BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

INVESTIGATING FLESH, SPIRIT AND STEEL

THE WEST WING OR *GENERATION KILL* IN SPACE? A SHOW ABOUT GOD-FEARING SEX-OBSESSED ROBOTS? OR A COMPLEX MEDITATION ON FATE, DREAMING AND ETERNAL RECURRENCE?

Of all recent television science fiction series, the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (shown on SyFy in the USA and Sky in the UK) is the most highly praised and consistently inventive and intelligent. Where the original show was a straightforward space opera, the new one is rich, strange and, above all, unpredictable.

THIS BOOK EXPLORES THE NEW *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA* FROM ITS BEGINNING TO ITS END, COVERING ALL OF THE SHOW'S PRINCIPAL THEMES: FROM THE DEPICTION OF SEXUALITY IN AN ERA OF ARTIFICIAL PEOPLE AND DOWNLOADED MEMORIES TO WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF A MILITARY ORGANISATION WHEN THE STAKES ARE NOT VICTORY OR DEFEAT BUT SURVIVAL.

Battlestar Galactica is also very much a show about people – including people who were born in a vat – and the essays here include in-depth discussion of some of the most fascinating individuals ever to appear on your screen: the drunken female jock Starbuck, the treacherous, pious Baltar, the stern Admiral Adama, and the passionate, devious Cylon known as Six.

Like all the best shows about the future or the past – we are never sure when all this is supposed to be happening – *Battlestar Galactica* is a show about the present; chapters here cover its depiction of the post-9/11 world and such issues as abortion and workers' rights. This definitive book on the full new *Battlestar Galactica* also includes an interview with Jane Espenson, co-executive producer of the show's last seasons and writer/director of the *Battlestar Galactica* prequel film *The Plan*, and a complete episode guide.

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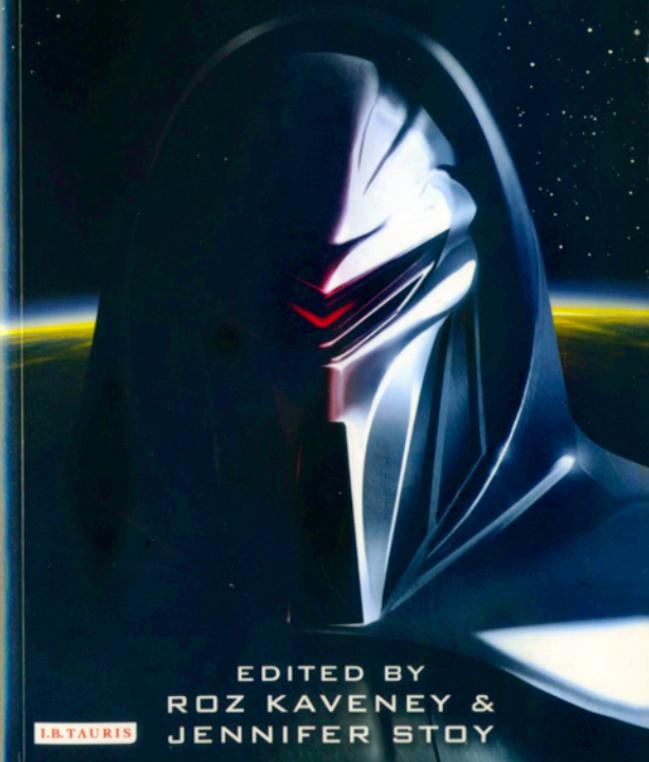
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4.19), but is equally sometimes portrayed in a less than positive light, as in his involvement with a group who seek to execute those involved in the occupation of New Caprica, but who are shown to make mistakes in deciding on the guilt of the accused ('Collaborators' 3.05), or in his drunken tirade to William Adama in which he accuses his dead wife of having 'dull, vacant eyes' and a 'cabbage smell' ('Escape Velocity' 4.04). Tyrol, it seems, always was something of a mixed bag, given to traditionally masculine behaviours while also capable of some very questionable acts indeed. As such, the series did not need to make the concerted effort to distance him from normative masculinity that it did with Anders; Tryol never possessed it to begin with.

8   For one example of this see 'Battlestar: The Extinction of Gay.'

9   To be clear, I do not intend to argue that the women of the fleet are without purpose since this is demonstrably untrue. Starbuck, as just one example, is still an excellent pilot and a boon to the chances of humanity's survival. Rather, I am arguing that the resurrection ship has the potential to negate the need for the female body in much the same way as the mentality of the series has negated the need for femininity. They both still exist, but are rendered purposeless in this context.

10   In Wolverton.

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Sci-Fi Ghettos

Battlestar Galactica and Genre Aesthetics

SÉRGIO DIAS BRANCO

'I was thinking, "I've got to get out of this sci-fi ghetto"', confessed Ronald D. Moore in an interview for *Rolling Stone* (in Edwards). The writer responsible for the development of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–9) uttered these words for an article about the topicality of the series that incorporated contemporary and politically charged themes such as terrorism and torture. Some crucial information precedes Moore's sentence in the text. We are told that he worked for a decade on some of the incarnations of *Star Trek* and that with this new version of the cult show *Battlestar Galactica* (1978–9) he was hoping to create a political drama like *The West Wing* (1999–2006). That is, Moore is portrayed as an author of science fiction in contact with the classic and in search of the new. Commenting on the creative ideas that shaped the reimagining, he adds: 'I realized if you redo this today, people are going to bring with them memories and feelings about 9/11. And if you chose to embrace it, it was a chance to do an interesting science-fiction show that was also very relevant to our time' (in Edwards 2006).

Ron Moore is clearly referring to the conventions of science fiction. He is alluding to its imagined worlds, situations and beings, and referring to how remote they seem from our everyday life. This encompasses, not just its stories but also its appearance,

not just the narrative aspects of the genre but also its aesthetic features. It is clear what Moore is referring to – but it is not easy to understand why. He surely knows that the notion that these characteristics hinder science fiction from reflecting current events and worries is uninformed. This genre has a rich tradition of addressing moral, political and social themes. Countless examples come to mind, but to limit our scope to television fiction, a drama such as *Babylon 5* (1994–8), with its interest in the efforts and complications of a peaceful co-existence between different creatures and cultures, is an eloquent example. Moore's statement can only be understood as an attempt to set the series apart from the other works of the genre: *BSG* would not be science fiction in the same way that HBO is not TV. In fact, the programme attracted a wider audience beyond sci-fi enthusiasts; at the same time it estranged some fans of the original show because of the changes introduced and the prominent gritty tone.

The idea of a sci-fi ghetto that *BSG* tried to escape from suggests a fruitful way of analysing the show. Genres, especially those that are popular simultaneously in television and film, are defined and definable through a repertoire of elements: characters, plot, setting, iconography and style. Since the focus of this chapter will be on aesthetics and not on narrative, the more relevant elements for the analysis of the series within the science fiction genre are its type and style of images. Arguably, the genre does not have a crystallized aesthetics, but there are aesthetic traits that are associated with it and that can be found in its popular manifestations. It is these traits that *BSG* presumably attempted to ignore.

First, the types of images will be discussed through the analysis of production design or simply design motifs. The discussion will centre specifically on the patterns of components designed and built during the development phase of production (costumes, sets, furniture and props). Such components may also be inserted after principal photography, in the case of computer-generated imagery (CGI). Analysing the design motifs in *BSG*,

reveals elements that individualize the programme within the genre. Science fiction portrays an imagined tomorrow based on scientific and technological advances in which production design plays a fundamental part – the design of the show blends different and contrasting elements to present an imaginary yet recognizable future.

Second, the style of images will be addressed by paying attention to the particularities of the camerawork. The handheld, dynamic filming style of *BSG* has been both celebrated and criticized, but rarely examined in depth. The subtlety and variety of these stylistic features are often reduced to an active and trembling camera, yet it is more akin to an observant presence. Science fiction favours images that consistently balance the real and the unreal – and, although the series opts for an unconventional style within the genre, it similarly weighs the concrete against the imagined, the close against the distant.

Blended Design

Science fiction is sometimes identified by, or reduced to, particular iconographic elements – namely, creatures from outer space. Vivian Sobchack singled out instead the *look* of the genre and persuasively argued that what connects these works 'lies in the consistent and repetitious use not of *specific* images, but of *types* of images' (87, original emphasis). This visual typology mixes the unfamiliar and the familiar, the unknown and the known. It presents the strange as believable – leading Sobchack to conclude that science fictions strive 'primarily for our belief, not our suspension of disbelief – and this is what distinguishes them from fantasy' (88).

BSG may be likened to Joss Whedon's *Firefly* (2002–3), a series that openly blended old and new, western and sci-fi, and Eastern and Western cultures. Since its inception, the reimagined *BSG* also combined alien and well-known elements, presenting a world in which this blend created a calculated ambiguity. The

Cylons, machines that were once at war with their human creators, returned to annihilate humankind, forcing the survivors to flee to space. Cylons are now completely organic and indistinguishable from humans to the naked eye; only laboratory analysis can confirm their real identity. In the first scene, one of these humanoid Cylons walks into the Armistice Station after two mechanical, Cylon Centurions. The contrast is striking. Unlike the original series, where Centurions were actors in outfits, these robots were entirely created by computer. In this sense, CGI is truly a part of the design process, an aspect of the conceptualizing, planning and building stages. It can extend partial sets or insert virtual elements that seem to interact with the properly physical elements, as in this case. Moreover, the opening scene of the series demonstrates how expressive digital components can be, giving visual and kinetic expression to the differences between mechanical and organic entities, machines and living matter. The design of the new Centurions was not constrained by human physicality and motion, opening up the possibility of laying bare their mechanical composition and functioning. Contrastingly, the humanoid model takes the form of a tall blonde woman (Tricia Helfer), which we will later know as model Six, in its various incarnations. The human officer had been waiting for a Cylon representative for forty years, after the first war between Cylons and humans, and Six's presence is as unexpected as her appearance. Her tight red suit, with a long-sleeved coat and knee-length skirt, is at odds with the neutral dark colours of the space station. The series visually turns the imaginary into the real, robots into humans – which puts in doubt the assumption that Cylons are clearly and fundamentally different from humans.

Examples such as this show how intentionally designed *BSG* is. A look into the control room of Galactica reveals other facets of its design motifs. It became conventional in science fiction for commanding spaceships to have a centre of operations with a window looking out over the vastness of space. Think of the bridge in the USS Enterprise in *Star Trek* (1966–9), a television

and film series that became a template for the genre in both media. Galactica is different. It has an intricate structure whose parts relate and function organically instead of merely hierarchically. The control room is embedded inside the ship instead of being on the leading edge of it (Hudolin par. 18). As seen, for instance, in 'You Can't Go Home Again' (1.05), the room is closed and angular. Its limits are well defined by subdued surfaces with, to all appearances, multiple layers of paint, conveying that this is an old warship that continues in operation after years of service and maintenance. Its spaces are clearly outlined by sharp corners and different floor heights. It is like an operating theatre with upper galleries from where people look down to Admiral William Adama (Edward James Olmos), who takes the role of teaching surgeon, always standing up, without a chair to rest, sometimes moving among the work stations (Hudolin par. 5). The set creates a central, lower space from where Adama usually speaks and gives orders and, at the same time, it allows him a mobility appropriate to his supervisory functions. The human proportion, logic and functionality of the design become apparent through the action and interaction of characters within the confines of the room.

Old objects dispersed all over the ship and particularly in this room also embody these qualities. Cases in point are the telephones from the 1940s that the military officers use to communicate, as originally used in warships (Hudolin par. 5). To talk, the officers have to come to the wall, pick up one of these bulky phones, and crank it. However, it would be hasty to interpret the presence of such objects as retro design. Devices such as these telephones are not meant to imitate styles from the past. They compose a world with a history, of which they are remains and evidence. That is why their existence is so thoroughly justified within the fiction. Adama participated in the first war against the Cylons and opted not to upgrade the ship and to continue to use outdated equipment that had proven reliable. Galactica was built in the beginning of the previous war. It is a veteran battlestar, the last of its kind still serving, and the only military vessel

without integrated computer networks. Thanks to these unique characteristics, Galactica survives the attack that neutralizes the defence system of the Twelve Colonies and destroys them in the miniseries. This narrative justification indicates that these non-futuristic elements are to be taken not as imitating the past, but as coming from it. As Charles Shiro Tashiro recalls, 'Because the image of the future must rely on general, socially shared images in order to function, its appearance will inevitably be dated by the fashions and assumptions current during production' (10). The series makes this process of visual design manifest, giving it a narrative logic and justification: there is something from the past in its imagined future.

Private spaces follow a similar design pattern. Bill Adama's lodging is filled with homelike furniture and objects that make it habitable, even cosy. In 'You Can't Go Home Again', Admiral Adama and his son, Captain Leland Adama (Jamie Bamber), discuss the ongoing search for Starbuck (Katee Sackhoff) with President Laura Roslin (Mary McDonnell) and Executive Officer Saul Tigh (Michael Hogan). The walls have the same grey tone of the control room, but the lighting is now in warm browns and yellows instead of cold blues and greens. The oil painting revealed behind Roslin, the table lamps, the red rug, make up a personal and informal environment that is at variance with the straight, oblique and horizontal, lines of the architecture of the ship. This contrasts with the rooms of the Cylon basestar, first seen in 'Collaborators' (3.05). There the walls have an illuminated red band and bright circular lights, reminiscent of a Suprematist painting. The pure geometrical forms and the intense and diffused lighting imbue the space with an abstract quality. Unlike the chairs in Adama's lodging, the chaise-longue looks like a decorative object, something almost stripped of its utility and positioned to be admired.

Other identifiable objects become at times a focus of attention. Tashiro posits that 'objects exist independently of a story. In this state they have their own string of associations. Once placed in a narrative, objects and spaces acquire meaning specific to the

film' (9). Commander Adama builds and paints a miniature boat in his cabin throughout the first and second seasons. It is a large model of a sailing vessel, square-rigged, and with several decks; but it is not a warship, because it lacks any openings for cannons. Using a warship would have reduced it to a small-scale replica of Galactica, the battleship that Adama commands. The miniature is crucial for itself, as a unique object, and not for its figurative and general meaning. Specifically, it is crucial because of the actions that Adama has to carry out to create it. This is readily confirmed when the context in which modelling appears in the series is taken into account. In 'Litmus' (1.06), Adama is cutting and perfecting small pieces for the model while reprimanding Chief Tyrol (Aaron Douglas). Tyrol had abandoned his post, causing a serious breach of security. One of his subordinates directly took the blame and was consequently imprisoned. In this scene, Tyrol tries to persuade Adama to release the detainee, but the reply that he gets is that he gave a poor example of leadership and organization. Adama's work on the model, on the other hand, is patient and meticulous – it underlines his entitlement, stemming from his commitment and not simply from his rank, to call attention to Tyrol's carelessness.

The construction of large models of sailing vessels is not exactly a hobby for Adama. He may do it for pleasure, but from what is shown, he does not do it in his leisure time. In 'Home (Part One)' (2.06), Adama confides in Lieutenant Anastasia 'Dee' Dualla (Kandyse McClure) about his son and Roslin and a recent shooting incident, while painting the boat. The fleet of refugees had been divided into two factions: one led by Roslin, the other by Adama. Dualla reminds him that parents, children and friends are separated. Adama attempts to dismiss her, but she insists that it is time to heal the wounds. This heated discussion happens while Adama is finally finishing the model with paint. He sustains his attention to the totality of the work at hand, handling the paintbrush with a relaxed assurance – showing the kind of overall understanding that he is currently lacking as a leader.

The blend of disparate features and components is customary in the science fiction genre. In *BSG*, design motifs have a distinctly expressive purpose. The physical appearance of Cylon models, the location and configuration of the control room and its telephones, the furnishings of Adama's lodging, the decoration of the Cylon basestar, the miniature boat that he constructs – all these are aspects and elements that are contrasting and unexpected. The design visual tone of the series – its character – is based on a mix that expresses and fosters ambivalence, mixed feelings, contradictory ideas about technology and humanity, the old and the new.

Present, Observant Camera

In a recent essay, Kevin McNeilly comments on the mobile, handheld camerawork of *BSG* as a hallmark of its visual style. It is worth quoting most of his paragraph because there is very little written on this subject:

> The series eschews a stable perspective, preferring the feel of embedded points of view, and the textures of improvisational immediacy and documentary presence that a handheld camera offers. We're reminded in every scene that perspective is contingent and temporary, that someone is taking these pictures, making these images. The aperture constantly jingles, drifts, redirects its attention, pulls, and readjusts its focus . . . The point however is not to expose the viewers' capacity to be duped by illusion . . . Rather, the documentary textures of *BSG*'s visuals serve as reminders of a corporeal, human materiality, that informs the whole aesthetic of the program. The handheld, quasi-documentary camera introduces into the screen-image material traces of hands and eyes — two key tropes, the tactile and the visual, that pervade nearly every episode.
> (McNeilly 186)

These are suggestive words. McNeilly is onto something here. Yet he does not develop it in detail since his essay has a different

focus: how the audience is audio-visually confronted with the difficulty of experiencing and addressing human duress and ruin.

The writer cautiously avoids calling the camerawork documentary, instead he uses the term *quasi-documentary*. It is wise not to claim that the camera is seemingly documentary simply because its unstable perspective and improvisational feel make it feel that way. Documentary filmmaking allows many different styles of direction and therefore of camerawork – recall the patient and long takes of Frederick Wiseman's documentaries, for example. In *BSG*, the camera is seemingly documentary because of the way it is placed in relation to the fiction, standing both inside and outside the fictional world as something present and observant.

The first scene of the miniseries, already described and analysed, closes with the Armistice Station being blown up into pieces as the initial act of war from the Cylons. One piece of debris hits the camera and causes it to shift, abruptly, revealing its material existence in the fictional universe of the series. As long as technical differences are unable to supplant perceptual differences, our relationship with photographic images will be different to that with digital imagery. Even when the textures and lighting of the latter give an impression of reality, their elements lack the sense of weight and mass that we instinctively recognize in the former. This gap is crucial to understand the role of the collision that makes the virtual camera move. We can see it as providing proof for the presence of the camera there, at that moment, through the physical interaction that is shown on screen. Only this kind of evidence can give additional grounds for the belief that something real, not simulated, was there in front of the camera.

In *BSG*, the camera does not just jingle, drift and reframe. Sometimes it follows a more fluid scheme. In 'A Disquiet Follows My Soul' (4.12), the sick and frail Roslin trots along the vast corridors of Galactica. She turns a corner and the camera accompanies her movement, avoiding obstacles and people, first

from the front and then from the back, until she comes across Adama. This is a moment that brings to mind the much longer take that unfolds during the opening credits of the miniseries. For more than three minutes, the camera tracks various characters, making a diverse record of what is happening on the day that Galactica, now a relic of the First Cylon War, is to be decommissioned as a warship and converted into a museum. From the jogging Starbuck, the camera moves to an attentive group of reporters who are learning about the history of the ship; then to Adama as he crosses Starbuck's path, talks to three mechanics and proceeds to the control room; then to Lieutenant Felix Gaeta (Alessandro Juliani), who leaves the room with paperwork; then to the drunk Tigh whom Gaeta runs into; and finally the camera returns to the group of reporters in the guided tour. Similar to the nervous yet intensely directed viewpoint that prevails throughout the series, the use of the Steadicam in these two scenes underlines the unimportance of what lies beyond the frame. Of course, it does not erase the awareness that there are things off screen, occasionally glimpsed, but this awareness is downplayed through visual focalization. Usually, nothing in the shots points to the off-screen space in any salient way. The images are centripetal instead of centrifugal, they point towards the interior instead of the exterior.

This reading is confirmed when we look at the two opposite end of the scale that visually structure the series; the screen is filled either with extreme close-ups or with very wide shots. Tightly concentrating on details and settling on partial views – such as the twirling knife in the telefilm 'Razor' (4.00) – directs our attention to something limited and small, detached from its surroundings. At the other end of the spectrum, presenting events with multiple points of interest – such as the space battle in 'Resurrection Ship (Part Two)' (2.12) with the curved firings from the Cylon ships – cues the audience to make spatial sense of the sequence within the screen. It is obvious that the range of stylistic choices of the show, from short to long takes, from close to distant views, from tentative to fluid movements, has

different narrative and expressive functions. The dynamism of the direction consists of precisely this openness, in which the positions and behaviour of the camera respond to the specificity of the scenes. These stylistic choices have something else in common, something more essential. The images that result from them tend to point inwards and not outwards, as if the camera is permanently observing; not merely capturing the action, but tentatively or confidently noticing and registering what is significant.

This present and observant camera may seem very unlike the discreet position that cameras often adopt in science fiction, yet the role it plays is not. Sobchack explains that these plain camera angles give the same vantage point for humans and non-humans, giving a balanced, symmetrical attention to both real and imaginary (144). The camera of *BSG* emphatically creates a similar balance. It seems to approach what it is filming in an unplanned, immediate way, as though participating in and even being surprised by the events that it is capturing. The rough, vivid visual textures of the series enhance the feeling of factuality and objectivity that the loose framing fosters. Such feeling is, at the same time, balanced by the subjectivity of the camera, guiding our attention to quickly fading details and stressing the predominance of the on-screen space.

Space Oddities

The series finale aired in March 2009 on the Sci-Fi Channel. In the following month, Ron Moore appeared in 'A Space Oddity' (9.20), an episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–) that parodies and examines fan culture as well as the scholarly interest in popular culture. The involvement of Bradley Thompson and David Weddle in both *BSG* and *CSI* as writers and producers facilitated the participation of actors from *BSG*. In the episode, *Astro Quest Redux*, a dark and dramatic new version of the dearly loved *Astro Quest*, is presented at a fan convention. Kate Vernon

(who starred in *BSG* as Ellen Tigh) is Dr Penelope Russell, a cultural studies scholar. Grace Park (who played the various Number Eights, including Boomer and Athena) and Rekha Sharma (who was Tory Foster, Laura Roslin's chief of staff) can be spotted in the middle of the crown during the presentation of the reimagined version of *Astro Quest*; so can Moore. The parallel is evident. Even though it is more similar to the original *Star Trek*, *Astro Quest* stands for the old *Battlestar Galactica* and *Redux* for the reimagined *BSG*. When Moore, playing an angry fan, gets up and shouts 'You suck!', he is re-enacting his own history from the opposite side. The scene may consequently be construed as mocking the inhabitants of the sci-fi ghetto that Moore desperately wanted to get out of. The passionate admirers of Glen A. Larson's series were vocal about their dislike of the remake right from the first contact, when it was presented at the San Diego Comic-Con in 2003. This deserves some comment, given the relationship between the aesthetic and narrative conventions of the genre and how they are valued or devalued.

It is possible that this strict rejection by some fans of the original has less to do with the genre and more to do with the cultural understanding of the genre – or, more precisely, with the lack thereof. Sci-fi lovers who are not insular are eager to connect the past, the present and the future. This is what *BSG* did when, in the opening scene, the armistice officer reviews a document with specifications for an old Cylon Centurion model from the previous series. The museum in Galactica's starboard landing bay displays a copy of the same droid and also a Cylon baseship from the first war. There are several nods like these that those acquainted with the original series easily notice. Creating a narrative continuity between the two shows was a way of reclaiming the important role that recollection plays in the genre; we cannot imagine the future without knowing the past.

The new viewers whom Moore wanted to attract and who have only discovered how rich and engaging sci-fi can be with *BSG* lack a sense of memory of the genre. The fans who dismissed it as a fashionable misreading of the original that disregarded

genre conventions, take genre as having a normative rather than descriptive function. The thematic wealth and the stylistic richness of the series are complementary. The show is not a rupture, either from the thematics of the genre, or from its aesthetics. It explores a central preoccupation of the genre: the dramas of the limits of the human and of the limitations of humanity. What was disappointing about the show's conclusion was exactly how it abandoned the intimate drama of the characters, and thus what resonantly embodied its themes, for a cautionary tale.

As a cult genre, science fiction creates its own ghetto, but one quite different from that which Moore suggests. Some works of science fiction, like J. J. Abrams's *Star Trek* (2009), may be popular, may be liked, but only some members of the audience understand them as additions to the history of the genre. This makes those people a somehow isolated group, uninterested as they are in the transient box-office numbers. For this immense minority – always keen to become larger – the measure of success of such a work is its pertinence and permanence in the popular imagination. They see it as a means of making sense of the world through the powers of creativity, connecting people in a projection of the future that can illuminate the present. There is a distinction to be made here. Undoubtedly, some aficionados think that their knowledge of trivia separates them from the rest, in an elitist and exclusive way. By contrast, genuine affection for popular art in general, and sci-fi in particular, is ideologically open and inclusive.

My analysis of the design motifs and camerawork of the series has shown that its visual style does not break away from the aesthetics of the genre and instead finds inventive forms of continuing it. The way the series deals with the aftermath of 9/11 is similar to how films such as *On the Beach* (1959) tackled the fear of a nuclear holocaust after the Second World War.

It is one of the achievements of the show that it did not reject the rich tradition to which it belongs, based on a conception of the genre as an isolated category or an artistic ghetto. Instead, *BSG* interacts with the history of the genre, carries it on, or

better yet, freshly reaffirms it with vigour. Despite Ron Moore's confused words quoted at the beginning of his chapter, his other statements make it clear that he did not want to create a non-genre science fiction work that merely used the trappings of the genre for action adventures. His show is genre science fiction because it reflects on current affairs and approaches ontological questions about humanity that are not bound to an era. Far from being a series that rejects the conventions of the genre, *BSG* enacts a return to the essence of sci-fi, acknowledging its place within it. How appropriate, then, that this strategy mirrors its storyline: the plight of humans and Cylons while trying to find meaning and coherence in the present through a grasp of the past. The truth is that new creative contexts give rise to original science fictions, but all of this has happened before, and all of this will happen again. We can only hope.[1]

Note

1 I am grateful to Professor Murray Smith (University of Kent) and Dr Steven Peacock (University of Hertfordshire) for their insightful comments on sections of this chapter.

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The Luxury of Being Simply Human

Unwritten and Rewritten Queer Histories in *Battlestar Galactica*

KAREN K. BURROWS

When *Battlestar Galactica* debuted on the Sci-Fi channel in the USA in December 2003, critics and viewers alike agreed that it was a smart, well-written science fiction drama that both embraced and transcended the trappings of its genre. The series has since revealed itself to be concerned with the post-apocalyptic fate of a fictional Earth, yet has managed to engage its characters and its viewers in debates more germane to our Earth. The plot has dealt at various points with hot-button issues such as conventions for the treatments of prisoners of war, the abortion debate, suicide bombers, occupying forces, fixed elections, the right to refuse medical treatment for religious reasons, the stem cell debate and more[1] – all straight from contemporary, particularly American, headlines. *Battlestar Galactica* has always been about 'the pressure of making genuine choices in real, and often horrific situations' (Ryan, 'Answers to Your "Razor" Questions'). The show typically refrains from direct commentary on the real-world treatment of the issues: though the leftist leanings of the (film) crew are evident, no moral or ethical line is drawn in any of the above examples. The characters are forced to muddle through as best they can and the audience is caught up in the uncertainty and is meant to question their own knee-jerk prejudices. Despite