

**“Enemy metaphors” and the countdown for mankind in the
American TV series *Space: Above and Beyond* (1995-1996)
and *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009)**

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Abstract

Nearly ten years lie between the two American television series, *Space: Above and Beyond* (*S:AAB*), a show which was cancelled after one season, and the highly acclaimed *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*), an extremely political drama and product of the Bush administration period. This paper analyses how both shows are connected to reality, how they are dealing with the intensity of human emotions in times of war and inner crisis in a highly militarized and technological environment, and how we could come to understand our “technological selves” through a show like *BSG*. While the humans in *S:AAB* are facing a totally alien and hostile life form, the enemy in *BSG* was created by mankind itself. These sentient AIs turn out to be the mirror-image of humanity at its worst; they have chosen to remodel themselves in the image of their makers in what looks like an attempt to infiltrate and destroy the rest of humankind. In the stand-off between humans and enemy fractions, the alien “other” in *S:AAB* or the Cylons (“toasters”) in *BSG*, both sides are reaching to justify their own survival and for reasons to commit genocide. In *S:AAB*, the treatment of In Vitros (“tanks”), genetically engineered humans, symbolizes a first level in the alienation of humankind from other life forms and, as it were, from its own humanity, which then culminates in the wars against the Silicates (AIs) and the “Chigs.” While first peace talks with the adversary in *S:AAB* end in disaster, the conflict in *BSG* is eventually resolved and humankind – “lesson learned” – discards its technological heritage to return to a life in nature, only to begin a new cycle of slow “dehumanization.” *BSG* is about mankind’s journey to (re-)discover its humanity and the struggle with itself after a catastrophe, but it is also about the Cylons’ quest to self-definition; two journeys which, as it turns out, have the same destination. In both shows the fight is as much with the enemy outside as it is with the enemy inside, the loss or the gain of what it means to be human.

Key Words: TV, enemy, other, mankind, artificial intelligence, technology

1. Two related science fiction TV shows

Nearly ten years have passed between *Space: Above and Beyond* (*S:AAB*) and the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*) series. While the new *Battlestar Galactica*, a remake of a campy science fiction show from the 1970s, like so many other television programmes or movies of the new millennium, is clearly a product of the Bush administration era, *S:AAB* was produced in an era when genetic engineering was the latest fashionable threat to humanity. Although *S:AAB* did connect to its socio-political climate, it did so in a less conspicuous manner than *BSG* and generally failed to weave its enigmatic storylines into a bigger picture. The intensity of human emotions in times of war and inner crisis in a highly militarized and technological environment, when they were explored earlier in the 1990s, did not resonate with audience and critics as strongly as during their remarkable return in the “decade of terror.” Through confrontations between humans and enemy “Others,” both TV programmes repeatedly throw humanity’s right and capacity for survival into question. Artificial intelligence like the Cylons (*BSG*) or Silicates (*S:AAB*), genetically engineered In Vitros (*S:AAB*) or utterly alien beings (*S:AAB*) are treated with the same disdain and racism that have been at the core of understanding Others throughout mankind’s history. While first peace talks with the adversary in *S:AAB* end in disaster, the conflict in *BSG* is eventually resolved and humankind - lesson learned - discards all technology and returns to a life in nature, only to begin a new cycle of slow dehumanization and separation. In *BSG*, mankind’s journey through war and space, which ultimately converges with the Cylons’ own identity quest, serves to (re-) discover humanity and understand the adversary as “next of kin.” Simultaneously, the audience is encouraged to explore its own technological heritage and becoming. Technology and humans in *S:AAB* are not blending into each other like they do in *BSG*, and the revelation voiced by an alien being, “We are you!” (ep. 1.24), merely serves to alienate the antagonists even further. In both tales the fight is as much with the enemy without as it is with the foe within, the loss or the gain of what it means to be human. By facing Others along with possible extinction, a mirror is held up to humanity. Ever more, hard-pressed to do and visit the unimaginable, the real alien faces people are forced to see are their own. The militarization of Western and especially American society since the September 11 terrorist attacks and its consequences, a globalized “culture of fear,” have given war ethics direct access to civilian lives, thereby placing human rights and freedoms under very realistic constant attack. It is a common literary trope

that war enforces changes in soldiers and civilians and lets them become “Other” to themselves. Thus, when a rebel from the *Galactica* fleet stares at his own distorted reflection in a broken mirror shortly before his suicide bomb attack (3.01), we are reminded how astonishing and uncomfortable such images in a contemporary programme that is meant to entertain us can actually become. The countdown for mankind is running, if it will lead to self-annihilation or simply to an end of mankind as we know it, remains to be seen.

2. The enemy as “Other”

Genocide

The Cylons in *BSG* were created by humans as robots; they then evolved into twelve human models which throughout the show increasingly develop their identity as “people.” There are many copies of the same model, but over time, specific individuals stand out among them and start to speak up. The Cylons can resurrect and download their consciences and memories into a new body, if their resurrection ship is close; a resurrection from death may then become a “learning experience” (2.18). Apart from the humanoid models in Cylon culture, the fighter planes (Raiders) and robots (Centurions) also do have a mind, can learn from their deaths and even rebel against their kind.

The first pilot episode of *Battlestar Galactica* begins with a hideous crime: the murder of an infant by one of the humanoid Cylon models we later get to know as “Six.” After this first encounter, which appears to be an act of heartless violence, but could just as well have been an act of mercy, it is the steadily declining figure - both in the opening credits of the show and on the whiteboard of the fleet’s president - counting down the number of survivors from the Cylon attack, that hovers like a Sword of Damocles over the frantic run of humanity from extinction in this Greek tragedy disguised as a TV show. At first the Cylon rationale to eliminate all humans seems logical; after all, they have machine minds and may have “calculated” the odds of their own survival if humanity is allowed to live. So, despite their devastating first strike, Cylons do not seem to represent a classic genocidal culture. From all we have learned throughout our own history on Earth, they do not follow the defining patterns that can be recognized in an eliminationist society. They do not use language to demean their victims or try to prolong or even enjoy the annihilation. They carry out a clean and final strike against an enemy that used to enslave their race. Any doubt about Cylon moral guilt, however, changes when their horrifying fascistic breeding factories are discovered (2.05). In the New Caprica storyline things get particularly gruesome; Cylons *do* torture and abuse, extort and finally execute prisoners (3.01-3.04). Daniel Jonah Goldhagen describes genocide as a “political, and purposefully

calculated, act.”¹ However, the Cylons’ eliminationist notion is reviewed by individual entities inside their own culture, Six, Boomer, Sharon, D’Anna and one of the Cavils on Caprica, and their change of heart in turn effectively annuls human rationalization to eliminate the Cylons in return; both sides are wrong. In the clone-like Cylon community it is hard to distinguish and become an individual, therefore humans keep crediting all hideous acts to the collective Cylon force. To them Cylons are faceless Others that do not recognize or even value a culture of individuals as can be found in human societies. The enemy is faceless, and can therefore be killed again and again. Faceless enemies, today often seen in Arabic terrorists who all look the same to Western people, come at us with a seemingly unlimited “supply” of soldiers and suicide bombers. *BSG* taps into very prominent discussions on war, terrorism and ethics, especially by reversing the American-Arabic victim-terrorist dichotomy in the controversial New Caprica storyline.

It is impossible not to interpret the Cylons as humans. Their capability for genocide is as prominent in them as it is in “real” humans. When chance presents the human fleet with an opportunity for a genocidal counterstrike using a biological weapon, the leaders do not hesitate to carry out this plan (3.07). Only the interception of Helo, a human married to a Cylon, who calls the bio-attack a “crime against humanity” (3.07) averts the “coup de grace.” Helo questions the legitimacy behind the reasoning for such a strike, as it mirrors the initial criminal annihilation of the Twelve Colonies by the Cylons. Goldhagen continues that even if one acts in self-defence and such views, emotions and acts are psychologically understandable, “it should be unambiguously understood that the eliminationist acts are criminal.”² The Cylons are clearly as racist and eliminationist among themselves as they are against humans, which they often name as their parents or creators.

Otherness

The human race has proven in the past that even genetic relationship is no guarantee for mutual respect. Virtually any kind of otherness has been utilised before to justify animosity, war and genocide among different cultures: skin colour, religion, birth defects, ethnic heritage, sexual orientation etc. In war we define our enemies as Others because we see them as unlike ourselves. It is a kind of ethnocentric certainty which makes us position otherness beneath us. There is a necessity behind seeing it as “monstrous” or “devilish.” We need to dehumanize strangeness first, before we can move on to eradicate it. Therefore we give names to our enemies to draw attention to their difference and to demean it, to vent our hatred and to justify our desire to extinguish this otherness. In *S:AAB* humans call In Vitros “tanks” or “nipple-necks,” the aliens are “Chigs,” named after the chigoe flea, Silicates call humans “cabonites” and in turn are labelled “walking computers,” “units” or “things.” Even the aliens in *S:AAB* have demeaning

terms for humans, something like “red stench.” In *BSG* the Cylons are either “skin-jobs” (humanoid models) or “chrome-jobs” (robot models), but all of them are referred to as “toasters.” The Cylons are the only Other in this collection who manage to enrich the word “human” with derogatory otherness without turning the word into a swearword.

The Silicates have developed just rudimentary emotions, yet their “Take a Chance” virus allows them to act independently, but it means that their decisions are based on chance not reason. They are gamblers, and their alleged “freedom” is revealed as mechanical, because it can be triggered by human adversaries at will, like some kind of automatism. Even though human in form, they are depicted as machines by their need for “batteries” to sustain their “life” and injuries in their faces where wires show. The models do share their memories in Borg-style, but they do not have a brain, only a hard drive that can be erased. When this happens, the Silicates are not really “killed;” they are rather “turned off” or “exterminated.” However, even the Silicates seem to be capable of evolution like their much more advanced AI-kin in *BSG*, because a rudimentary love relationship seems to have formed between two of these androids (1.19). Yet, other than the Cylons, Silicates have no means of reproduction whatsoever. Their species comes with an inevitable expiry date, and their erratic and childish behaviour at times defines them as flawed creations, whose extinction is desired by humans and just a matter of time.

Genetic relatives

Genetic relatives like the Chigs or In Vitros remain Other as long as they do not conform to a sense of familiarity. If by definition, something cannot be human, like the Chigs, at least it should be “humane,” so we do not need to exterminate it. Even if the Others’ appearance matches ours, knowledge about their difference remains and is often channelled into an ideology or religion, where - if unchecked - it may wreak havoc, for which German fascism is a prime example. In Vitros were not “born” in the human sense, they were grown and harvested and as a result are only one step away from being “artificial intelligence.” In the 1990s, the Orwellian idea that humans could be designed like this continued very much to scare the public. On the one hand, human cloning still retains an air of materialism; why else would we want to clone ourselves, other than to produce living organ donors for ourselves?³ On the other hand, advances in biotechnology make talks about disease-free “designer children” with preferred sex, IQ, race or appearance sound less like science fiction than we could hope for, and rightfully so, some people say.⁴

While the humans in *S:AAB* struggle with their humanity, In Vitro Cooper Hawkes has yet to discover it in himself. Scorned and discriminated by the “naturally born,” at one point he and his superior, Lt. McQueen, who

is also an In Vitro, have to undergo a “loyalty test” (1.07). Through his life as a soldier he learns about love, friendship, compassion, fear, hatred, family and loyalty, the TV show seems to follow a certain clichéd checklist here for what it means to be human. By being born at the age of 18 and then brainwashed into indentured service, he is, after all, some kind of empty vessel and ready for input, not much different from the Silicates, but his “programming” - he was taught 687 ways to kill a human (1.13) - is not irreversible. Hawkes is reared by his team and McQueen into becoming a respectable human being. As the In Vitro Cooper Hawkes absorbs the best of human qualities, his teammates simultaneously discover the worst in themselves and some of them nearly lose it completely. The Wang-Elroy story arc most strongly symbolises this struggle of the soldiers in this narrative to remain human.

There are only fleeting impressions of the Chigs as having common “positive” notions, like familiar body language or behaviour, however, without communication the real meaning evades the humans. In “Who monitors the birds” (1.13) In Vitro Cooper Hawkes on a lone combat mission observes an alien looking at a bird flying in the sky and remembers his desire for freedom sitting in an In Vitro education camp where he was considered to be “defective” and scheduled to be “erased.” In a first personal contact between him and a hostile the Chig begs for mercy and hands Hawkes what appears to be a token. Yet, only minutes later, Hawkes kills the very same individual in another fight. In a faceless war all enemies look alike. Hawkes returns the token to the dead alien with an air of sadness. Hands that had been held out in friendship were forced to kill each other in the end. As encounters go, moments like this remain fleeting and without consequence. The Chigs are an Other whose hideous behaviour and customs mainly serve to progressively enrage and scare the humans in *S:AAB*. In all their actions they appear faceless, merciless, cruel and cunning. As enemy the Chigs are largely invisible, launching sneak attacks out of the dark, like combat fighters in the Vietnam War. Their presence looms in their terrifying weaponry and space fighters. Their bodies are hidden in space suits, so in the very few close encounters with individuals, the Chigs all look the same. When finally an alien face is shown, its facial play remains unreadable to the humans.

3. Humanity’s survival

Finding Earth

“Science fiction is the fiction of mortgaged futures.”⁵ It seems that in *BSG* people do not come from a society in decay, but merely are forced into one. However, it is possible that Galactica’s civilization is just pushed to jump a few life-cycles and survive in an environment nearly completely devoid of nature, where it has to continue in a confined, prison-like state with

human rights constantly under attack. Humanity is doomed, and nothing we can do will change this fate. Charles Eisenstein states that “It is already too late.”⁶ In his study *The Ascent of Humanity* he claims that there is a “purpose to the Fall”⁷ and humanity’s demise will come from the separation from each other and the world around it.⁸ In a way, Eisenstein creates the ultimate “enemy metaphor” in nature itself by saying “The world is an Other.”⁹ The decreasing number of survivors in *BSG*, much like a countdown, symbolises that time is running out for mankind. Yet, when after countless painful sacrifices the remainder of humanity unites with its former enemy to settle on Earth, it is a literal miracle that takes them to this point; how else to interpret the divine intervention in the final moments of a show that for the most part relies on stark political and social realism? In Eisenstein’s view the miracle that will save humanity is less divine. He believes the world, not per se, but as we know it will come to an end.¹⁰ The miracle that will save humanity will reveal itself in a change of motivation and organizing principles of technology,¹¹ in new kinds of materialism or eco-friendly new age lifestyles.

Eisenstein ends his analysis on an optimistic note, though he concludes that humanity will have to face the ultimate evil before it will finally “choose” to step up to a higher level of humanity. There will be victims to the Fall, he confirms, but they will serve to initiate the healing process.¹² “The price of Separation has been no other, and could be no other, than the furthest possible extreme of evil”¹³ In fact, we are dealing with a double separation in *BSG*, as humans have split both from nature and from their technological selves. The reunification of Cylons and humans is not a final solution, but just the beginning of another cycle in what Eisenstein calls “the tides of separation and reunion,”¹⁴ initiated by handing down the technological gene to the next generations. Humanity is a technological species whose technological evolution feeds back into biological evolution.¹⁵ The idea in *BSG* to move “beyond civilization,” to leave the idea of building cities behind, is likewise in line with Daniel Quinn’s thought experiment in *Beyond Civilization: Humanity’s Next Great Adventure*. Quinn suggests a change of “memes” that are lethal to humanity and a return to tribal values and organization structures.¹⁶ Quinn does not understand this “New Tribal Revolution”¹⁷ as old-style ethnic tribalism, but rather as new coalitions of people as equals trying to make a living¹⁸ and calls it “the gift of natural selection to humanity.”¹⁹ In *BSG*, separation is healed in the end - for the moment - but Eisenstein and Quinn’s proposals are revealed to be idealistic, when in the last minutes the story jumps 150,000 years to the cities of the future. After their settlement, the colonists had immediately begun a new cycle. “Innocently, nature will attack the denatured and vacuous culture of humanity, as an immune system would attack a viral culture.”²⁰ Human nature is meant to return to nature, or, in Quinn’s understanding, to more natural, less stressful ways of living - but only for awhile. This image

assumes that just being in nature does not mean humans are resonating with it and that humankind is destined to separate itself from nature sooner or later. Ultimately, so even Eisenstein asserts, technology will again distance us from nature and insulate us from her rhythms.²¹ Our genetic memory of nature is like nostalgia that, even when we achieve reunion, it is not meant to last, but meant to be an ideal that is forever out of reach. “Finding Earth,” literally, is humanity’s never-ending quest.

Machines and humans

In *BSG*, more so than in *S:AAB*, the main question is not whether the AIs are human, but if mankind is. “Each of us lives our human-ness as a uniquely individual experience; but that experience, we are asked to feel, is part of a larger, all-embracing humanity, a ‘human condition...’²² Other than in *S:AAB*, where humans remain divided from technology, *BSG* is a story about separation *and* unification. Humans have separated themselves from their technological self, and ultimately the Cylons make the same mistake by separating their human natures from their mechanical heritage. They split into the human models and the mechanistic robot Centurions and Cylon Raiders, biomechanical and sentient fighter planes. Because the human-like models are equally scared of the free will of their mechanical selves, they choose to lobotomize the Raiders and constrict the freedom of the Centurions with inhibitor chips. Humanoid Cylons make the same mistake humans did, when they made slaves out of their robots creations. As the Centurions were the ones who originally created the human models, again the children of one species are turning on their creators or parents, much like the Cylon robots turned on humanity.

Why do the Cylons choose to copy their creators’ appearance in the first place? Is it just to infiltrate their enemies? Or is the goal to understand and to become them, to better themselves? It is clear that Cylon evolution did not reach for perfection. The AIs are far from the Singularity and far from being biologically perfect human models. The Cylon god could be a substitute for the “genetic gods” John C. Avise is talking about in his book *The Genetic Gods: Evolution and Belief in Human Affairs*. Evolutionary processes, he argues, are “mechanistic” in nature and guided by a “totally amoral and thoughtless operation, natural selection.”²³ Cylon evolution desires the flaw as it is their idea of improvement and, maybe, perfection. There is a rationale behind the Cylons’ desire to replace resurrection or their quasi immortality with birth; they are replacing one type of immortality with another. The “technological self” in itself is indestructible. The resurrection ship symbolises an anchor to a mechanistic technology that does not entirely fulfil the definition of “life” and constitutes the one thing that prevents them from being entirely human. The Cylons have discovered that if there is no death, there is no meaning to their existence, which might not even count as

life at all. When you can infinitely replicate yourself, the value of the individual body disappears completely. However, “genetic immortality”²⁴ after all is just another type of mechanism, “biological mechanism,”²⁵ and its close relationship to sexuality could make it as desirable as mechanic immortality. Many observers have noticed that the Cylon race is clearly depicted as an overtly sexualized species. “As elements of the human experience, sexual reproduction and death are as inevitable as taxes, and far more enigmatic.”²⁶ I do believe that this facet does not serve any marketing purposes, but neatly fits into the Cylons’ identity quest. There are many explanations of why humans have sex, it is necessary for procreation, helps to cement the bonds between parents in nuclear families, and, because it is necessary to initiate reproduction, “we’ve come to enjoy it.”²⁷ If “[e]volving is not a goal but a means to solving a problem,”²⁸ then the problem the Cylons desired to solve with their evolution is to become human through self-reproduction, not replication. “Among the features that tend to distinguish life from nonlife, such as growth, metabolism, movement, and responsiveness to stimuli, the most fundamental is self-reproduction.”²⁹ Reproduction through birth seems to be the Cylons’ aim, as their experimental human breeding factories and the human-Cylon (Helo-Sharon) reproduction experiment underline. Avise’s understanding of the genetic gods would also explain the unexpected religiosity of the Cylon race. Researchers now understand religiosity in humans as influenced by the genes, as religiosity served our forbears well in the evolutionary struggle for survival and reproduction. The genetic gods “are material agents, outcomes of natural evolutionary processes that have shaped them and their organismal vessels, ourselves included.”³⁰ They are “tangible entities, with profound influences on humanity” which have “wrestled from the supernatural gods considerable authority over human affairs.”³¹

In *BSG*, spirituality is presented like a unifying force that brings together the divided human natures in the end. The appearance of angels as guiding as well as misguiding forces in the visions of Baltar and Six and - probably - in the Starbuck character, could be interpreted in a number of ways. However, at this point I want to avoid taking the angels in the show too literally. Being no theologian, I would rather leave the discussion of the complex religious implications in *Battlestar Galactica* to other researchers. Cylon religion in this tale can visualize the learning process of the human race and lets it see its flaws. Yet, humanity as the most reckless and genocidal of all species on our planet, so far has shown no insight into its defects on a grander scale. The Cylon revolution is made possible through their interfaces and their initial sameness, but we humans do not possess such an interface - yet.

Technological self

Most analyses of *BSG* are enthralled by the human-like Cylon models and their understanding as “people.” But their identity as machines is equally fascinating and should be brought back into the discourse. Clearly the Cylons are sentient life forms, but they are also programmed and sometimes their programmes kick in and their machine selves take completely over, in which case their humanity vanishes. An understanding of our bodies as machines roots in the fact that human life over time has evolved from the natural to the artificial and our fascination with technology may still lead us down the mechanical road to self-annihilation. The Cylons in *BSG* could refer to the increased melting of our bodies within technology and that we do not really feel threatened by this development any longer. Frankenstein’s monster does not look so scary anymore, because we are wearing cyberbodies every day. We may still look human, but this appearance is now often superficial, even cosmetic. We have embraced technology completely and desire its advantages and “kicks.” We crave “input” and even have shaped our modern languages with technology. Science fiction accommodates “a scientific view of humanity and culture”³² and is both afraid of and in love with science.³³ The Cylons “represent the *otherness in ourselves*, that radical otherness which lies at the heart of our own artificially becoming, technical and multiplicitous ‘nature-s.’”³⁴ The desire to go beyond what is humanly, sensory and intellectually capable, usually at the core of drug addictions, is now part of the fascination with virtual reality, computer games and media conversion and has become an ingredient of everyday life. The Cylons are an incarnation of our technological self, not only because they can download themselves into new bodies, like we dress ourselves up in countless online identities today, but because of our human innate desire for progress. They also incarnate our inner conflicts and debates and the fear that still looms after opening Pandora’s Box, the underlying unease that the knowledge we crave could trigger our inevitable demise. If technological evolution goes unchecked, humanity, so many voices warn, could reach a final stage when our human and technological self might destroy each other.

BSG rejects the idea of the Singularity, but it acknowledges it in the Cylon character Cavil. At the end of “The Plan,” Cavil opposes the other models’ fascination with the human condition, he voices opposite feelings of confinement and entrapment in his human body. His voice is not so far removed from the amazement with technology of our times as one might think. As a kind of a reverse statement it also echoes another android’s desire to embrace humanity in the moment of its death, Roy Batty’s iconic last words in *Blade Runner* (1982). There is yet hope that a machine consciousness will make it choose humanity as the final stage of machine evolution and that humanity could embrace new hybrid life forms. In the end, the mechanical Cylons leave the human models to find their own destiny in space, but also to become a silent threat to humanity still out there. J. Storrs

Hall believes in *Beyond AI* that “the deep structure of the moral instinct is a common genetic heritage”³⁵ in humans, but AI of the future will equally be capable of morality, therefore humans are advised to provide them with a conscience, as “we will be able to create machines that exceed us in moral as well as intellectual dimensions.”³⁶ One hope for humanity resides in creating intelligence that will be capable of surpassing human morality, because by design “AIs will (or at least could) have considerably better insight into their own natures and motives than humans do.”³⁷ Hall predicts that machines could teach us science as well as morality³⁸ and may even have “the ability to be more honest than humans, who believe their own confabulations.”³⁹ Brian Willems agrees that humans and machines need each other, “machines are machines only with the help of humanity,” but humans can only outgrow their poverty in relation to the machine.⁴⁰ Maybe that is why, by watching *BSG*, we have the uncomfortable feeling that we can learn more from the Cylon characters than we can from the humans in this show.

4. Conclusion

Humans have a constant fear that evolution could outsmart them somehow. In *S:AAB* a genetically related species appears which might do just that. In *BSG* humanity outsmarts itself by creating thinking machines. Both fears are common tropes in sci-fi stories. Somehow, in its darkest hours, when humanity cannot recognize itself anymore, shows like *BSG* take it apart and make us have a good look at it from the inside. In a race to Earth a divided version of humanity comes together to form wholeness at the end, ending one destructive cycle and beginning a new one. In *BSG*, humanity reaches a phase when - for a brief moment - it understands itself completely and sets a course for life. But when this climactic point has passed, it drifts and tears itself apart again. This tearing is done by the human civilization distancing itself from nature and then, metaphorically, by creating the Cylons in the first place. The humans in this tale put a piece of themselves in their avatars, like artists who put a piece of their heart and soul into their work. Like a chemical reaction, our divided human natures are striving for completion, and in the very moment of achievement, inevitably will set in motion a new process of rejection.

BSG is going out on a limb for humanity by telling us to embrace our technological heritage and self as part of human nature, quasi a genetic condition we cannot escape, no matter how much we try. Is *BSG* optimistic? Yes, more so than *S:AAB*, which ends on a depressing note, but it is obvious that the lesson that is learned is not passed on to the next generation. In *S:AAB* the tale remains unfinished, and the ending is fabricated and unsatisfactory; we are just catching a glimpse of humanity's path in this version. Chances for harmony or unification, not with our technological self,

but with our genetic relatives, are botched. A chance to embrace otherness remains just out of reach in this tale.

Are we really still scared of technology? Didn't we pass that phase the moment we crossed over the genetic engineering borderline over a decade ago? Even the sanctuaries of our human bodies have become progressively designed by technology, cosmetic surgery, medicine, cyberspace and virtual identities, and technology has entered our offspring's bedrooms. Children grow up attached to iPods, mobile phones, computers and chip cards. How can we still fear what we carry in our pockets willingly? Therefore it is no wonder that the robots in the stories of our time have human faces by default.

Notes

- ¹ D J Goldhagen, *Worse Than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity*, PublicAffairs, New York, 2009, p. 167.
- ² Ibid., p. 204.
- ³ This is an idea that has been explored in a number of science fiction stories; see for example the movie *The Island* (2005).
- ⁴ M Polyakov, 'The Ethics of Designer Children,' *Institute for Ethics & Emerging Technologies*, April 10, 2008, <http://ieet.org/index.php/IEET/more/2380/>.
- ⁵ Z Sardar, 'Introduction,' in *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, Z Sardar & S Cubitt (eds.), Pluto, London, 2002, p. 1.
- ⁶ C Eisenstein, *The Ascent of Humanity*, Panentheia Press, Harrisburg, 2007, p. 434.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 534.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁹ Eisenstein, op. cit., p. 31.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 438.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 483.
- ¹² Eisenstein, op. cit., p. 555.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 552.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 537.
- ¹⁵ Eisenstein, op. cit., p. 59.
- ¹⁶ D Quinn, *Beyond Civilization: Humanity's Next Great Adventure*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1999, p. 24.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 163.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 147.
- ¹⁹ Quinn, op. cit., p. 82.
- ²⁰ S Cubitt, 'Delicatessen: Eco-Apocalypse in the New French Science Fiction Cinema,' in *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, Z Sardar & S Cubitt (eds.), Pluto, London, 2002, p. 20.
- ²¹ Eisenstein, op. cit., p. 7.
- ²² T Davies, *Humanism*, Routledge, London, New York, 1997, p. 21.
- ²³ J C Avise, *The Genetic Gods: Evolution and Belief in Human Affairs*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1998, pp. 50-51.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 135.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 4.
- ²⁶ Avise, op. cit., p. 123.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 125.
- ²⁸ M Ridley, *The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature*, Penguin, New York, 1993, p. 31.
- ²⁹ Avise, op. cit., p. 11.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 203.
- ³¹ Avise, op. cit., p. 204.
- ³² Sardar, op. cit., p. 2.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 5.
- ³⁴ C Wertheim, 'Star Trek: First Contact: The Hybrid, the Whore and the Machine,' in *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, Z Sardar & S Cubitt (eds.), Pluto, London, 2002, p. 91.
- ³⁵ J S Hall, *Beyond AI: Creating the Conscience of the Machine*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2007, p. 302.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 367.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 346.
- ³⁸ Hall, op. cit., p. 353.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 347.
- ⁴⁰ B Willems, 'When the Non-Human Knows Its Own Death,' in *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Knowledge Here Begins Out There*, J T Eberl (ed.), Blackwell, Malden, 2008, p. 95.

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