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Downloading Doppelgängers: New Media Anxieties and Transnational Ironies in *Battlestar Galactica*

Battlestar Galactica (US 2004-09) has become a phenomenally popular fictional show in an age of 'reality' programmes. A pointedly post 9/11 updating of Glen A. Larson's 1970s broadcast series of the same name, the new *Battlestar* has produced ardent fan communities across the USA. Thanks to its international circulation, it has also generated a strong global audience. Much of its popularity derives from the creative liberties that executive producers Ronald D. Moore and David Eick have taken with Larson's series. Far from being a niche sf programme, it reworks the original with more and stronger female characters, and has season-spanning serial drama storylines as soap operatic as they are space operatic. It consistently and creatively elaborates on its premise as an allegory of the USA's twenty-first century 'war on terror'.

There is, however, another war being fought in the remade *Battlestar*, a guerrilla-style culture war that is, in its articulation of cultural economic problems in intellectual property (IP) and transnational productions, as timely as the show's post-9/11 theme. In this article I will triangulate *Battlestar*'s storyline, especially its characterisation of the Cylon antagonists, to the Canadian contexts of the show's production and the globalised contexts of its distribution – both formal (on cable TV) and informal (on the internet). While the series speaks strongly to US and UK audiences about homeland security and 'homegrown' terrorism, it speaks less obviously but just as compellingly to global debates over new media and IP law. In Canada, which provides *Battlestar* with several of its star actors and its outdoor scene locations, these debates have been recently galvanised by the conservative Harper regime's introduction, in June 2008, of Bill C-61: IP legislation that has been widely criticised as Canada's answer to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) – complete with allegations that it answers not to Canadian media consumers but to US entertainment interests. In this context, the new media anxieties that drive *Battlestar*'s narrative produce interesting transnational ironies of nationalist ideology and cultural economy between the USA and Canada. These ironies – and *Battlestar*'s thematisation of current globalised debates over new media and cultural trade wars – become apparent in reviewing its adaptation of the original series and its production history from the perspective of the Canadian experience of media imperialism.

A twenty-first century *Frankenstein*

Battlestar Galactica (US 1978-79) originated as a prime-time network television series one year after the box-office success of *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* (Lucas US 1977). The story begins as the Cylons break a forty-year truce and devastate all twelve human worlds. Only one military

spaceship – a ‘Battlestar’ – and a few thousand civilians escape. The Canadian actor Lorne Greene starred as Commander William Adama, who leads the ‘ragtag fugitive fleet’ in its quest for humanity’s fabled ‘thirteenth tribe’ on a planet called Earth. It was a short-lived series, ridiculed for campy acting and recycled special effects footage; but it built a hard-core fan base, periodically reinvigorated by the efforts of Richard Hatch (who played pilot Lee ‘Apollo’ Adama, to remake the series). When the series was re-branded and re-cast for a new decade as the even shorter-lived *Galactica 1980* (US 1980), it descended into farcical self-parody. The *Galactica* found Earth, only to occupy it covertly and continue its cat-and-mouse war games with the Cylons, and the plots became little more than extended gags about US popular culture, with cameos from celebrities like Wolfman Jack. The series’ heavy biblical borrowing from Genesis and Exodus has also provoked speculations about its religious and ethnic subtexts: some critics read *Battlestar*’s story of the search for a thirteenth tribe as a link to Mormon theology; others read in the original series’ adoption of classical and Egyptian tropes an extension of Nazi Aryan ideology.¹

More germane to this article, though, is the fact that *Battlestar* was also embroiled in a legal skirmish over IP, with George Lucas promptly charging that Universal Studios had plagiarised *Star Wars*. Sf writer and critic Brian Aldiss recalls that the case was never brought to trial; he advised Universal’s lawyers at the time that *both* texts drew so heavily on prior sf that trying to proving originality for either one would be absurd. ‘The lawyers’ first formal question to me was this: ‘What was your initial response to *Star Wars*?’ I replied, ‘I experienced the delights of recognition’. They thought about it. Then they smiled’ (Aldiss and Wingrove 274). As I will argue, the original series’ cultural quotations and alleged plagiarism have been self-reflexively woven into the remake; however, a closer look at the remake’s adaptation strategies is required first.

Premiering as a cable miniseries in 2003, *Battlestar* became a fascinatingly anachronistic and transnational curiosity – a 1978 concept that could only make sense after 9/11 – and a pointedly American allegory about disaster, diaspora and deregulation, that would only be produced with pivotal Canadian resource contributions. It reproduces the premise of the 1978 series, but through a realist aesthetic shared by other post-9/11 action series, such as *24* (US 2001-). As the remake’s developer Ron Moore (a former writer-producer for the *Star Trek* film and TV franchises, as well as of *Roswell* (US 1999-2002)) reflects: ‘I knew that if you did “Battlestar Galactica” again, the audience is going to feel a resonance with what happened on 9/11. ... And it felt like there was an obligation to ... tell it *truthfully* as best we can through this prism’ (qtd in Hodgman, my emphasis). Following Frederic Jameson, Jason McCullough notes how the realism of Hollywood’s post-9/11 action productions trade heavily in both realism and conspiracy plots; in this connection, the realist mode privileges the associations of metonymy over the substitutions of metaphor (a point worth noting in relation to the associations and connotations of *Battlestar*’s cast, sets and theme I discuss below). If the realism of *24* is produced through its multiple-frame shots and ‘real-time’ plotting, *Battlestar*’s realism emerges through its combination of ‘military-journalism’ shooting (e.g. handheld-style footage, quick zooms), state-of-the-art CGI effects and adaptation strategies for script, costume, and set that model the imagery and story of the remake very closely on actual US military and government institutions, as well as contemporary fashion and media. An early memo by Moore describes the remake’s realism:

¹ I am indebted to Julie Rak and to the peer reviewers of an early version of this paper for alerting me to these fascinating cultural subtexts.

We take as a given the idea that the traditional space opera, with its stock characters, techno-double-talk, bumpy-headed aliens, thespian histrionics and empty heroics has run its course, and a new approach is required', [Moore's memo] began. 'Call it "naturalistic science fiction".' There would be no time travel or parallel universes or cute robot dogs. There would not be "photon torpedoes" but instead nuclear missiles, because nukes are real and thus are frightening. (Hodgman 21)

The general chain of command replicates that of the US military, including its ultimate subordination to a democratically-elected president as commander-in-chief. Whereas Lorne Greene's Adama wore a silver-trimmed blue jumper and cape, the remake's Adama (Edward James Olmos) wears a decorated military uniform. Greene's Adama was the sole leader of the fleet, with a nominal council of robed patriarchs far in the background to provide some mild drama, whereas the remake foregrounds such internal conflict, thanks to the presence of President Laura Roslin (Mary MacDonnell),² who drives subplots in gender politics (she has breast cancer) and, predictably, romance (she and the Commander develop a chaste love interest). This re-imagining of the fleet's social structure makes for a wide variety of other subplots about the politics and ethics of a post-apocalyptic – and post-colonial – society, poised precariously among liberal democracy, martial law and radical deregulation. By modeling the culture of an imagined remainder of all humankind on that of the contemporary US, the remake not only lends critical urgency to its allegory but also reproduces the universalising tendency of US national ideology to imagine itself (as that '80s charity single put it) as 'the world'. The nationalist synecdoche of USA as world must be given special emphasis here so as to fully appreciate the transnational ironies arising from the remake's Canadian contexts of production.

The remake's major adaptation strategies give the concept not only a timely realism, but also a fundamentally Frankensteinian premise, as both a cautionary tale of technology run amok (Baldick 7) and as a trope of geopolitical rhetoric (60). Central to this is the antagonistic role of the Cylons. In the original series, a back story attributed their creation to a vanished race of reptilian aliens (Communists?); in the remake, they are products of human technological instrumentalism that rebelled against their makers. In *Battlestar Galactica: The Miniseries* (US 2003), which functioned as the new series' pilot, Adama, speaking at the *Galactica's* decommissioning ceremony, extemporises on the Cylons in terms that echo Victor Frankenstein's reflections on his creature:

You know when we fought the Cylons, we did it to save ourselves from extinction. But we never answered the question why. Why are we as a people worth saving? We still commit murder because of greed, spite, jealousy. And we still visit all of our sins upon our children. We refuse to accept responsibility for anything that we've done. Like we did with the Cylons. We decided to play God. Create life. When that life turned against us, we comforted ourselves with the knowledge that it really wasn't our fault, not really. You cannot play God then wash your hands of the things that you've created. Sooner or later, the day comes when you can't hide from the things that you've done anymore.

² In the kind of irony I will detail later, Canadian actor Colm Feore cameos as president of the colonies prior to their destruction.

Attributing the Cylon threat to human agency, the remake casts human-Cylon antagonism in much more ambiguous terms than did the original, weaving together the problematics of technological determinism and political backfire to make US foreign policy, especially 'the war on terror', its chief allegorical object. For example, Saddam Hussein and Islamic extremism have been referred to as the Frankensteinian progeny of US foreign policy (Roy 4).

From the miniseries forward, Adama frames the difference between human and Cylon in a binary opposition between the organic and the mechanic, even as Cylon technology gradually reveals itself as viscerally organic in many respects. A kind of neo-Luddite discourse, articulated by Adama and his crew, configures as asymmetrical the main conflict between the Cylons (as cyborgs characterised by sublime and uncanny technological power) and the human fleet (defended by a Battlestar whose very low-tech obsolescence is its saving grace).³ Early dialogue between Adama and Roslin sets the stage for the series' overarching problematisation of technology through new media discourse. Roslin, prior to assuming the presidency, is aboard *Galactica* for its decommissioning and transformation into a public museum; flanked by Aaron Doral (Matthew Bennett), a PR agent who is later discovered to be a Cylon infiltrator, Roslin tries to persuade Adama to network the ship's systems:

Roslin: ... it could tell people things like where the restroom is –
 Adama: It's an integrated computer network and I will not have it aboard this ship.
 Roslin: I heard you're one of those people – you're actually afraid of computers.
 Adama: No, there are many computers on this ship. But they're not networked.
 Roslin: A computerised network would simply make it faster and easier for the teachers to be able teach –
 Adama: Let me explain something to you: many good men and women aboard this ship lost their lives because someone wanted a faster computer to make life easier.

The remake complicates the problematic of technology and the ambiguities of responsibility by characterising the Cylons as a more complex and diverse society than the original series' iconic chrome-plated Centurion soldier-drones who spoke in Casio-chip monotone and were led by a caped robot conehead. The remake's Cylons consist not only of Centurions (nicknamed 'toasters' by *Galactica*'s personnel) but also of twelve human-simulacrum models, only distinguishable from humans by a blood test – or when more than one copy of a given model appears.⁴ Exacerbating the Cylons' Baudrillard-esque scandal of simulation, the twelve Cylon models are also technically immortal: dying individuals download their consciousness into new bodies produced by a distributed network of 'resurrection ships'. Furthermore, these replicant Cylons are also proselytising, monotheistic fundamentalists who ridicule the humans' explicitly classical pantheism. The re-imagined Cylons thus embody a metonymic chain of enemy figures and security threats: spies, sleeper agents, hackers, 'homegrown' terrorists, the so-called 'clash of civilisations', and 'synthetic' alien 'skin jobs'.⁵

³ Attacked by Cylon viruses and kill switches, the networked computing systems of the other, more up-to-date Battlestars proved their Achilles heel.

⁴ *Battlestar* self-reflexively alludes to *Blade Runner* (Scott US/Singapore 1982) in several ways, not least by the casting of Olmos as Adama. In *Blade Runner*, he played the cop Gaff, a character whose origami unicorn implied that the protagonist, Deckard (Harrison Ford), was himself a replicant; early in *Battlestar*, Adama is suspected of being a Cylon.

⁵ Another *Blade Runner* allusion: see the season 2 episode 'Downloaded' (24 February 2006).

As the series progresses, questions of human responsibility for the Cylon 'machines' deepen and overlap, set in the confines of somberly appointed spaceships that offer Gothic, carceral settings for paranoia, violence, and romance. As self-styled 'children of men', the Cylons routinely blame humanity for its own annihilation. One major subplot focuses on the internal conflict of Gaius Baltar (James Callis), a self-absorbed, Faustian race traitor who gave defence secrets to his lover – unbeknownst to him, a Cylon spy who engineered the attack;⁶ while a third-season episode ('Hero' (17 November 2006)) suggests that the human military, not the Cylons, violated the truce with a 'black op' mission in Cylon territory which provoked the Cylons to attack. Far from simplistic, *Battlestar*'s 'war on terror' allegory is deeply ambiguous in blurring the lines between good and evil, friend and enemy, human and inhuman. As producer David Eick comments, 'the bad guys are all beautiful and believe in God, and the good guys all [fuck] each other over' (qtd. in Hodgman). This ambiguity has helped *Battlestar* to find both liberal and conservative audiences. In this respect, *Battlestar* (not unlike *24*, or, for that matter, *Star Wars* before it) continues the Hollywood tradition of 'Reaganite' entertainment, which privileges military action as a vehicle for mobilising liberal and conservative tropes, and for resolving these ideological oppositions through personal dramas and family romances (see Forsythe). *Battlestar* must also be situated as a *critical* product of what Henry Jenkins identifies as an emerging 'military/entertainment complex' (75) – *critical* in its allegorical emphasis on military culture as a synecdoche for US culture, in its popular adoption by audiences across the US political spectrum and in its marked ambivalence towards controversial security topics.

That *Battlestar* responds with such imaginative sophistication to such current concerns as biological weaponry, military discipline, torture, ethnic profiling and suicide bombing partially explains its wide appeal. However, as its cybernetic-simulacral version of the Cylons suggests, its global popularity also results from the widespread downloading of episodes across a distributed network of file-sharing computers and programs. Between its security-minded content and its insecurely distributed context, the dependence of *Battlestar* on Canadian production resources opens up a range of mutually-articulating transnational ironies articulated and new media anxieties – ironies and anxieties localized by the long-standing perception, shared (for different reasons) by Americans and Canadians alike, that Canada is a slightly off-kilter reproduction or mimic of the US. If the fleet, as the balance of all humankind, stands for the contemporary US, then the Cylon enemy that is virtually indistinguishable from it – *except in the uncanny identity of its reproduction* – stands, suggestively (because invisibly), for Canada.

Rethinking media imperialism in Canada

Battlestar's outdoor scenes are shot on various locations in and around Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), and several of its stars (as well as many of its production crew) are Canadian. The use of BC locations as extraterrestrial settings and – more importantly – the casting of Canadian actors in key roles are extremely suggestive when considering the transnational implications of the series' major themes. To understand these implications, it is first necessary to outline the relationship between US and Canadian cultural production in terms of media imperialism.

As theorized by Oliver Boyd-Barrett in 1977, the media imperialism thesis 'characterize[s] the unidirectional nature of international media flows from a small number of

⁶ In 'Six Degrees of Separation' (29 November 2004), this Cylon infiltrates the *Galactica* under the name of Shelley Godfrey, in a nod to *Frankenstein*'s author.

source countries' (Lorimer et al. 287). Although the thesis was subsequently challenged for its deterministic model of unilateral cultural power (which neglects the uses and appropriations of 'imperial' media products by its target audience 'colonies'), I would argue from a postcolonial perspective that the present, high-pressure state of US-Canadian trade relations and their implications for Canadian sovereignty warrant not the dismissal but the critical retrieval of its suggestion that cultural exportation is closely connected to 'territorial annexation' (287). In contrast to media scholars who abandoned the media imperialism thesis because it identified cultural export with political takeover, a postcolonial perspective recognises: the hegemonic power of cultural production as a tool of empire; the adoption of imperial structures and strategies by transnational conglomerates; and the constant, increasing pressure by US corporate lobby groups to liberalise trade with (i.e., exploit) Canada in everything from cultural products (viewed by corporate lobbies as multi-platform intellectual property), to health care (viewed as a market, not a public service), to water (viewed as a commodity, not a human right). Since dominant US ideology has enshrined 'the idea of the marketplace as the fullest expression of democracy' (Schlosser 219) – an idea promoted incessantly by major US media corporations – the difference between media and political imperialism seems to collapse when viewed from a Canadian perspective.

Anglophone Canadians consume far more US media products than Canadian ones. For example, in mid-October 2006, the top ten most watched television shows in Anglophone Canada were all US imports (Lorimer et al. 71).⁷ This is not only because the US cultural industries can appeal to global audiences with superior production values, but also because they can export their products for a fraction of the cost they charge in their domestic market (Grant and Wood 54). It is thus cheaper for Canadian broadcasters and distributors to buy foreign programmes (like *Battlestar*) than to produce domestic ones, however popular the domestic products may be (17). In light of these market- and mindset-dominating realities of US media imperialism, and in recognition of the 'curious economics' (Grant and Wood 44-5) of the cultural market, Canada has developed a complex policy toolkit to promote the development of its cultural industries and thereby protect Canada's cultural (and political) sovereignty. This toolkit includes federal and provincial arts and culture funding agencies, Canadian content quotas for broadcasters, production tax credits, and initiatives like the Canadian-led UN initiative to develop a New International Instrument on Cultural Diversity (NIICD) (Grant and Wood 386-8).

The priorities and efficacy of Canada's cultural policy toolkit, which first took shape during the early Cold War as a militaristic response to the domination of Canadian culture by US interests (Pennee 197), shift according to different times, regions, governments and international pressures. Federal arts funding rises or falls depending on how left- or right-leaning is the government of the day; tensions persist between federal and provincial arts funding bodies; the cultural exemption clause Canada negotiated for NAFTA perennially comes up for re-negotiation as US entertainment interests seek a greater share of Canada's media market. And so Stephen Harper's current minority-conservative regime's introduction of new copyright legislation has become widely understood as a response to US corporate and government pressures. The government minister responsible for Bill C-61 has consulted with US media and entertainment companies, but not the Canadian public; and the introduction of this Bill in June 2008 seems specifically timed as a response to the US Congressional International Anti-Piracy Caucus' announcement, in May, that it had placed Canada on an 'anti-piracy watch list' – in third place, after China and Russia ('Co-chairs'). This Caucus' main problem with Canada, it seems, is online

⁷ CTV's Evening News was the top Canadian programme, in eleventh place.

IP enforcement: 'We remain deeply concerned that Canada has failed to update its copyright laws to provide for online enforcement, making it a safe haven for Internet pirates' ('2008 Country Watch List'). Canadian critics of this manoeuvre and of the Canadian government's responding appeasement suggest that this Caucus may be motivated less by legal than venal interests, noting that career total contributions made to its members' campaigns by the US TV, film and music industries have exceeded \$19 million ('Canadian Bill').

The widespread public protest over Bill C-61 – a protest fittingly mobilised through online social network sites and blogs – repeatedly targeted the bill's evident 'made in the USA' privileging of US media companies over Canadian media consumers (see Geist, 'How the U.S.'). As such, it demonstrates something of the efficacy of Canada's postwar, nation-building cultural policy in connection with Canadians' abiding assertion of cultural difference from the USA. Recent research suggests that Canadian media consumers demonstrably read US media texts 'through a special lens made in Canada' (Rutherford 113), a lens variably focused not only through national but also through regional and cultural priorities. (The circulation of 'culture' as a keyword in Canadian policy is itself substantially different from that of 'entertainment' in the US.) Noting that Canada has provided media scholars with 'a paradigm case of media imperialism', Aniko Bodroghkozy claims that

there is one experience all residents of the True North Strong and Free [i.e. Canada] share (if diversely): an ambivalent relationship to a fictive American Other ... a continual working and reworking of the irresolvable dilemma of how Canadians can construct their imagined community as ultimately different from an intensively desired, but just as deeply loathed made-in-Canada construction of America. (568-70)

In this context of conflicts, colonisations and collaborations between US and Canadian media and culture, questions of national identity centre on overall likeness and devilish detail – that is, on a kind of cross-border identity crisis, a crisis of replication and simulacrum. Paul Rutherford characterises the historical relationship between US and Canadian media as the latter's colonisation by and mimicry of the former in 'home-grown imitations' (108). He quotes a 1907 study, *The Americanization of Canada*, which articulates a perennial symptom of Canada's problematic nationalism, one as familiar during Confederation as in today's debates over 'deep integration': 'The English-speaking Canadians protest that they will never become Americans – they are already Americans without knowing it' (105).

From the slightly different perspective of dual US-Canadian citizenship, Laura Marks explores the flipside of American images in Canada, noting an equally robust perception of what she calls the "'little bit off' quality in Canadian images, seen from a U.S. perspective' (198). For Marks, Canada's identity-with-a-difference, in metonymic terms, poses a 'subversive potential' in 'American contexts', with 'the detail' of Canadian difference making 'it possible to question the whole' ideological apparatus of US nationalist identity (198). Citing a wealth of audience research on how Canadians appropriate US cultural products, Bodroghkozy makes a similar claim: 'It is a foundation of fine details, *typically unnoticed by non-Canadians*, upon which Canadians have built their shaky edifice of national identity' (579, my emphasis).⁸ Both the British Columbia setting and Canadian casting of *Battlestar* trade heavily in such fine details, the

⁸ Since Marks and Bodroghkozy wrote their essays, Canada's legalisation of medical marijuana (Schlosser 226) and gay marriage – which pushed that issue to the forefront of the 2004 US election – have undoubtedly only exaggerated the perversity of Canadian difference in the US imagination.

implications of which, in connection with the show's theme, hinge precisely on their not being noticed.

On location: *Battlestar's* British Columbia

Perhaps the transnationally mediated image of Canada as not-quite-America finds its fullest expression in the BC media industry that has hosted the production of *Battlestar Galactica*. Mike Gasher detaches the BC film industry from any simplistic role in a national cinema, arguing instead that it emphasises industry over culture (103) and depends heavily on foreign location production, not collaborating but *competing* with other Canadian film centres (Toronto and Montreal) for the title of 'Hollywood North' (i.e. the preferred foreign location for 'externalised' Hollywood productions) (140-2). For the longer shooting schedules of TV production, Vancouver competes less with other Canadian cities for US business than with American cities like San Francisco and San Diego (109).

The BC film industry's strategy for attracting foreign location production has been to promote 'the province's protean nature' (112): 'what is noteworthy in British Columbia's case is the degree to which the province has built an industry based on its malleability, selling itself to Hollywood as a place that is willing to stand in for anywhere or nowhere' (106). In *Battlestar*, BC settings, buildings and landscapes are used to represent an intergalactic array of cities, settlements and planets (many of which thus share uncannily similar redwood forests and mountainous terrain). Vancouver provides the locations for urban settings, especially Caprica, the capital city of the human colonies, a post-apocalyptic cityscape occupied by the Cylon army but otherwise devoid of people – not unlike the photos used by the BC Film Commission to promote its locations to Hollywood (Gasher 113-14), or, for that matter, the perennial self-promotion of Canada more generally as a prime site for colonisation, 'a largely unpopulated place full of scenic wonders and infinite resources' (Rutherford 106). In light of these promotions, media imperialism in Canada also encompasses how various governments and policies actively invite foreign colonisation and investment.

For Canadian and especially BC audiences of *Battlestar*, the viewing is richly strewn with local landmarks abstracted into generic sf topoi (for longer-term fans of sf television, BC and Vancouver landmarks also evoke their own earlier appearances in series like *The X-Files* (US/Canada 1993-2002). The Vancouver public library provides a suitably futuristic background for several early scenes in which the Cylons take over the wasted capital. Simon Fraser University supplies a bleak, institutional setting for the first season's finale. In a series so insistently grounded at Ground Zero, the colonial capital, Caprica, evokes New York, making Vancouver, through these allegorical associations, a 'landscape double' for one of the most symbolically charged cities in post-9/11 America. Yet as such, it's 'less ... a distinct geographical location than ... a social class' (Gasher 120) – that is, it is still just a 'little bit off'.

As Gasher argues, 'place' – understood as a specific intersection of particular social relations (136) – even just as background setting does contribute (whether intentionally or not) 'to the story's tone, atmosphere, and possibly its central themes' (106). Like Toronto and Montreal, Vancouver is one of Canada's biggest cities and quite close to the US border; Vancouver is also of particular interest to the US Drug Enforcement Agency as a heroin hub (it has been called the Baltimore of the west coast) and – more importantly – as a city receptive to harm-reducing and decriminalising drug policy initiatives, such as safe injection sites and medical-use marijuana distribution. Marijuana mail-order entrepreneur and former Vancouver mayoral candidate Marc Emery has been fighting extradition to the US for three years now,

facing felony charges for seed distribution that have made him one of the DEA's most wanted ('Prince of Pot'). The formulaically bellicose rhetoric of US policy colours its representation of black-market and legitimate trade issues alike. Take, for instance, film and audiovisual production. Gasher quotes from reports commissioned in 1998 and 2001 by US lobby groups to rein in 'runaway' foreign location production; the 1998 report describes it as 'a grave threat to the future of [domestic US] film and television production', while the 2001 report calls it 'a serious threat' to the US positive trade balance (103). As Pennee observes, Canada and the US may have traded the Cold War for trade war, but culture remains a question of national security (191). And since Vancouver is a Canadian hot spot on the US map of northern-border security issues, its filmic milieu carries with it the residue of some very fraught border politics in Fortress North America.

'They look just like us': *Battlestar's* Canadian conspirators

The perception by US cultural industries of Canada as threat – as rival for production spending – seems to focus more on state borders than agents. As the casting of Lorne Greene in the original *Battlestar* exemplifies, generations of Canadian actors since Mary Pickford have been able to make very comfortable second homes for themselves in Hollywood. The absorption of Canadian bodies by Hollywood seems more tolerable to US producers and audiences than the decampment of Hollywood productions to Canada (which puts such runaway productions in the stereotypical company of job-stealing 'foreigners' and unpatriotic draft dodgers), even providing occasional material for self-reflexive commentary on Canada-US relations as played out in the US entertainment industry. For example, in 1985, Greene hosted a mockumentary that exposed a 'Canadian conspiracy' to take control of the US by infiltrating and occupying its media industry, and which satirised how Hollywood routinely erases the Canadian nationality of actors like Leslie Nielsen, William Shatner and Greene.

Admittedly, the fact that the dominant discourse of Canadian citizenship is itself an exercise in self-effacing, postcolonial diffidence makes it easy for the citizenship of Canadians in US media to get erased. In the 1970s, a CBC contest to find a Canadian equivalent of the expression 'as American as apple pie' awarded its prize to a teenager who completed the sentence 'as Canadian as...' with 'possible under the circumstances'. Using a computing metaphor that will resonate with my argument below, Marshall McLuhan claimed: 'Canadians live at the *interface* where borderlines clash. *We have, therefore, no recognizable identity*, and are suspicious of those who think they have' (qtd. in Pevere 132, my emphasis). Adding some political nuance to this common self-deprecation, Richard Collins suggests that Canadians' weak nationalism in fact drives our nation-state's efficacy as a global model: 'Political institutions are more important than television and culture, or even language, in producing and reproducing a solid sentiment of national identity among Canadians' (qtd. in Bodroghkozy 570). In the light of these images of Canadian citizenship (self-effacing, non- or anti-nationalist, American *doppelgängers* – whether unwitting or scheming), it is hard to imagine that *Battlestar's* casting is not in fact some kind of deliberate in-joke for Canadian audiences, about Canadian identity, conspiracy and camouflage in the ideoscape of North American popular culture. In looking at the Canadian cast, two patterns of characterisation become apparent.

Five of the twelve Cylon models represent the series' leading antagonists, and they are all played by Canadian actors. Alberta model Tricia Helfer takes the star villain's role as Six, the love spy lauded as a 'hero of the Cylons' for her leadership of the attack on the colonies. The romance between Six and Baltar figures them as quarreling lovers; Six travels with Baltar, in an

ambiguous role as a spectral advisor, his absent but tangible beloved, the Cylon version of a devil's voice in his ear, speaking of God's love. With Six's help, Baltar escapes the attack, joins the fleet and wins the presidency; but she also helps him to survive torture by the Cylons, to win his case in a war-crimes trial, and (halfway through the final season) to become a messianic spokesperson for the Cylons' 'one true God'. By repeatedly blurring the line between lover and foe, good and evil, Six's involvement with Baltar becomes an exemplar for several other major relationship subplots.

Korean-Canadian actor Grace Park plays the Cylon Eight. One of her copies is the 'sleeper agent' Boomer, whose assassination attempt on Commander Adama closes season one. The other, Athena, is impregnated by the *Galactica* officer Helo while they are stranded on Caprica; they later marry, and she becomes a *Galactica* officer, while their child Hera becomes an object of Cylon-human power struggles and an iconic harbinger of 'the shape of things to come. Helo is played by BC actor Tahmoh Penikett, a rebellious officer who takes flak from his mates for being a Cylon collaborator, a 'toaster lover'. In one third-season episode ('A Measure of Salvation' (10 November 2006)), he subverts a plan to exterminate the Cylons with biological weaponry; and in another ('Rapture' (21 January 2007)), he reluctantly agrees to kill Athena so she can download herself to a nearby Cylon ship in order to steal back their child. Like the relationship between Six and Baltar, that between Helo and Athena blurs ethical lines of good and evil, but on balance the story tends to figure this pair as renegade protagonists rather than as antagonists.

Boomer, the doomed Eight, is also romantically involved, at the start of the series at least, when she is covertly dating the hangar crew chief Tyrol. Tyrol, played by BC actor Aaron Douglas, eventually discovers, in seasons three and four, that he himself is a Cylon sleeper agent, a discomfiting discovery he shares with no less pivotal an officer than the Commander's right-hand man, Executive Officer Saul Tigh, played by Canadian stage and radio veteran Michael Hogan (whose northern Ontario accent is perhaps the only conspicuously 'Canadian' detail in the series). Tigh is one of the show's most conflicted characters, a grizzled alcoholic whose despair deepens as the series develops, to the point that he deploys suicide bombers against Cylon targets and even kills his own wife for collaborating with the enemy. Ironically, his discovery of his own Cylon identity gives him the mettle to precipitate a new truce between Cylons and humans, a truce that helps lead humans and Cylons together to Earth, on which cliffhanging plot point the fourth and final season ended its first half.

Another of the four 'sleeper' Cylons disclosed at the end of season three is the president's advisor Tory Foster, played by Vancouver actor Rekha Sharma. Unlike the other three awakened sleepers, Tory embraces her newfound Cylon identity, initiating a relationship with Baltar and killing Tyrol's wife, Cally, played by fellow Vancouverite Nicki Clyne. The fourth 'sleeper' Cylon is the erstwhile athlete and guerrilla leader Sam Anders (Michael Trucco), husband to the pilot Starbuck, a lead character from the original series whose drinking-and-smoking machismo (as played then by Dirk Benedict) has been creatively gender-bent by the casting of Katee Sackhoff. An archetypal and self-destructive maverick, Starbuck also develops a mysterious connection with the oracular, trickster-like Cylon Leoben Conoy, played by Canadian screen regular Callum Keith Rennie. Leoben alternately stalks and woos Starbuck, who repeatedly kills his copies, amidst suggestions that she is the 'final' Cylon, a 'harbinger of death' and a human whose unique destiny is to finally discover the way to Earth. In addition, Leoben's appearance in the pilot miniseries first alerts the military command that the Cylons are human replicants, as Rennie's character fights Adama in a grisly showdown:

Adama: What you got is silica pathways to the brain or whatever it is you call that thing you pretend to think with. It's decomposing as we speak. ... you'll be dead in a few minutes. How does that make you feel? If you can feel?

Leoben: Oh, I can feel more than you can ever conceive, Adama. But I won't die. When this body dies my consciousness will be transferred to another one. And when that happens, I think I'll tell the others exactly where you are, and I think that they'll come and kill all of you, and I'll be here watching it happen.

Lastly, Torontonian Matthew Bennett plays Aaron Doral, the PR agent who, in 'Litmus' (22 November 2004) becomes the civilian fleet's first clue that 'the Cylons look like us now'.

As the casting of Penikett and Clyne suggests, Canadian actors do not exclusively play Cylons or their collaborators. Winnipeg-born and -trained actor Donnelly Rhodes plays the *Galactica's* harried, hard-boiled doctor— a chain-smoking straight-talker who gets involved in dubious strategems, such as delivering Athena's hybrid baby then telling her it died so that it can be hidden anonymously in the fleet for security reasons. Alessandro Juliani plays Lieutenant Gaeta, plotting the *Galactica's* journey and jerry-rigging its crude ICT. Luciana Carro and Leah Cairns play minor pilots Kat and Racetrack; and Paul Campbell played Billy, the president's first advisor, killed in a second-season hostage-taking incident.

But Canadians predominate in the antagonists' roles; of eleven known Cylon models, only four are not played by Canadians (but by US actors Trucco, Rick Worthy, Dean Stockwell, and New Zealander Lucy Lawless). This preponderance of Canadian actors in antagonist and especially Cylon roles is largely invisible and unremarked, at least among *Battlestar's* various online fan sites and networks. 'Speaking as an American', writes one participant at Battlestar Forum, 'the nationality of the casting and where scenes were shot doesn't matter to me at all' (qtd. in sonicfiction, 'A question'). Another respondent finds the Canadian production contexts 'amusing' but unimportant.⁹ According to the peculiar transnational dynamic of identity-with-a-difference described above, it is significant here that the question of Canadian contributions has generated barely any discussion – the very *invisibility* and *unremarkableness* of Canadian labour and imagery in fact consolidates the nationalist metonymies at work in the show's cast, locations and theme.

In Cylon roles, Canadian actors simultaneously *embody* the exposure of national difference while *enacting* its erasure. Furthermore, these transnational metonymies add timely significance to the discourse of new media and computer networks that *Battlestar's* dialogue uses to describe the Cylons' technology of reproduction. Throughout the series, tropes of programming, software, drives, kill switches, and viruses accompany those of networks and downloading; for example, in 'Flight of the Phoenix' (16 September 2005), Athena identifies 'a Cylon virus [that's] been learning your system, testing, adapting, finding weak spots [...] so they can turn *Galactica's* systems against you: crash you into other ships, detonate your weapon stores, suffocate the crews'. This discourse of the Cylons as downloadable transgressors, in turn, prefigures the official US government view of Canadians as new media offenders. Through the characterisation and Canadian casting of Cylons as a technologically superior enemy, *Battlestar*

⁹ My thanks go to the *Battlestar Forum* moderator and participants for fielding this research question. An interesting related thread that I read there, worthy of more detailed discussion than I can give it here, concerns the Orientalist depiction of model Eight Cylons (those played by Park) in groups; see cylon_democrat, 'Disturbing depiction'. I concur with this participant that the recurring depiction of Eights in large groups is conspicuous; it activates many of the stereotypical images theorised in Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies*, an analysis of multiculturalism in Canadian English literature.

stages a specific current issue in Canadian-US border tensions, and connects these connotations and associations to its formal and thematic grounding in the 'convergence culture' theorised by Henry Jenkins as a globally distributed network of transmedia franchises, online fan communities, and both collisions and collusions between old and new media, between creative consumers and controlling corporations (18).

As the Congressional Caucus quoted above suggests, it is not only pot seeds but digital seeders that have made the Canadian border a multifaceted security concern for American interests. The US Trade Representatives Office has 'made veiled threats about "thickening the border" between Canada and the U.S. if Canada refused to put copyright reform on the legislative agenda' (Geist, 'How the U.S.'). And this is a border already thickening for Canadians, who are now required to present passports to US customs officials – as well as their digital devices, which may now be searched by said officials, *without cause* (see Singel).¹⁰

The perception of Canada as a 'safe haven for Internet pirates' seems based on the *fair dealing* provision of Canadian copyright law (which is in ways quite different from, but not necessarily better than, US *fair use*), which

grants Canadians the right to make personal, non-commercial copies of music without requiring permission from the copyright holder. Both the Copyright Board of Canada and the Federal Court of Canada have ruled that private copying may include peer-to-peer music downloads. (Geist, 'Piercing' 25)

One consequence of this ruling is that downloading music – for private, non-commercial use – is technically legal in Canada, while uploading music is not (Lorimer et al. 175). As suggested by the spectrum of cultural industry interests lobbying for copyright reform, this legal situation has clear implications for other media. The proliferation of increasingly rhizomorphic torrent networks, which orchestrate the transfer of *parts* of files from arrays of 'seeder' sources, has not only muddied the waters of accountability in more punitive jurisdictions of copyright enforcement, such as the UK and US, but it has also combined with improved bandwidth infrastructures to facilitate the sharing of other cultural products like video games, television programmes and films, which represent exponentially larger file sizes.

In this context, the government publicises Bill C-61 to Canadians as a clarification and entrenchment of users' rights under fair dealing, but its fine print – the controversial 'anti-circumvention' clause – effectively neutralises those rights by imposing harsh penalties for media consumers who work around, disable or otherwise hack the technological protection measures like Digital Rights Management and DVD region codes that producers increasingly build into the cultural commodities themselves. 'The bill essentially says that technology trumps whatever rights consumers or competitors might have otherwise had', writes law professor Jeremy de Beer. 'So the law no longer matters. People only have whatever rights content owners choose for them'.

These contours of the present Canada-US debate over intellectual property, its digital insecurity and the legacy of the 'Napster wars' (see Marshall) produce another transnational irony

¹⁰ I wish to thank the Society for Socialist Studies, and especially June Madeley, for hosting such productive presentations on trans-mediatised popular culture at the 2008 Congress; it was Carolyn Guertin's paper 'Remixing Participation' that alerted me to the US Customs development, among numerous other hot topics in contemporary 'pirate capital'.

in *Battlestar*'s Canadian production context – a temporal irony of the show's distribution and broadcast schedule.

Battlestar Galatica: The Miniseries was co-produced by Universal, USA Cable, the British cable channel Sky One and the US Sci Fi channel. It first aired on Sky in the UK in late 2003. Positive response from the UK audience led to the weekly series, again airing first in Britain, in the fall of 2004. In January 2005, NBC broadcast an edited version of the miniseries and a few episodes from the first season already underway in the UK. NBC's subsidiary Sci Fi channel then began airing the first season in January 2005, followed by the second in July. As of spring 2006, the series was airing simultaneously in both the UK and US. While Canada's Space Channel began airing first-season episodes in January 2005, it did not air the miniseries until October of that year. Space subsequently aired the second season in January 2006, and the third that October. The point here is that for most of the series' broadcast history, the Canadian cable audience has had to settle for third place in line, half a year (or in the case of the crucial, scene-setting pilot miniseries, nine months) behind UK and US airings, in order to watch a show shot in Canada with numerous Canadian actors. Only with the third season, which began in October 2006, did *Battlestar* air simultaneously in all three national markets (Space Communications).

However, the debut of *Battlestar* on UK cable in 2003 coincided with the networked spread of advances in online file-sharing, which began to shift industry attention from music sharing to video and film sharing. 2003 saw a massive surge in the popularity of peer-to-peer applications that use bit-torrent technologies to choreograph multiple sources, thus accelerating the upload and download of very large files. And in Canada, 2003 also saw the launch of the CA*net 4 high-bandwidth network (Lorimer et al. 72). In short, new file-sharing technologies popularised in 2003 meant that *Battlestar* gained popularity with a global audience in the informal digital sector almost as soon as it aired in Britain's formal broadcast sector – a global popularity assisted by the decidedly tech-savvy profile of the show's target audience. *Battlestar* is far from being the only show to find a huge transnational audience in the online informal sector, but it was an early instance of the 'shape of things to come' in the convergence of broadcast and online media (Pesce 5-6). For audiences like these, particularly those participating in online 'knowledge communities' (Jenkins 27-8) to interpret and decode plot mysteries like the *Survivor*-esque hidden identity of the 'final five' (see Jenkins 25), even the one or two days between US and UK air times in otherwise synchronised screening schedules are sufficient to drive significant file-sharing traffic.

If the Cylon discourse of new media anticipates something of *Battlestar*'s online popularity and suggests something of how it constructs a tech-savvy target audience, the episode, 'Black Market' (27 January 2006), explicitly thematises the underground milieu in which much file-sharing takes place. Apollo (Jamie Bamber) tracks the fleet's black-market supply chain back to the conspicuously racialised black kingpin, Phelan (Bill Duke), whom Apollo summarily executes. True to the series' overall ambiguity (and perhaps in a nod to the promotional value of online file-sharing), the military then permits the black market to continue operating, but only on condition of tighter surveillance and a non-negotiable prohibition of using children as collateral (which practice contributes centrally to the kingpin's characterisation). This political-economic subplot allegorises the US as a market society where the line between privatisation from above and informalisation from below is as blurry as *Battlestar*'s Canadian-based line between good guys and villains (see Sassen 266 n. 11).

In this respect, *Battlestar* belongs to a recent trend in specialty cable programmes about the US as an increasingly deregulated and/or underground market society – such as Showtime's *Dead Like Me* (Canada/US 2003-04), in which the grim reaper's work is all outsourced to undead

sub-contractors; Showtime's *Weeds* (US 2005-), in which a single mother tries to maintain her gated-community lifestyle by dealing drugs; and HBO's *Deadwood* (US 2004-06), a Western which, like *Battlestar*, works as a frontier allegory of diasporic migration, militarised public space, technologised security threats and unregulated enterprise in a society characterised less by democracy than 'adhocracy' (Doctorow qtd. in Jenkins 251). Among these series, *Battlestar* most stridently articulates questions of market-society culture, technologies of reproduction and political-economic ethics to a military problematic. Just as the Bush administration attempted to link recreational drug use with terrorism in the public imagination, *Battlestar* embeds processes of recording and reproduction technologies in its themes of market culture, militarisation and diasporic displacement and re-territorialisation. That Canadian involvement is so materially central but symbolically marginal to this series provides grounds not only for reading the ironies between its text and its context, but, moreover, for speculating on what these ironies imply for Canada, as a site for the increasing investments of sf capital.

Canada: sf capital?

Whether coincidentally, conspiratorially or just uncannily, *Battlestar* has kept a thematic finger on the pulse of Canadian-US trade relations, especially in the vexingly un-public domain of intellectual property. In 2008, the fourth season (only the second one to air simultaneously in the US and Canada) sees the humans reaching a new diplomatic accord with a Cylon faction that has emerged as the victor in a Cylon civil war, and the long-awaited arrival of both these parties at Earth. Meanwhile, Canada's minority Conservative government, riven by competing power blocs and on the cusp of parliamentary dissolution for a year, has tabled Bill C-61, received across the board as a new economic accord with the US entertainment industry lobby. Bill C-61 is a salutary symptom of cross-border initiatives in 'deep integration': legislation that aligns Canadian political, economic and cultural structures ever closer to US models, under pressure or open threat from US politicians, government bodies and trade representatives. Like the Liberal government it narrowly succeeded, the present Conservative regime represents its policies and platforms on behalf of Canadian sovereignty, although they tend ultimately not to serve it. For example, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's recent campaign to bolster Arctic sovereignty seems like a nationalist assertion of the Canadian state's northern border, but increasing military spending to do so – and to intensify the Afghanistan operation – is more in step with Bush administration spending priorities. Likewise, Bill C-61 pays lip service to cultural sovereignty, but would facilitate further cross-border colonisation of media use and control.

Kodwo Eshun summarises 'SF capital' as 'the synergy, the positive feedback between future-oriented media and capital' (290). As such, the post-nuclear Vancouver and the 'scandalous bodies' (see Kamboureli) of Canadian-played replicants that have been deeply integrated into *Battlestar Galactica* project a troubling image of what deep integration could mean for Canada's cultural economy, when justified by a sense of the 'Canadian conspiracy' as a cons' piracy: a piracy of American national identity, run (and overrun) by Canadians as the cons. In their very unmarked quality, the integration of Canadian actors, crew members, landscapes and industry facilities into the production of *Battlestar* position Canada as a site of anxious uncertainty over national identity and the security of intellectual property, and as a reservoir of future (and futuristic) resource extraction (Rutherford 106-11). If *Battlestar* episodes that depict the gleaning of water ('Water' (25 October 2004)) and harvesting of food ('The Eye of Jupiter' (15 December 2006)) amid locations shot in the BC interior prove as uncannily pertinent to Canada-US relations as the series' thematisation of cross-border identity crises and new media

trade wars, then Canada's role as a source of sf capital augurs ominous implications for Canada's more basic ecological sovereignty.

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