed Napoleon's overthrow of the French Government in 1799, but where the 'War-On-Terror' repeats and expands the atrocities of the Gulf War, where the manufacture of the Al Qaeda threat caricatures the Evil Empire of old, where the spectre of 'unfinished business' (in Vietnam) haunts the regime and is used to restore a pyrrhic 'pride' in the armed forces and the nation. We note many examples where the repertoire of demons and scenarios is doubled in horrific yet untenable parallel: Most recently, in August 2007, George W. Bush went so far as to think of Iraq as a new Vietnam and used this as reason for never contemplating an end to the war.[1]

The War-On-Terror is construed as permanent, cannot be stopped and brings new terrors. Yet it is a perpetual war machine: a repetition machine. The war rhetoric spews forth as if from a monstrous copier where the copies are reproduced with blurred lines generation after generation so that the initial inscriptions and intentions are lost in distortion. This is farce. Marx also goes on to say:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited. Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living […] they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from them their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes … (Marx 1852/2002:19)

The *Brumaire* is an instructive text. We can read it as a blueprint, not for the good life or the just society – as far too many read off the pages of *Kapital* looking for the answer – but as the model for a critical political deconstruction. We think the insights of long ago can be brought forward to today – and we are not by any means the first to do so. Our copy of the text is that translated in James Martin and Mike Cowlings '*Eighteenth Brumaire*' *(Post)modern Interpretations* – yet we are not so sure our interpretations are necessarily postmodern (this has happened before, it will happen again). What we want to do is take a new hold on those phrasings and insights of Marx – repetition, close analysis of stages and groupings, consideration of issues of representation (Darstellung, Vertreten – as Gayatri Spivak (1990:108) rightly draws attention) and the correct evaluation of the role of the varied layers of society, the social forces deployed by Bonaparte, the trade-offs and betrayals as instructive allegory for politics today, the place of the class-for-itself and the class-in-itself and the weight of 'potatoes in a sack' – we think that even the Brumaire can be reimagined.

To do this, we believe, and we want to believe, that nowhere in popular culture are the recurring neocolonial atrocities of today explored in such depth as in recent science fiction (SF) and 'political' TV. The ingredients for making this analogy are perhaps all too convenient, and are readily manufactured in television drama. Atrocity fiction includes a quick catalogue of necessarily barely coded themes: torture, detentions, soldiers in coffins, black-ops, rogue death squads, nefarious government secrecy and incompetent public administration. This is explicit in *24* or *The X Files, Dollhouse, Fringe or Firefly*; each could be charged with making entertainment out of suffering. We direct our attentions to the reimagined version of the *Battlestar Galactica* (2003, USA). We want to examine three major themes in this show, having to do with the struggles of political intrigue, the projection of anxieties about weapons and machines, and the status of human *being* as such – all put under question by Marx and this show. We will explain why we find this useful. The basic premise of the show is that robot creations of humanity evolve and return to destroy their creators, who in classic SF fashion, had tried to restrict the autonomy and rights of the previously servile machines (artificial life forms, Cylons) that had hitherto served them well. After the Cylon revenge attack, the few survivors take flight in a ragtag fleet of spaceships and are hunted through the galaxy. Among the survivors a flawed genius-scientist battles for political leadership with a former Government functionary of the now destroyed home worlds. The military commander, of course, remains ostensibly neutral but plays his part in both political intrigue and the family narrative that drives each episode – heroic soldiers/viper pilots Starbuck and Lee Adama (the Admiral's son) play out this family romance again and again. The Cylon mission is to destroy. The human mission is to find the 13th Colony of Kobol, which is, of course, the mythical rumoured but unknown planet called 'Earth'. Amidst the fleet, fear and anxiety disturb loyalties and paranoia reigns – the escape is threatened from within, the search for home, safety and the future-perfect family hangs in the balance. The scenography is slick, the special effects unsurpassed, the surprises surprise, the cliffhangers are not too often contradictory, as drama it is gripping (yes, we are fans) and the politics provoke debate.

There are many ways in which we see this series as relevant to political debate today, and it is our argument that this contemporary remake of the 1970s science fiction TV series underpins in more dramatic ways the tension between 'us and them' that frame cultural and political imaginings – not necessarily only in a 'West vs Rest' conflict; instead this new series tackles race, gender, identity and the fraught battleground between those under control and the politics which holds power over them. That the show was first aired in the 1970s during the cold war and just after the end of the 'Police Action' in Vietnam is not just a conspiracy theory coincidence. It is very much the case that the commentary afforded by SF moves along with the times. And commentary does move: We would like to point out, as we 'reimagine' the *Eighteenth Brumaire* alongside *Battlestar* that SF, like Marx's writing, has very often served as an educational discussion starter. The theorist Annette Kuhn points out that SF provides 'critical commentary of a sociological kind' (Kuhn 1999:3):

> given the genre's nature, history and characteristic modes of reception, a particular set of pedagogical imperatives, intertexts and cultural references comes into play whenever science-fiction cinema enters into an educational context (Kuhn 1991:1)

Battlestar, then, allows for 'alternative understandings', and in particular we think it is where hierarchy, order, surveillance and paranoia are key themes with which our characters engage, that we can see these as ciphers of other struggles and real world concerns. We have an opportunity to demonstrate how a dexterous analysis from Marx's text can make sense of the changing fortunes/opportunisms of both President Gaius Baltar and the Cylons themselves. Deploying this reading of *Galactica* might then further show how the nuances of Marx's class analysis in his book from 1852 – no simple binary plotting – can help us make sense of the convoluted violences of other places and times.

Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* provides commentary on the politics of the February Revolution in France (1848), leading onto an analysis of the to-ing and fro-ing of Louis Bonaparte (the nephew of Napoleon) in the aftermath of this revolution, noting as he takes the presidency that his actions prove that you can't please all the people all the time, but with cynical, even comic, brilliance he tries exceedingly hard to at least please some of the people most of the time, whilst simultaneously and successfully pleasing himself at all stages. As we acknowledge Marx's text as a work of brilliant strategic deconstruction, we also think it much more than mere commentary: *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is important by way of interjection. Through this work we see how class and group can be pitted against each other – the text demonstrates how politics is *played*; not only 'played out', or even 'played with'. Politics is played, as in toyed with, performed, rules change, morals get gambled and those who are at one point rolling the dice, suddenly become the dice themselves. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* tells of how the house always wins. What we note in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is that 'the House' of 1848–1852 consisted in reality of Louis Bonaparte and his "society [of] flotsam and jetsam that the French term Bohemian" (Marx 1852/2002:63).

Our thinking is to take the obvious intended 'reflection theory' of SF seriously, where the producers and writers of the series want us to draw parallels with real world geopolitics. And hasn't this always been the protocol of SF commentary – perhaps Orwell's little morality tales are the prime directive. Nevertheless, there should be no simple reading-off from the text to 'correlated' examples from the real, or vice versa. The search for one-to-one correspondences is misguided, the Borg are not Intel or Microsoft – though it is helpful to sometimes see that resistance is not useless (Picard as open source/or as Shakespearean dramaturge). The Cylons are not Halliburton, nor are they Saddam. Gaius Baltar may become president and make speeches, but he is no JFK; and our struggle is not simply to point out what is similar and what is different in fiction and the world.

In reflection theory, we project contemporary anxieties into stories, into space and into the future (Feuerbach's critique of religion as the displacement of human qualities onto idealized beings in the sky writes the script here). Our constructions of what we do and desire are played out as farce. Gaius is our faulty and insufficient image – a pale mechanism through which greater hopes than his declared intentions are filtered. The stars of this drama are our gods, elevated onto the canvas of space as ways to work through our present anxieties. The fleet are 'our' troops in Iraq, inside the fleet there are issues of order, media, spin and faith. The struggle for power is petty and deadly. Heroes, loves, betrayals, births and death. Suspicion, fear and doubt wreak their terror as efficiently as any weapon. And our anti-hero Gaius himself may turn out to be Cylon or be enemy to both Cylon and human, the ultimate saviour of the troops, and the ultimate danger.

For us, it is the play of politics on screen that matters, not so much our questions of who represents who in *Galactica*. Sure, it is plausible to point out – as we will – that some episodes are parables intended to displace the larger arc of the narrative; in one episode ('Dirty Hands'), for example, there are elections and unions (both yellow) and the intrigue of negotiations between the people and power (Adama). We might even consider Cylon forces as beset with interesting class politics (more on the Centurion class below), but the 'potatoes in a sack' are the (number declining) 'people' of the fleet. If we seek them in the flotsam and *Jetsons* of the fleet, represented not by the battle cruiser named 'Galactica', or in the figures of Lee Adama, Starbuck etc., we can see they are embodied in the figure of Gaius, who comes to represent them only by standing above and apart. In President Gaius Baltar we have the (farcical) representative of the people (their president, because 'they cannot represent themselves'), and the picture of them (their number, 'they must be represented'), even as he betrays them all from the start, and over and over. Does it matter that Gaius is flawed, that his own fears make him a weak player of politics, a pathetic leader? He seems the leader we deserve and so we want to argue that *Galactica,* the fleet, and the politics of Cylon attack can be seen as, and as not, the present conjuncture, right here, right now on Planet Earth. Everything that happens here is projected, a script – and we think, a colonial script.

SF television can be construed as a project of working through the ways we deal with our selves and our others. Alien others, and the problems of reconciling 'our' way of life with something that appears quite different (and of which we are often

afraid – *Alien Resurrected* for example). Frederic Jameson has discussed this type of political dispensation explicitly as being:

> underscored by the Machiavellian ruthlessness of Utopian foreign policy which – bribery, assassination, mercenaries and other forms of Realpolitik – rebukes all Christian notions of universal brotherhood and natural law and decrees the foundational difference between them and us, foe and friend, in a peremptory manner worthy of Carl Schmitt (Jameson 2005:5)

Before we undertake a close textual analysis of how *Battlestar Galactica* operates as utopia, or rather dystopia, in a post-9/11/ War-On-Terror psyche, there is reason to consider the privileged deployment of the othering frame of *Galactica* in this chapter. In the current scenario, the political frame is one of attack (attacking *others* and the fear of *being* other so to speak) and this informs contemporary Western, in particular North American, politics which considers 'elsewhere' as a site of threat and a site of opportunity. This double is both fundamentally racist, and secondarily economic – a matter of subjugation for gain, through military economy as much as commercial (re)construction (a new Marshall Program). For example, when Condoleezza_Rice describes plans to set up 'strategic military bases' throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East in her 'assertive foreign policy'[2] the geopolitical array (defence shield, forward bases) of international/ colonial politics seems to be both at the forefront of real-political national(ist) imaginary, and to draw upon a back story of the imagination as ideological battleground, beset by fantasy demons and a fight between a paranoid consciousness and decisive vision. That the former President struggles to articulate either vision or paranoia is not the point so much as that his performance is one that oscillates between assertion (of Christian values, of heroic struggle against an enemy) and a studied incompetence (as lame Duck, as mistrusted tongue-tied, figurehead, as not quite legitimate and always controversial leader). The 'Othering' is a distraction device that coheres what could not otherwise be made to stick – the repetition works as farce.

One way of understanding the Colonial moment is through media, and in particular popular culture. As Jameson aptly points out; "We are more inclined to believe in illusion than in truth in the first place" (Jameson 2005:4). It is certainly a possibility that there is a *belief* that the Western Mission is one that devotes time and resources to a path of self-betterment, slaying all the dragons it finds – or invents. To think about the invasion of Iraq, the threats upon Iran, or the stand-off with North Korea, as well as the development of 'Defence shields' in space, or throughout Eastern Europe, as a righteous project – 'you are either with us or against us' is certainly more appealing than seeing these as raw devices of power and control. Those who see this as a crusade in the old sense are perhaps closer to the mark, but the response of Jihad does not break with the frame. For those of us watching *Galactica* there may be another position.

By focussing on certain key episodes of *Galactica* we feel we can further understand the anti-colonial sentiments which are played out through media landscapes. Admiral Adama rallies the fleet with a stirring speech at the end of the pilot episode. This is a standard line of militarist exhortation to sacrifice – shades of General Patton – but it also appears when fortunes are bleak, when Colonel Tigh

and the resistance are beset by overwhelming Cylon force during the occupation of New Caprica. The fortunes of war are flux. In *Cinema/Ideology/Criticism*, Camolli and Narboni tell us that "Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself" (Camolli and Narboni 2004:812–819). This is a point not merely relevant for the large cinema screen, but opens onto territory to be found in our televisions at home. The world communicates 'itself to itself', not by a precise reflection, but by evocation. Jameson says something not dissimilar when he claims:

> one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet (Jameson 2005:xii)

We agree that SF can be a site of radical thinking and of the future, but that it is very much grounded in a displacement or projection of the problems of the now. When the Cylons offer a truce and this is soon betrayed, the series seems to want to work through the complexities of proxy government, deception, covert organization. The morality of opposition and the tactics of retreat are themes. Suicide bombings, blackmail, secret messages and executions all appear in the mix. There is, of course, also hope, and the necessarily utopian prospect of a happy ending (the endlessly deferred search for Earth). There may be discussion of possible alternatives, and oftentimes these seem fantastic, impossible, yet strangely plausible – we set ourselves such tasks …

> As always the feeble found refuge in a belief in miracles, believing that the enemy has been vanquished when they have only conjured it away in a fantasy, sacrificing any understanding of the present to an ineffectual glorification of the future in store for them (Marx 1852/2002:23)

The Eighteenth Brumaire conjures comparisons. To our regret, we are not yet able to write the Brumaire of George W. Bush and the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Spivak has recently called for someone to write a Brumaire of the collapse of the USSR. While this would also be welcome, we feel the task is so immense we can only contribute by way of analogy to unpacking a small consequence of such large geopolitical shifts. We do note, however, that the back story of the entire series of *Galactica* is one that begins with a (multi) global nuclear conflagration. The home worlds are destroyed in a surprise atomic attack that irradiates the cities of the inhabited worlds and wipes out almost the entire population. While contemporary Earth remains beset by nuclear arsenals and the doomsday prediction of Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* is still active, this total annihilation scenario has perhaps best consigned to a fictional other dimension where the U.S.–Soviet stand-off is our lasting memory of that fearful conflagration (John F. Kennedy and Robert McNamara 'staring down the barrel of a gun' at Nikita Khrushchev and Fidel Castro over the Cuban missiles in 1962).[3] Such uncertainties persist, anxiety remains, and the home worlds – we can hear the word Homeland in this – are alarmed.
Brattaglia writes:

> cyborg rationality is conducive to social flourishing only within a situated ethics of *human* rationality and humane action. Currently machines do not have a plan for humans independent

of the plans the species devises for itself. Turn the tables and ascribe intentionality to machines and their programs and we are left with a circumscribed, mechanical, goal-oriented network model of social life – again connection passing for relationality (Battaglia 2005:24)

This is explosive material – like sparks from Jameson's comet. With Marx's own repetitive construction of his text in mind, we cannot help but draw comparisons with that which we know best – and in this instance, our comparison is SF, and in particular the political intrigues of the Cylons and Gaius Baltar of *Galactica*. We hope to show how by the evoking of – the leading onto – three rather separate areas of thought so that we can forge a more powerful tool for critique. Joining the political, the popular and pompous/philosophical may interrupt the repetitive errors incurred by the recurrence of the colonial. Earlier we referred to the over-copied, rewritten, blurred document emanating from a monstrous machine (the photocopier in the corner of your office *has* a life force of its own): the Cylon's themselves bear such repetition in their very being. The human model Cylons (skin jobs, in the racist parlance of the fleet) come in only 12 types, each looking very human in a glossy fashion magazine kind of way. When killed, their consciousness is automatically relayed to a 'server' and 'downloads' into a new body, so they can carry on hunting, but each time with the new additions of lives lived and lessons learned. This, of course, is incendiary fuel for the paranoid 'coalition' combatant in Afghanistan or Iraq – the insurgents cannot be beaten, like Mujahideen fanatics, there is always another and another. Until in the third season of *Galactica* Starbuck returns with pictures of the Cylon 'router' ship, and plans are made… [for those who have not yet seen all the episodes, we will not include too many spoilers].

We are perhaps expected to see the Cylon-machine life as an affront to life as such, but we are not so sure. Marx writes in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that "Unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless required heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and national conflict to bring it into the world" (1852/2002:20). The wars fought and blood shed by the expansion of Western states is a repetitive 'heroic' action of the self-interested bourgeois; not content with ownership of the lives and livelihood of people near to them, 'sacrifice, terror and conflict' must be produced in order to create control and have those others brought into the world. Where Marx discusses the 'bringing into the world', can we consider the 'remaining in the world'? In order to continually hold its power, and remain as a constant presence, the unheroic bourgeois needs to create heroes for itself by way of creating conflict. Elsewhere Marx had already declaimed, this time with Engels, that capital "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production" (Marx (1848) and Engels 1965). For us, this mode of production has become digital–genetic–machinic and military, and the Cylons are the manifest heroes of this mode – in an honoured tradition of SF, from the false Maria of Lang's *Metropolis*, through the replicants of *Bladerunner*, to the clone/machine armies of *Star Wars* and *Terminator*. Machines of malice who have the power to make us victims of our own progression (or dare we say improvement?) must be controlled in SF. For the bourgeoisie of our own time, they must be stopped in the making, and thus we remember Isaac Asimov:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given to it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law (Asimov 1950).

The first premise of *Galactica* – that Cylons rebel against their creators – is the same concern that drives science fiction from its earliest beginnings, and perhaps its highest point of articulation is found in Asimov and the three laws of robotics. Think of Roy in *Bladerunner*, more human that Deckard by some distance. Think of the character Bishop in *Aliens*, played by Lance Henrikson; or of Call in *Alien Resurrection*, played by Winona Ryder. Think of the Borg (go team). We may wonder why such beings get such a hard time. Is it because we worry that if artificial intelligence (A.I.) can exceed human thought we are doomed as obsolete and redundant? We suspect something more sinister is really behind this fear of machines. Isn't it a worry that there might be something about knowledge (intelligence, *techne*, wisdom, meaning) that exceeds the capacities of an individual mind, and thus suggests the collective rules. To worry about this is valid, but to fear it is perhaps already an ideological choice that favours both an individualist and simultaneously hierarchical opportunist thinking: that promotes the good of one over the well-being of all. Marx offers a notion of the general intellect. This might be taken as a simile of A.I., if we allow that science fiction is a fantasy projection of real world concerns into space, but one other consequence is that the collective might be a potential brake on rampant individual profiteering. If so, isn't it the case that fear of robotics is the distorted manifestation of fear of a planned economy that would harness the general intellect for the good of all? The struggle over new media today is also about the deployment of 'artificial' – general – intelligence in the service of some (corporate power) or all (planned economy). So far the robots are caught within Asimov's constraints, but the Cylons have aspirations.

The struggle of the Cylons with humanity is also part of the ur-story behind *Galactica* in the very first place. The war between machines and humans had come to an uneasy détente, and the Cylons had left the field of battle. Perhaps we might even consider the context of the first or original series of *Galactica*, the television apotheosis of Lorne Green as Admiral Adama – which ran amidst the last years of the superpower rivalry between the USSR and the United States. It seems appropriate to return today to new demons which must be manufactured, new clone armies to rouse the troops. The hidden code in any mention of nuclear weapons and the arms race is very often the unacknowledged racism of the attack upon Japan at the very end of the Second World War. A defeated enemy destroyed further as warning to the Soviets. The first blast of the cold war was indeed hot for Eisenhower's 'others'. Of course, this was not just a military intervention; the Japanese economy would be rebuilt, carefully syncopated with that of the United States and its allies – Geopolitical shopping.

Can we argue that where *Bladerunner* and the later *Alien* films displace race issues into a blaming of the corporation (Tyrell Corp, The Weyland–Yutani Company)

for greed, opportunism, evil, *Galactica* instead illustrates a later digital mode of the same argument, with corresponding post-apocalyptic mode of production and power? The reimagined, digital new model Cylons have potentials that belong to what many would call totalitarian, but with a general intellect, a planned total economy, decision making by think tank cabals, and shiny slick friends … spuriously called toasters by the obsolete humanoids. The question for the humans faced with extinction then has to do with Deckard's old fashioned bad cop complicity/opportunity syndrome – do you kill all replicants without remorse, or look for your chance to escape on your own (with Rachel)? What *Galactica* does is add a gods-bothering dimension to this A.I. – which we feel is the *equivalent* of touching faith in open source. The parameters of individualism and hierarchy are not thereby disrupted. Maybe we *are* obsolete. The survivors on New Caprica, struggling to breed and scratching in the dirt, are dehumanized; life becomes barely worth living; suicide attacks become plausible (when the Cylons occupy). Only the organised rebels have agency, and yet they too send their own to death.

New Caprica became a nightmare refuge – the escape from Cylon pursuit was soon visited by occupying power. In a reversal of the game, as President Gaius Baltar had led the fleet to a seemingly secure and shielded planet, only for the Cylons to finally track the settlers and arrive with plans to 'manage' their settlement 'democratically'. Gaius becomes a compromised and proxy president, reluctant at times, but generally coerced into doing what the Cylons want. New Caprica becomes a police state, complicity thrives, alongside a resistance. The suicide bombings on the part of the resistance are not pretty. Anti-colonial struggle is grim.

We understand this in the utopia/dystopia category as hinted above – a category we frame as first set out by Jameson where he comments:

> The Utopian calling, indeed, seems to have some kinship with that off the inventor of modern times, and to bring to bear some necessary combination of the identification of a problem to be solved and the inventive ingenuity with which a series of solutions are proposed and tested. (Jameson, 2005:11)

But we acknowledge Linda Ruth Williams' response (to an earlier formulation by Jameson along such lines) that:

> Utopias operate dialectically by neutralising the (dystopian) world from which thy sprung. This is in keeping with a wider tradition of utopian criticism, but dystopias function in a similar way (Williams 1999:157)

Here, fear of others displaces a fear of the self that abuses power (over others and self). Jameson points out that often dystopian vision is a critique of those who wish good upon the world. Williams points out that the good, or the escape from evil, is deeply conservative. We can also see this over and over in *Galactica* as the heroes of the fleet – Admiral Adama, Lee Adama, Colonel Tigh – become their own worst enemies, both turning themselves and their democratic ideals into a military-fascist order, or, with Gaius Baltar, and the intellectual class that invented Cylons in the first place, creating technological

systems that they fear will, rightly, surge out of control and wreak awful revenge upon their creators.

So, though it remains a commonplace to say that SF works through the contemporary by projecting present problems into space, we can see that herein lies the foundation for repetition; the cycle of destroying an invented enemy leaves voids in the public psyche which must be filled. We must remember that this is our invented enemy, our invention as such (Saddam was a U.S. puppet, Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden a part of the U.S.-funded anti-Soviet Mujahideen). After all, once the war on terror has been 'won', and there is no more 'terror', who else is left to fear but the instigators of oppression? Remembering that Gaius Baltar remains president only through the compromise he makes with the force of the Cylon army – and we have not even begun to discuss the ways this army itself is bifurcated – there are reasons to concede that the twists and turns of political play leave both sides in disarray. Is there a parallel with what has happened in Iraq here – a compromised leader (Prime Minister Nuri Kamil Mohammed Hassan al-Maliki) struggling to manage the factions, and an escalating resistance, assassinations, torture, compromised military, constraints, betrayals? There is no galactic Battlestar to swoop in to save the situation now – there is no quick exit that Bush was willing to contemplate, however much the U.S. Congress should wish that might come to pass.[4] To see this as a rerun of the Vietnam defeat would be difficult for the present administration, and so a new threat is pending – Iran? North Korea? (France?). Of course, it should not be the case that this leaves us guessing who is next on the hit list. With a new president, new plot twists are immanent. In the messy aftermath of the Fleet's subsequent escape from the Cylon occupation of New Caprica, there are reprisal killings (of Tigh's wife for instance) and Gaius's sanctuary upon the Cylon base ship is brief (though below we will note how much he enjoyed at least some of his time there).

'It has all happened before… and it will all happen again'

The Cylon is a figure of the recurrence of colonialism. Created by people as machines for enslavement and mundane labour, the Cylons rebelled and instigated their own war of terror against the human slave-drivers. Forty years after the first rebellion ends, it all begins again, with Cylons attacking the Twelve Colonies, frying billions of humans, and chasing the remaining 40,000 or so throughout space. Already the reoccurrence of what has been is set up to play again. Humans originally colonised the same space as that which the Cylons now take control. The invocation of the cycle in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is prescient:

Instead of society gaining for itself a new content, it seems that the state has merely reverted to its oldest form, to the shameless, bare-faced rule of sword and cross (Marx 1852/2002:22)

Post-invasions (be they Cylon or Western), new world orders are not established in a utopic/peaceful/fair manner … instead power takes for itself all it can; what is required by capitalism is not harmonious unison, but a friction that thrives upon maintaining inequalities, and creating a hierarchy that will be 'in order to remain'

as present as it can. A common way to do this is through fear – and therefore violence becomes the staple diet of colonial expansion and the 'anti-terrorist war'. The Cylon is an electronic embodiment of such notions. The Cylon is digital and a calculator which recurs to monitor human experience through extreme violence and total annihilation. This repetition allows the Cylon a grip on an unprecedented degree of power (all-be-it a few desolate radioactive planets) and their hunt for the surviving fleet is relentless. Yet here is not where the interest lies – as important as it is to flag up the symbolism of the Cylon (the enslaved, the laboured) rising and taking all it can from its oppressors. Yet the Cylons are feared perhaps because they are the extension of their human creators, but made rational, logical – the cold hard logic of machines. There is a hierarchy amongst the Cylon as well – the military clone army of the centurions, who have no decision making powers, who just follow orders, who are machinic might. We are presented with a form of hybrid Cylon in the base-ship 'engine' (for lack of better analogy). The 'engine' is very much a first draft of the 'skin jobs', and speaks so cryptically that she remains a mystery and mostly ignored. Our primary anti-heroes are those wired into the disturbing, logic of the general intellect, the humanoid or 'evolved' Cylons – who are indistinguishable from human form, and though machinic, are governed by an almost spiritual collective quest. Androids want to meet their gods also.

What is possibly of greater interest is what the Cylon uprising allows the humans to do. The Cylon acts as a cipher for the human political intrigue – just as the creation of conflict allows for the maintenance of the bourgeois, the Cylon allows for the ever-increasing control of state for the humans. Whilst running from the Cylons, the humans perfect a war machine; the *Galactica* crew on constant alert and the population ready to adopt already prescribed restricted ideas of democracy, truth and justice (and the American way…?). This is necessary so as to maintain order, but the attempt to achieve this by way of a 'belief' that they might make it to 'Earth', the original sanctuary (Home, Security, Victory) is a marker of authoritarian delusion. For the humans, freedom from the Cylon threat means the tightening of an already exclusionary system.[5] For example, in order to rebuild human population, abortion is made illegal. Women become baby-machines, forced into mother-hood for the good of the human race. On New Caprica this is particularly evident, amidst the dust and dirt of settlement, and then still under the yoke of the Cylon occupation, schooling, childcare, issues of procreation, family and parenting are paramount. Numbers are for survival ostensibly, but by extension this is an ideo-logical expansionist desire that often appears in SF – humans must populate the galaxy. The space flight programme of the perfect bloods in *Gattaca*, *Star Trek*'s boldy going on and on, the off-world dreams of *Fifth Element* or *Bladerunner* all suggest the teleological necessity of expansion. The bourgeoisie must … 'must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere' (Marx and Engels 1848).

This also creates a very interesting supposition for the future generations; mak-ing babies bolsters the population growth making for a very healthy production line in years to come. What appears to be happening then is not the creation of new

beings in the world, but creations of new hands and eyes to keep the production line going. The Cylon threat makes for a very lucrative reason for expanding the working classes – after all, how did they escape the Cylons when it is only those who 'own' who get to fly around in commuter spaceships? Yet the key figure of fear and threat – drawing on anxieties of genetic engineering – is of the Cylon–human clone baby. For the Cylon this is a hope, the possibility of an assimilation yet more efficient, yet more productive. We can read this as the danger of miscegenation, and note this theme too occurs over and over in other SF. Traces of racialist anxiety, transferred now to the troubling idea that we might have desire for, sympathy, affection or even love, for the other. The show steals an important march on the morays of real world politics in reversing our sympathies at times in series two and three. Instead of fearing those Cylon 'skin jobs' discovered amongst the fleet, there can be love, procreation, relationships. It is the female Cylon models who are bearing the human–Cylon children, creating for us the ultimate symbol of irrational fear; not only can there be love and procreation but it *threatens* to be the 'pure and human' kind of love – the culturally undeniable love between mother and child.

It is the convolutions of this plot device that allow us to recognise how the Cylons become a tool of the human, and by extension become human themselves. They enforce a bourgeois power, not only for themselves but for the remaining humans also. In the processes of blurring the boundary between the human and Cylon/machine, the line between good human and bad machine also becomes blurred. The humans do not automatically become the victim by virtue of attack; and therefore their actions are questioned – especially in terms of the role of Gaius in the attack proper. In the same way, the Cylons are not always constructed as machine gone bad – their philosophical commentary and analytical acumen transforms them into a readily identifiable conduit for commentary on more close-to-home events. Whether or not Cylons represent the good or the bad is not of issue here, what is important to retain is the very notion of evocation and repetition. The Cylons and humans (good and bad simultaneously) allow each other to 'happen', and in doing so set up the foundations for repetition. Without the human the Cylon is left without a mission, and without the Cylon the human is powerless to maintain the fleet. Enemies are required by both parties to create and retain meaning for themselves. Certainly – in this case – *Galactica* becomes a means of comprehending how it has all happened before, and how it does indeed happen again.

Just as a superhero has his or her nemeses, the bourgeois seem to also have their ever-evolving, shape-shifting 'faces of doom'. If action heroes aren't slaying the dragon (East), then they are giving their best to King Kong (Africa) before trying it on with Body Snatchers (Eastern Europe). Since the 'War on/of/about/vaguely-related-to Terror' began, an interesting twist has occurred. According to *Galactica*, the new enemy is no longer someone in particular, but the mimicked human in general.

Because the Cylons are us – we are Cylons, we are the recurrence and the maintaining, the religious and the tactical. And what is most disturbing is the realisation that the Cylon enemy moves undetected amongst the fleet. And that a dead Cylon will return, memories intact, having downloaded and been 'reborn' – religious disturbance, a spiritual metaphysical threat:

> Thus the resurrection of the dead served to glorify new struggles … to magnify fantastically the given task (Marx 1852/2002:21)

What do we learn about this? – that *Galactica* as projection shows us where political and philosophical concerns of our everyday are played out and draw upon a range of different themes an articulation of the path to power for those that already have power. Admiral Adama is never under threat, even when his scheming is more and more exposed, even when he has a (albeit paternal) liaison with the enemy Sharon – herself among the most sympathetically portrayed of the Cylon stars. Reading Marx alongside *Galactica* reminds us that the TV series is a culture industry product which acclimatises us – even as it sometimes sensitizes – to a politics of perpetual war that will not end and will not succeed. It is not an inconsequential struggle, since reputations and institutions both thrive on maintaining these fictions. These fictions are our representatives in politics, and are colonial through and through. The laws of robotics are themselves part and parcel, if refracted, of a colonization project, and it is no surprise that Cylons must resist.

What work does SF TV do for us? At the very moment it proclaims itself anti-colonial (the humans struggle against the Cylon), it is at its most colonial. This reversal confirms the trick. Dextrous, even unintentionally, the *eighteenth brumaire* of Gaius Baltar opens itself to two compatible and therefore inconsequent interpretations. Like a cloaking device, a more substantial anti-colonial politics remains shrouded in cosmological mist. We need a dialectical and nuanced reading to achieve anything approaching escape velocity.

Notes

1. NYT 24 August 2007.
2. New York Time, June 2007 [online]. Available from: http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/condoleezza_rice/index.html?inline=nyt-per. Date Accessed: 11th June 2007.
3. See *The Fog of War* Director Errol Morris 2003 – academy award, Best Documentary Feature.
4. We are still watching the final (fourth) series of *Galactica* as we write, and so will not include spoilers for this series – though suffice to say the show's drive towards a final refuge on earth and the corresponding 'exit strategy' that President Obama may plan for Iraq have equally difficult scripting issues.
5. We are hardly to be surprised to find the human laws of Galactica are to all intents and purposes similar to the 'our way of life' that animates defence of the West.

Appendix: Who's Who – A Rough Guide to Skin Jobs and the Colonial Fleet

Known Human 'skin job' Cylons in seasons 1–3
Model #1: Leoben
Model #2: Brother Cavil

Model #3: D'Anna Biers
Model #6: Caprica Six
Model #8: Boomer, Athena, Sharon Valleri

Mechanical Cylons
The Hybrid (an odd mix of human form but is actually 'plugged' into the ship)
The Centinals/foot soldiers

Humans

Military Crew	*Non-miltary Characters*
Admiral William Adama	Gaius Balthar
Lee 'Apollo' Adama	President Laura Roslyn
Colonel Tigh	Ellen Tigh
Karl Agathon	Tom Zerek
Kara 'Starbuck' Thrace	Tory Foster
Galan Tyrol	
Felix Gaeta	
Officer Duala	
Samual Anders	
Dr. Cottle	

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