

Disco Galactica: futures past and present

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Lost in Reimagination

A liberal's case against monopoly-minded multinational media conglomerates, when it comes to decrying the paucity of quality in today's broadcast programming, often rests on the multiplicity of sequels, prequels, remakes, cycles, specials, tie-ins, one-offs and spin-offs. This characteristic is explained in relation to the acquisition of copyrights that comes with buy-outs or take-overs of other broadcast media companies, and their archives, as monopoly status is further consolidated. Yet if this industrial house style of television programming can be identified as typifying the Rupert Murdoch era, then the case for a "national" television drama culture, one which attained a universality with (rather than despite of) an "individual voice" – a case once made by Murdoch's implacable enemy, television dramatist Dennis Potter (Potter, 1990: 22) – should be, by rights, long forgotten. And yet Potter's argument now seems, with the return of *Battlestar Galactica*, and series such as *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *The Office*, *Deadwood*, *The West Wing*, *24* and *The Wire*, impressively far-sighted. For Potter, real life was infinitely mine-able for the television dramatist, demanding a richness and complexity in its representation that both challenged and informed, and yet was accepted by, the television viewer. Clearly something of this dynamic has survived, even with the contemporary propensity for the dilution of just such original programming, which structures an anaemic postmodern culture (and no more so than in the besieged culture of popular television), in which nothing is understood to be new, or can usefully aspire to break new ground. Producing quality television, therefore, necessitates a tricky negotiation: to be both new, and yet to cast

that problematic newness as accommodating the old – that is, new but often within the multiplicity of sequels, prequels, remakes, cycles, specials, tie-ins, one-offs and spin-offs. In this context, at first glance, the 2000s series of *Battlestar Galactica* represents an arresting achievement of just such a negotiation.

The vaunted “re-imagination” with which *Battlestar Galactica* was introduced, or re-introduced, suggests a dialectical relationship between the original, 1978-79 *Battlestar Galactica* series (hereafter abbreviated to OBG, excluding the *Battlestar Galactica 1980* series of 1980) and the contemporary series of *Battlestar Galactica* (CBG, 2004-09). The latter is not entirely a remake of the former, and not entirely a sequel to it, yet not entirely a self-contained text, as separate from it. CBG flags up thematic continuums and the very imagination of its reworkings of the motifs, characters and enemies, concerns and even vocabulary of OBG as all still present – a continuity long after computer generated imagery (CGI) has supplanted matt and model work. CBG is old and new, familiar and alien; of then but from now. The former haunts the latter, particularly in the all-important opening episodes, in which both series need to establish their narratives, introduce their characters, dazzle with their sci-fi visions, and establish the grounds for a deepening and furthering of all these facets. The demands of television sci-fi necessitate a front-loading of wares – an immediate “experience” – for the speed seduction of the virginal audiences. And in these opening salvos, large slices of OBG are – and perhaps this is the most prosaic, and so most welcome description of the idea of a reimagination – simply rewritten for CBG. Once again, mankind’s guard is unwisely down, enabling the Cylons to mount an attack of such ferocity and completeness that *once again* (to the extent that considering CBG as picking up the story where OBG left off renders this moment in CBG comically implausible and dramatically ridiculous) the human race itself

becomes an endangered species. And once again the Battlestar Galactica spaceship and its Colonial Viper space fighters are fired up to repel, or at least mitigate, this sudden attack.

To consider the dialectical relationship between OBG and CBG in intertextual terms – an invitation extended by the continuums present in CBG – suggests an insight into the television series *per se* at the dawn of the twenty-first century: multiplatform grand narratives, created through and disseminated across a variety of media (DVDs and their extras, internet / cellphone downloads, exclusives for fan groupings, console or interactive gaming, and even the weekly television broadcasts of old), which replaces Potter’s dream of television as the great, singular populist art form (the one vision, often shown just the once, for all) with a hydra-headed form of endless possible entry points into any number of variants of the narrative. But such intertextuality bolsters an enticing myth of reimagination: that the old series, shortcomings and all, is *reimaginable* – that the old series now speaks to us, via the new; the OBG vision of a beleaguered humanity now never more relevant, so that the seeds of a visionary quality to be found in OBG can only now be cultivated. After all, what is old, forgotten sci-fi other than “visionary” once it re-emerges in such critically-praised contexts?¹ The suggestion of an intertextual reading of OBG, in CBG, is selective: there is plenty in OBG that does not receive the reimagination treatment. And those elements left behind point to the limitations of the surface political liberalism of CBG, and the way in which the process of reimagining reveals an ideological shift between the times of OBG and CBG. It is from this perspective that this chapter will conclude by questioning the ideology of CBG in respect to *its* times.

¹ In other, marginal viewer contexts – nostalgic, amateur sociological and cult; *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, the Something Weird DVD company, etc – the answer can be “camp”, of course.

Ditching retrospective intertextual readings returns a consideration of OBG to its historical time and place: late 1970s West Coast North America. That is, OBG speaks of a popular television culture at the end of the celebrated phase of New Hollywood, with producers and television companies still unsure just what the kids want to see, but happy to follow discernible emergent market trends. OBG follows the leads of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Wars* (in respect of the then new found popularity of sci-fi) and, as with *Happy Days*, subscribes to a reinvigorated, 1950s-era mythology for its young adult cast (preferable to the anti-establishment 1960s, and the moral uncertainties of Nixon's 1970s). And yet, hedging their bets, and perhaps even taking guidance from market research, the producers were clearly reluctant to leave the militarism of OBG unqualified by a mildly anti-establishment, slightly revolt-minded, consciousness. (The unapologetic militarism of the *Rambo* films, and their like, which abandoned any such liberal kowtowing, were only a couple of years away – but years after the dawn of Reaganism). Typically, the vehicle for just such a modish consciousness is the vicissitudes of fashion, and so OBG seems to have imbibed, and regurgitated, elements from another part of the popular cultural scene of its target audience: disco. In this respect, with disco culture imported to provide a contemporary ambience, an ambience that works to temper the militarism, it becomes understandable why the *politics* of disco culture, at least, were not reimaginable. In fact, for CBG's own contemporariness, in a series that goes to such lengths to suggest itself as a mirror to the post-9/11 West, and was critically received as much too, cf (Tranter, 2007: 49), the equivalent idea of a *Battlestar Galactica* disco culture is redundant. The regurgitated disco culture, as an access to and reverberation of a certain ontology of feeling, flowing from a particular ideological reading of the world, has been excised from the micropolitics of CBG, banished in favour of the new

seriousness with which the post-9/11 West is to be explored. A battle-hardened space warrior is required for CBG: a post-*Rambo*-isation of the libertarian-hedonist cosmic explorer of yesteryear – someone with no time for trivial recreations.

So what is abandoned? What did disco culture represent at the close of the 1970s that is unwelcome in a contemporary *Battlestar Galactica* – essentially unremakeable, so seemingly lost in reimagination, as it were? At this juncture, such a trade-off seems to suggest an honest replacement of OBG libertarianism with CBG's tarnished liberalism, as befits popular drama, post-9/11. But, as Alex Cox observed in "Blockbuster Barbarism" (Cox: 2004), the tide of popular American fare seems to be actively dragging such tarnished liberalism away from its one-time Hollywood home, making way for once unimaginable discussions on the legitimacy of torture. And such a shift has occurred through a greater creative collaboration between Hollywood "movers" and the burgeoning industries and institutions of "homeland security", post-9/11, as is now well documented. Is this shift to the right not the context for a consideration of CBG? After all, from this vantage point, such a shift could be understood as the price for the surprising renaissance in quality television drama. In this respect, the process of reimagination presents *Battlestar Galactica* as a useful example of this shift, from disco sci-fi to Neoliberal sci-fi.

Disco Sci-Fi

The trappings of a late 1970s disco culture, with disco as signifying the look and feel of the new, can be readily discerned in OBG. But the wider disco culture that OBG drew upon was, for most commentators, the wrong one: that is, disco once it had sold out, once it occupied the top forty music charts rather than presented an alternative to them; once disco culture had become fully integrated into the discourses

of corporate entertainment (of music, fashion, interior design and so on); the disco of the discotheques newly installed in franchised chain hotels; disco as “Disneyland with tits”, as it is described in the heavily sanitised disco movie *Thank God It’s Friday* (1978). The ironic mode of *That Seventies Show* is a paean to this kind of disco. The “right” (as in the culturally authentic) disco culture, as the soundtrack to, or even the enabler of, a carefree (pre-AIDs, pre-crack cocaine, pre-Reagan) idyll of sexual hedonism, resonates more in *Boogie Nights* (1997). In this latter respect, in disco culture comes a late flowering of the Summer of Love – a radical liberation to a state of depoliticised and freed desire – to be followed by the struggle for the reintegration of this dangerous turn into bourgeois mores. The dilution and selling of disco culture (that is, the triumphant emergence of the “wrong” disco culture) represents a reshaping of disco culture so as to mitigate or neutralise the radical potential of the liberations of the body. These liberations from previous codes of “straight” behaviour (particularly in relation to sexuality / morality) were founded on the liberation from the dictates of biological necessity: in the Western society of abundance, a generation after wartime austerity, the need for biological survival is overtaken by the drives of desire, with those drives now routed through the pleasure-orientated technologies where flows of intensities of feeling finally recalibrate the functioning of the body. In this, the agency of organs comes to be understood to be replaced by (or surrendered to) technology, creating new intensities of pleasure between the two (body and technology), so that Shapiro, in his history of disco, can claim “[d]isco is the ultimate cyborg music, the ultimate coupling of orgasm and machine.” (Shapiro, 2005: 103). Thus a new and ambiguous liberation comes from the very heart of the machine, springing from the allotted pleasure-times in advanced Western techno-capitalist societies.

Shapiro here journalistically invokes the notion of the “body without organs”, as outlined in (Deleuze, Guattari, 2007: 165-184)² – something not unusual for critical considerations of the seemingly apolitical freeing of desires in the zone of mental and physical liberation of the disco floor. The invocation arguably holds good for a consideration of disco-induced bliss as “plugging into desire, of effectively taking charge of desires” (Deleuze, Guattari, 2007: 184), but it is doubtful whether disco does not, in fact, induce one of the false doubles of the “body without organs”: those “empty vitreous bodies, cancerous bodies, totalitarian and fascist”, (Deleuze, Guattari, 2007: 183). Indeed, the concern of this chapter is exactly false doubling; the sold-out disco, the shammed emancipation which blocks the revolutionary potential of bodily liberation that an optimistic Marcuse had identified, as discussed below.

The radical potential was evident in the fledgling new lifestyles and patterns of communalism that first emerged within, or even as, disco culture. Thus the “right” disco culture – that of a hedonistic, post-moral, underground flowering of sexually “problematic” lifestyle choices to the cold and machine-generated beats of (often European) twelve inches mixes – was vanquished with the market’s reimagining of its essence as sexual freedom *per se*; sexuality as the structure itself, and not the structuring agent. Hence the slightly prurient sexual scenarios of a post-moral world shown in many sci-fis, such as *Logan’s Run* – which mostly consists of an ease of moving between partners. But there is a sci-fi prehistory of the coupling of man and machine, desire and technology – after all, which other genre is best suited to explore such future scenarios? – which flourished between 1968 and the emergence of disco, and so complicates the relationship between inauthentic disco culture and sci-fi. Such a vision of a dehumanised near-future is apparent in *THX 1138* (George Lucas, 1971),

² Shapiro seems not to be the only figure who draws on these figures in passing; is CBG’s own Felix Gaeta a reference to Félix Guattari?

Dark Star (John Carpenter, 1974) and, most notably, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968). Miller traces the influence of *2001* across the 1970s, albeit with the lonely vision of the future man isolated in his computer-regulated environs reworked as an appealingly futuristic prospect in advertisements, and through architectural design, (cf Miller, 1994: 24-25). Thus the killer computer does not preclude human advancement or even regeneration – in fact, this contradiction is the very story of the domestic and erotic “remake” of *2001*: Donald Cammell’s *Demon Seed* (1977). The paradox is present in *Silent Running* (Douglas Trumbull, 1972) too, which pits ecological and technological futures against each other, with its hippie protagonist going so far as to assassinate colleagues who opt for the latter, and then attempt to humanise his worker drones while maintaining his spaceship-greenhouse for the re-vegetation of a post-nuclear war earth. In the world of *Logan’s Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) the technological future gives on the one hand (a society entirely for the pleasure of its beautiful occupants) but takes on the other (since breeding has become a function of the HAL-run city-state, and to avoid the coming, disastrous overcrowding – one of the racist myths of the 1970s – no-one may enter their thirties). Whereas sci-fi once offered warnings (the dire shape of things to come, with the fight for humanity against the machine, or alien invasion, as the standard line of battle), a warning which returns with CBG, this post-’68, pre-disco sci-fi sensibility expresses a cautious, anticipatory welcome: man can yet evolve, in the future milieu, for better or worse, rather than face extinction. The untameable spirit of man – in the shambolic hippy “crash pad” spaceships of *Dark Star* and *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* (the BBC television series), in Dr Hans Zarkov’s defiance of brainwashing (clinging onto his indelible memories of the Beatles and sexual experiences) in *Flash Gordon* (1980), and later in Officer Murphy’s usurping of his cyber-genetic

programming in *RoboCop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), and in the psycho-sexual sci-fi explorations of space, the “sexual odyssey” of *Starcrash* (Luigi Cozzi, 1979), *Sleeper* (Woody Allen, 1973), *Sexmission* (*Seksmisja*, Juliusz Machulski, 1984), *On the Silver Globe* (*Na srebrnym globie*, Andrzej Zulawski, 1978-1988) and even *Solaris* (*Solyaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972) – persists in this future. Here the cosmos is feminised, this final frontier as a sexual frontier – a vaginal darkness to be, like its siren female denizens, conquered by the bold males venturing ever forth, for whom both females and space represent the waiting, expectant “other”.

However, the acceptance or even celebration of the radical potential of disco and the body without organs is rare, and certainly does not colour many *Boogie Nights*-style retrospective readings of the historic period.³ Corporate disco culture required the reassurance of conservative revisions of disco culture: disco as a feel-good communalism, clean and depoliticised (unlike the murky and protest-minded psychedelic music that preceded it), and with sexual desire (via John Travolta’s working class hero in *Saturday Night Fever*) as a hetero- rather than homo- or pansexual concern. This phase of revisionism came between the “death” of disco and the anti-disco backlash; from the high tide of disco fever following the late 1977 release of *Saturday Night Fever* to the beginning of the end of disco’s stranglehold on the charts. Shapiro sees this process as culminating in 1979, (Shapiro, 2005: 194, 226), which coincides exactly with ABC’s original broadcast of OBG, from September 1978 to April 1979.

³ Two examples do come to mind: Verhoeven’s fascinatingly subversive *Showgirls* (1995), and French pop group Daft Punk’s concept Manga film, *Interstella 5555: the Story of the Secret Star System* (Leiji Matsumoto / Kazuhisa Takenouchi, 2003). (Indeed, one of the Daft Punk duo seems to model his appearance on an OBG Cylon’s). Here, Manga comes to function as a doubly alienating aesthetic: the “otherness” of its “Orientalism” (from the Western perspective unused to Manga), and the otherness of its retrospective aesthetic (highly anachronistic late 1970s-styled cartoons illustrating Daft Punk’s late 1970s-styled Eurodisco).

Indeed, although OBG – as a high budget, primetime television series – effectively *is* one such revision, traces of the utopian dreams and aspirations of disco remain. Such traces are to be found, therefore, in the undercurrent of aesthetics, ambience, performance and space, and in the “filler” in between moments of narrative importance. Elsewhere OBG simply recycles many of the familiar paranoias of Cold War sci-fi, and in this sense is very un-disco. Indeed, it is at the very moment of intergalactic communalism – a *detente* coming together for the common good of all (the peace initiative with which the series, and European film version of OBG, start) – that a Cold War *realpolitick* emerges in this sci-fi context. The peace initiative is nothing more than a Cylon ruse to raze humanity once and for all. Repeatedly, thereafter, the human “Hawks” have realism on their sides while the pacifists are dupes and patsies; the Hawks are thus emboldened to take executive decisions since the pacifists, with their democratic niceties, are recklessly gambling with humanity, have a track record of being dangerously naive, or are simply infiltrated by the enemy. This last belief was held by some on the Right in relation to anti-nuclear activists and peace groupings and their infiltration by Soviet agents and far left groups throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and OBG accommodates and advances just such a reading; thus Tranter finds in OBG’s Viper pilots “... attitude straight from the pages of Robert M. Heinlein.” (Tranter, 2007: 47) The bumbling civilian Council of Twelve repeatedly block military initiatives (resulting in the rapid formation of a political-military cabal of Adama, Apollo and Starbuck), with disastrous results. A Rightist reading of US defeat by the North Vietnamese resonates in this dynamic: the soldiers and generals undone at the hands of a meddling civilian leadership, and battlefield valour wasted and nullified by political appeasements. But such “adjustments” to democratic norms by the cabal are not seen to seriously undermine the democratic structure – after all,

the enemy is entirely totalitarian: the Cylon leader is a sole, enthroned figure. In these ways the subtexts and ideological positions of the dramatic narrative of OBG are as reactionary as one could expect.

It is beneath this narrative, however, that an ideological position quite contrary to the aggressive military ethos can be discerned – in the frisson of vintage disco libertarianism. Even within the “straightened” confines of a heterosexualised disco culture, the current of sexuality is OBG’s very teleology (or its “force” equivalent). (Homosexuality, rendered as camp behaviour and intonation, is left to asexual robots – also taking the *Star Wars* and, arguably, *2001* leads or, more problematically, marginalising the historic gay origins of disco culture by now ascribing homosexuality to those not-quite-human figures, still walking among us). This frisson is difficult to avoid, especially with the hindsight of some three decades which invariably pushes the datedness of the set and costumes designs to the fore. There is a predominance of disco lighting; sensual reds and purples flood the sets. At other times fairly empty sound stages are lent space and depth, and an aspirant sci-fi artificiality, via the strategic placing of visible spotlights in the background, with their cross-flares arcing across the camera lens – an aesthetic device typical of disco (cameras often track or pan into flaring spotlights in disco-era promo videos, sometimes in anticipation of a lap dissolve or fade). Under or against, or even lit by, such a sensual colour scheme, Apollo and Starbuck have the look of Studio 54 busboys. Even when unlit and in action, their heterosexual posturing in their Vipers is undercut by cutaway shots to their manicured nails on the spaceship’s fire and boost buttons. And this sexual identity extends beyond make-up and sexualised uniforms (with the belts worn at angles); Starbuck’s tangled love life is a major theme in OBG – even structuring whole episodes. Indeed, in a way unthinkable in CBG, substantial subplots in OBG

concern, or are given over to, the pursuit of pleasure. This is particularly so in the visit to the alien disco in “Saga of a Star World” (OBG 1.1-3), during which Starbuck considers managing the resident disco singers on “the star circuit”, and another character is accused of “smoking plant vapour” – and it is no exaggeration to say that, in the context of the plot, these party-going exploits endanger the existence of humanity. And elsewhere, in terms of the overriding pursuit of pleasure: the (romantically) disruptive reappearance Aurora, Starbuck’s old flame, now a Baader-Meinhof-style revolutionary moll, in “Take the Celestra” (OBG 1.23); Starbuck’s gambling and his flirting with his (female-voiced) Viper onboard computer, even when in peril (and “she” reciprocates; “anything you say, honey”); his willingness to put the mission on a backburner in favour of a cache of bootleg vintage liquor in “The Long Patrol” (OBG 1.7); his use of a Viper as a place of love-making; and the way in which Apollo’s soldierly concern for Serina’s wellbeing soon merges with a seduction of her. Even in the early, desperate hours, the checking of human survivors turns into a cruising-like social activity – and indeed, a party is discovered to be in full swing.

The pursuit of pleasure coincides with the pursuit of women in OBG; the series was remarkably free of exclusively male patterns of behaviour: the kind of male bonding and whooping it up that could be expected in the wake of repelling enemy attacks. And so the disco aesthetic is strongly present in the desired female, conveying their presence and availability in terms of the sexual pleasure of, or as, the future female. And the futureness of these females indicates the kind of shopping mall-coloured vision of things to come also specific to the West Coast late 1970s. The blueprint for such females derives from the figure, hair and skin pallor of the actress-model Farrah Fawcett-Majors, particularly in *Charlie’s Angels*. Here the female is decorated and clothed so as to be animated or ventilated by a Big Sur breeze –

through the off-the-shoulder gown, through the fluffed hair, blowing stray strands from the face to reveal clear WASP eyes, set against the reds and purples of a summer sunset. This is the quintessential Playboy woman of the 1970s: the PA on nightclub hours, the beach tan and halter dresses, shimmeringly orgasmic yet entirely domesticated – that is, born into that first post-war generation of the newly classless, upwardly mobile, leisure time-rich society, enabling movement from the beach to the office and back again.

The ambiguous position of this female in the context of the end of Second Wave Feminism, at the end of the 1970s, is apparent in Fawcett-Majors' own mysterious role in another disco sci-fi touchstone: *Logan's Run* (in fact, the role which propelled her on into *Charlie's Angels* – chronologically, then, a contemporary reframing of the future woman). Her *Logan's Run* role essentially serves no purpose; in terms of the dramatic narrative, she is redundant. But on the level of a future vision of frictionless free love, her role is pivotal: the future (female) form of pleasure, presiding over a painless plastic surgery clinic able to entirely alter appearances (that is, manipulate the body independent of its organs), for reasons of pleasure (or, for fleeing Logan, disguise).⁴ As with *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), *Logan's Run* offers an LA-based, LA-styled vision of the near-future (the film was even partly shot in a shopping mall), so that the post '68 "LA woman", in Fawcett-Majors, becomes the access to this future – as found in both (in the words of the *Logan's Run's* introduction) the coming "... ecologically balanced world [in which] mankind lives only for pleasure, freed by the servo-mechanisms which provide everything" and on and in the contemporary fashions of the disco floor. This LA woman does not break

⁴ From this perspective, the prescience of *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971) becomes particularly notable; Allen Jones's sculptures – women in submissive positions, used as tables or drink dispensers in the milk bar sequences – ironically recast and deaden the notion of beauty in this literally domesticated future female form.

with the evolution of the female form of pleasure (something attempted *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979), with its bald female, or a number of female and female-alien hybrid characters in *Space 1999*), but remains true to its texture – the Arian, outdoors-healthy, full-lipped and toothsome blondes of, say, Pirelli’s 1969 calendar portfolio.⁵ As a kind of “end of history” aesthetic, the LA woman extends from that first post-war generation (with its aesthetic institutionalisation of the sexualised, domestic blondes of the pin-ups taken by US servicemen abroad to Europe, where women typically did not match this model), and on into the future. Indeed, OBG opts for the big-haired receptionist / PA type rather than its counterpart, Jessica (Jenny Agutter) of the *Logan’s Run* film, whose sexual liberation is tempered by a sense that there must be more to life – a dangerously subversive notion that eventually propels her out of the pleasure-domed future Garden of Eden. The first *Logan’s Run* television series (1977-78) also eradicates such a counterpart; Heather Menzies’s Jessica melds Fawcett-Major’s appearance and Agutter’s role as Logan’s love interest and sidekick.

Here, the LA woman represents the horizon of the libertarian imagining of a technological, pleasure-bound, post-feminist, post-late capitalist society. Cassiopia (Laurette Spang) in OBG fulfils, and extends, such a role; her “liberated” sexual status, emphasised with her disco-red dress, is also institutionalised in the world of the series. She is seemingly a reformed legal prostitute (precision is hidden beneath the coyness of the sci-fi terminology employed) so that, once on missions towards the end of the first series, it is her interpersonal (rather than laser gun-wielding) skills that matter to the males. Femininity serves pleasure first and militarism as an afterthought. And much the same could be said for Colonel Wilma Deering (Erin Gray),

⁵ Shot by Harri Peccinotti for Pirelli on, appropriately enough, Big Sur; see (Larkin, 1975).

Commander of the Earth's Defences – the combat Earth Mother in silver jumpsuit and lip gloss – of *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century* (1979-1981).

Spaces exploration

Starbuck, despite Cassiopia's wishes, inevitably womanises. The size of the interiors of the *Galactica*, and of the other spaceships in the fleet, and the remoteness of the planets encountered and visited, with their scattered human or alien populations, creates and allows for such an opportunity. Along with disco culture, this sense and use of sizeable physical spaces does not make it into CBG – indeed the two, disco culture and space, are interconnected. The physical space to roam across the dance floor, making eye or body contact with those seen and encountered, asserts itself in the sets of OBG. This space odyssey is one in which endless possibilities present themselves – possibilities that necessitate substantial physical spaces for their staging, a space that restores agency to the characters, and gives freedoms to their free wills. It is in the sizeable physical space that the body is free to explore, and free to gravitate towards the loci of desire: the sexually available other bodies. For late 1970s sci-fi, this was no radical or particularly new departure; Captain Kirk's love odyssey in the original 1966-69 *Star Trek* series (the clichéd subplot involving a girl on every planet) tempered the stiff, scientific exploration (forever logged and star-dated) of the encountered galaxies with a more physical and communal interaction with beings on/of other worlds. With the dawn of disco, only a few years later, this sensual type of galactic exploration becomes a chief mode for the exploration of other galaxies and interactions with their inhabitants. And such wide-ranging explorations, across such spaces, presuppose a general enlarging of scale: bigger spaceships, bigger spacescapes, bigger space "action".

Such bulk and size, in the late 1970s, was closely allied with the fantasy “wow factor” of sci-fi: the enormity of the UFO at the climax of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), for example,⁶ or the Gothicism of the cathedral-sized interiors of *The Black Hole* (Gary Nelson, 1979), or James Bond in the shuttle launching bay, and orbiting spaceship, of *Moonraker* (Lewis Gilbert, 1979). Biskind goes so far as to locate the beginnings of Reagan era cinema (bombastic, escapist and fantastical) in the opening scene of *Star Wars* – the giant space freight that rumbles over the heads of the cinema audience (experiencing this rumble via the newly-fitted prerequisite of a stereo sound systems), and onwards to the galaxy vanishing point, (Biskind, 1998: 337). It is as if enormity had taken the place once occupied by straight special effects and miniatures against matts – the special effects of earlier eras of fantasy (the work of Ray Harryhausen, creatures features, Edward D. Wood Jr and the visibility of American International Pictures budgetary constraints and the like).

This “wow factor” for the late 1970s is predicated from the integration of a dramatic use of size and space into the sci-fi narrative itself. The maze of the Galactica’s interior, or the ruins and architecture of societies and civilisations found on other planets, offers space for an infinity of narrative possibilities and surprises: the geographical scope for unending sagas. The same is often true of *Dr Who* from this time; in *The Pyramids of Mars* (1975), for example, the action jarringly shifts from Tardis space travel to an English country house in 1911, to Martian interiors, and to a meta-space outside time occupied by Dr Who’s nemesis. The enormity of the spaces of *The Black Hole* encompass previous generations of space explorers, both living (Maximilian Schell’s Kurtz-like Dr Hans Reinhardt) and dead (the zombie robot workers), and previous generations of technology (earlier models of robot).

⁶ Trumbull, who provided the *Close Encounters* special effects, would go on to design the spaceship, integrated into the lightshow, of the Times Square disco Xenon in summer 1978. The spaceship was intended to descend from the ceiling and hover above the dancers.

Traversing this space, or simply existing in this space, is the condition of the picaresque adventure. Edmund White described the New York underground gay disco clubs The Mine Shaft and The Anvil in just such terms in 1980 (White, 1986: 269-285): cruising ever onwards into darkened corners, basements or back rooms, encountering the (newly discovered and entirely available) others. In the resultant collective happening, individualism melts away into events that occur with the synchronisation of movements across groups of people, across ethnic categories, and even across different classes. Space and exploration are united in this new communal eroticism, with disco culture as (in its earlier manifestation) progressive unifier so that, for White:

... it was more than just the sexual body that disco was concerned with. The dance floor is nothing if not communal, and this group body was a polymorphous, polyracial, polysexual mass affirming its bonds in a space that was out of reach of the tentacles of the church, state or family. At the discotheque, the rigid boundaries imposed by such institutions were thrown out with the careless disregard of someone discarding a spent popper bottle... in the discotheque the seventies practiced what the sixties preached: the communion offered by the dance floor was the embodiment of the vision of peace that the sixties yearned for. (White, 1986: 185)

This “what the sixties preached”, as utopian wishful thinking at least, was the point at which, for Marcuse in 1969, in *An Essay on Liberation*, the

... new sensibility has become... *praxis*: it emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new ways and forms of life: negation of the entire Establishment, its morality, culture; affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the [*sic*] *Form* of the society itself... [and at this point] the hatred of the young bursts into laughter and song, mixing the barricade and the dance floor, love play and heroism. (Marcuse, 1973: 33)

The spirit of this future form, in the sense of its animating force or its *praxis*, was to be the nascent disco culture: a “oneness” that arises with and from shared rhythm or feeling – something that, like “The Force”, transcends normative modes of

communication, becoming a cosmic bonding agent; an “interplanetarianism” (as an intergalactic variant of cosmopolitanism); free (in the sense of depoliticised, non-partisan) love; an organless harmony between man and machine – the latter as an emancipatory instrument for the former. The “force”, of *Star Wars* vernacular, is an appropriate description of Marcuse’s *praxis*: a new metaphysical motor for a secular age, promising fulfilment for those who surrender to it – which is also to surrender to their own desires, since this force permeates and guides the “good” half of the galaxy. And where else could this permeation be at its purest other than on the dance floor? Thus the force is relayed from *Star Wars* into The Real Thing’s 1979 disco hit “Can You Feel the Force” (“People who make war are making love instead / This could be the dawning of another time”), and informs Starbuck’s own libertarian-hedonist philosophy: “[We] may as well live for today – we might not have many left.”

While OBG’s formal metaphysics are somewhat more prescriptive, so that Ford (1983) can readily map them onto Mormon theology,⁷ the world of OBG is clearly in the *umma*, as it were, of the force. In this crucial respect (and in respect of a poststructuralist reading), the Hawkish militarism of OBG is immediately diminished. Its nominally foundational position in the text is almost always soon forgotten once the new mission begins, with disco values now recontextualising militarism as a rearguard action – vanquishing the threatening, amassed enemies in order that the dancing can go on, so to speak. Such a recontextualisation of the vehicles of war occurred with The Village People too, dancing on an active warship for “In The Navy” – a highpoint in the queering of military aesthetics. This overall balance of values is articulated in the introduction to each OBG episode: in Patrick McNee’s

⁷ Indeed, it is the religious pretensions of OBG that first attracted critical attention, with James E. Ford’s reading of this world “somewhere beyond the heavens” as creatively indebted to Mormon theology, (1983). Deleted scenes from OBG (archived on the DVD release) show the removal of more overtly religious (and homoerotic) material.

patrician, story-teller tones, the idea of a creed (“There are those who believe...”) and communion (“brothers of men”) of humanity is understood as the guiding intelligence of the mission; the fight is for the good “dawning”, to borrow *The Real Thing*’s term – and in this respect ultimately subordinates military action to the ideological and metaphysical coordinates of a galactic mission of love; OBG as a sci-fi variant of *The Love Boat*. Thus material comfort remains an integral part of this world; OBG opens with a meal for the Quorum, complete with waiters, flowers on the table and velvet curtains.

Two decades later, CBG will open with military-hardware style computer data flashed across the screen, over images of spaceships (rather than OBG’s psychedelic galaxies and abstractions of cosmic gases and clouds) – that is, the point-of-view is shifted from that of McNee’s benevolent observer / chronicler to that of Viper pilot, mid-dogfight.

POV-CGI

How best to describe the profound difference that marks, from this opening moment onwards, the re-imagined BSG? It is not so much a matter of the quality of the new aesthetic, nor the careful strategies (possibly even reckless, in relation to the timidity typical of US network television channels) of parleying the particulars of contemporary conflicts into the storyline – most notably with the colonised planet of Caprica, post-Cylon attack, as occupied Baghdad (complete with night-vision footage of house raids), and the Cylons themselves as technological blowback. Indeed, the eye-catching nature of these achievements, in themselves, seem to obscure the more fundamental shift between OBG and CBG.

The beginnings of an answer to the question comes in the collision of two strategies that are in constant operation in CBG: CGI and POV. That is, the moment of action, of attack, of catastrophic destruction, of incoming ordnance, of movement in space, of encounters with the Cylons – those moments of “high octane” drama, the very “money shots” of sci-fi – often arise from computer generated imagery seen from the point-of-view (POV) of a protagonist. It is often in this way that the danger of the world of CBG is communicated, and the viewer involuntarily measures his or her own dexterity in relation to it: the POV shot positions us in front of the goaded Cylon, places us in the cockpit of the Viper as debris and missiles hurtle passed – a gaming rather than framing aesthetic tendency. This POV-CGI aesthetic is quite different to the use of CGI in Hollywood blockbusters, especially those that illustrate the influence of the Spielberg and Lucas recalibration of experiential cinema at the end of the New Hollywood phase. In this later strain, CGI use is given over to the visualisation of the spectacular: the view beheld, and the exactitude of this fantastical sight, as primarily realised on the screen via (*pace* Orson Welles’s *mise-en-scène*) deep focus and depth of field shots, often for sequences shots, or elevated Establishing Shots, with figures or clusters of civilisation lost or dwarfed in the enormity of the landscapes. In this is an echo of the aesthetic tradition of German Romanticism: the framing of the world, as encountered, often by a new set of eyes (those of the explorer, or the discoverer of ancient ruins) – the world found and presented, therefore, essentially objectively, and distanced, and to be surveyed. Thus Spielberg and Lucas remade their lost worlds, or attempted to fully realise new ones.

When this kind of framing occurs in CBG (which, after all, “classically” concerns a civilisation, *en masse* and in transit), typically with the parade of spaceships *a la 2001*, the camera revolts. It suddenly and artlessly lurches into the

image, a CCTV-like speed zoom, breaking the vista and restoring an urgency to, and introducing movement within, the image. The imagery of CBG is not to be surveyed but to be rapidly scanned – the Establishing Shot now as a field of data concerning battle – to inform the need for an instantaneous repositioning of the subject (the subject whose POV is used for such shots) so as to outmanoeuvre immanent danger.

When this kind of framing occurs for Establishing Shots on Caprica, the onlookers rapidly retreat – into prison camp tents and huddles of insurgents. The field of battle is no longer the geographical space beheld by the onlooker, necessitating a military leader’s reading of that space (natural defences and blind spots in the landscape, possible supply routes etc). Rather, the field of battle now exists on the level of human interaction. So the spaces for movement, which in OBG allowed for communalism and exploration, and can be equated to Marcuse’s “Form”, are squeezed, and the characters locked down; an individualism returns, of a paranoid kind – in the final analysis, with Cylons now disguised as humans, each character can only vouch for themselves.⁸ And back inside the mothership, in the mole tunnel corridors of the CBG Galactica itself, space is closed in, ditch-like, like the space afforded by the trenches of the First World War. The resultant bunker aesthetic enforces intimacy of an imprisoned, rather than erotic, kind. And, as with the intimacy of the chamber drama (Ibsen’s or Noël Coward’s living rooms, or in Sartre’s *Huis Clos*), human qualities come to the fore. Ironically, for a series that transcends the typical future war sci-fi scenario of human flesh vs. alien hardware by positing an immortal artificial intelligence that lives on as the hardware it inhabits is destroyed, the old fashioned quality of the human being becomes all-important.

⁸ In a telling intertextual joke therefore, it is the paranoid Dwight of the US version of *The Office* (who winds up appointing himself as his own assistant on the grounds that he cannot trust anyone else) who expresses how much he is “into” CBG on more than one occasion.

So the structuring of the aesthetic of CBG, via POV-CGI, is misleading in terms of theorising this vision of the future. In short, it is not what is seen, but who sees it. And the seer is locked-down, closed-in, guarding the premium position of his or her flesh and blood in this world of constantly de- and re-territorialising cyberspace technology. So the fundamental shift between OBG and CBG, conceptually and in terms of the concerns of the episodes themselves, is the difference between the human bodies in each series, original and reimagined. The “message of love” of OBG occurs as, despite the near complete annihilation of the human race, the bodies of the survivors remain impulse-driven, self-possessed (in the usual sense, but also literally) and recreationally (in both senses) -minded. Thus the bodies of the OBG were at ease in their surroundings, something also lost in reimagination.

The micropolitics of apocalypticism

One searches in vain for bodies at ease in CBG: not making love (although the love rivalries usual in television series are present and correct, in spite of the Cylon sex dolls thrown into the mix), not in the spaceship’s bar (under the wing of a Viper, with most revellers ever-ready in their combat uniforms), not in contemplation (the “chapel” which, with its innumerable photos of the dead, seems like a variation of Orwell’s *1984* “hate hour”, or a sci-fi holocaust museum) and not sleeping (more than a plague of fantasies come to the fore; the infiltration of the human mind by Cylon psy-ops). Rather, the bodies of CBG are taut, limber and anticipating action. Clothing, therefore, is utilitarian; combat uniforms over a variant of gym-clothing; the work-out outfit beneath, and for, combat preparedness. Hair is practical; long gone is the big hair, now replaced by manageable crops, or hair tied back into a pony-tale. The quality of the skin is rougher too; stubble, blemishes, lines and dark under the eyes

rather than the moisturised, evenly-tanned skin, glossed lips, and the general male grooming of OBG. (The teeth, however, are impervious to any new, scuzzy digital realism; there is clearly still one frontier sci-fi is reluctant to cross). Much the same set of differences apply to the Cylon robots, old and new – rust has now overrun the shine in these Gothic (rather than Pop, and specifically disco, with their vocodered voices) creations, and their weapons.

Thus the reimagined state of war, or more precisely this new future era of war, a total war, a war seemingly without end, in which the battleground is the organic and the physiological – the very existence of the human body in itself – impacts at all moments, on all bodies. The human body is the last line of defence and the zone of resistance: the body attacks and is attacked, it is appropriated (by the Cylons, who remain undetected as mock humans) and in adversity, regained (the very tactile humanness of the human body – even in sickness and tiredness; the blood of bloodied Commander Adama, after his surprise bout in the boxing ring, blood which confirms the necessity of his example of self-criticism in keeping the collective guard up). In the final analysis, the measure of the gravity of the threat to humanity is evident in the way in which there is no longer any territory to defend. War is literally deterritorialised and the only remaining uncrossed frontier or outpost is that of flesh and blood, and its continued existence in the light of the possibility of elimination altogether. The human body that survives under these circumstances is one that invites a consideration of it as, micropolitically, fascist: the message of war, having usurped the message of love, is the very operator, as it were, of the body. That is, the elements of a Rightist sensibility of OBG have come to determine the behaviour, use, understanding and ethics of the body rather than prompt the formation of bureaucratic organs of totalitarian fascism of yore (in the cabal formed to overturn the Council of

Twelve). The future shock, in CBG, occurs inside the spacesuit, not outside it: the body, in extremis, contorted in its technological shell, as it fights for the survival of the fittest in the cosmic arena. This is crystallised in the abovementioned boxing match: violence as generative, recreational, the moment in which “the moral” is delivered; violence as the moral and existential index of humankind. Verhoeven’s *Starship Troopers* (1997), which also diagnoses a militarised future for humans of intergalactic fascist imperialism, and contains an array of suitably repulsive space foot soldiers, balks at this final frontier. For Verhoeven what little optimism there is can be eked out from the wavering of the human proletariat – their humanity just about intact, despite the bombardment of scare-mongering infotainment (a virtual “false consciousness”) and the fascist historical revisionism alive and well at their military academy. (But Verhoeven also factors in massive military incompetence as beginning to engender dissent within the ranks; CBG collapses the distinction between the military and the non-military, substantially curtailing such a possibility).

So as to secure the imperilled flesh and blood, the human body itself is caged in; the small spaces in which the human form now fits dominate CBG – dormitory bunks (rather than the carpets, armchairs and cushions in the living quarters of OBG), cockpits, the mock living rooms of the Cylon prison-flats, tunnels and tents, with the body continually jostled or strapped-in or strapped-down. All spaces close in. The Captain’s Deck resembles a dingy submarine interior rather than the expansive Cape Canaveral-style control room of the *Star Trek* Enterprise bridge, the settlements of occupied Caprica resemble a cheek-by-jowl squatter’s camp, the winding corridors are now bottlenecked, and even the Battlestar landing strip seems diminished in size – its psychedelic landing lightshow replaced by a modest area for vertical ascents and descents. This pervasive claustrophobia erodes the space for physical action and

movement, of expansiveness and dancing, pacing and yelling to colleagues; it blocks-off big gestures and the bolting and rolling across the flight deck as it rocks from the impact of Cylon missiles. In short, the diminished space of these sets further clamps down on the body, squeezing the leg room needed for knee-jerk, instinctive survival-orientated actions – the dodging and diving manoeuvres that, surely, represent one front of spontaneous, tissue-intelligence: the human edge on the artificial intelligence of the automatons.

As spaces shrink, the spectrum of possible actions tightens: the humans rely almost completely on the virtual imaging systems of their armour-hardware and computer weapons systems, only furtively glancing out of the cockpit when necessary, and then from under the brims of bulky helmets, to clock the whereabouts of fellow pilots. As space is compacted, the space for secrets goes too. Hiding places disappear and, in the microscope *mise-en-scène* that emerges, all is seen: the recurring image of the human alone, flooded with white interrogation light (often from above and often blindingly), which returns the imagery of the film to the very texture of the skin – a closeness from which refractions of light across irises are visible. These scrutinised humans, like those of H G Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds*, feel observed and experimented upon, their body resistance faltering and failing, fearing that they are merely colonies of bacteria serving a momentary purpose for a ruthless higher intelligence.

This is the magnitude of the future catastrophe that elicits such a response in the future bodies that fight it. For this collective mindset, micropolitical fascism thrives on intertwined complexes that, considered without their sci-fi trappings, are far from futuristic: communal persecution and victimhood, survivalist-tinged foreign policies, the invisible enemy as having infiltrated into everyday life.

Mirror to mirage

It is from this vantage point that a series of more satisfactory connections can be seen to the “war on terror” than those suggested by the narrative of CBG; connections that are not thematic, but textual. The militarised future of CBG is presented as an unfortunate necessity – the result of a paradigm shift in warfare so extreme as to prompt, in one much-discussed episode, the suicide bombing of occupying forces. CBG’s recontextualisation of such future military action therefore presents it as an exception – even to the point of such an aberration as “our side” engaging in suicide bombing; an exception, but one born of unfortunate necessity. In this, CBG effectively dramatises, and fleshes out, the grand narrative political myth that critical theorists of globalisation understand and have recognised to be in operation. The total war of CBG is one in which war is no longer the continuation of politics by other means (to quote Clausewitz) but simply *is* the means of politics so that, today, “... war has passed from the final element of the sequences of power – lethal force as a last resort – to the first and primary element, the foundation of politics itself.” (Hardt, Negri, 2005: 21)

This new foundation necessitates the indefinite suspension of formal norms in the name of such an “omni-crisis” (Hardt, Negri, 2001: 189), creating a “state of permanent exception” (Hardt, Negri, 2001: 17) of the particulars of peacetime rule, which impinges on human rights, judicial norms and so forth. The new norm is now an endless and constant, unlimited war, attaining the level of a “... global state of war” (Negri, Hardt, 2005: xi):

... a perpetual and indeterminate state of war... with no clear distinction between the maintenance of peace and acts of war. Because the isolated space and time of war in the limited conflict between sovereign states has declined, war seems to have seeped back and flooded the entire social field. *The state of*

exception has become permanent and general; the exception has become the rule, pervading both foreign relations and the homeland. (Hardt, Negri, 2005: 7; italics their own).

Hardt and Negri share this reading with Baudrillard, where Baudrillard characterised the contemporary era as that of the Fourth World War,⁹ (Hardt, Negri, 2005: 37).

The bodies of CBG are bodies capable of operating in and for the state of permanent exception and are bodies modelled after it, since this is the world in which the permanent state of exception comes to be the actually-existing (rather than, as read by anti-war activists, effectively) the norm. The achievement of CBG is one in which a future speaks of such abstractions, making them concrete in its ontology, even experience-able. And, in this materialisation, the diversionary nature of CBG's surface liberalism is revealed: the progressive political mode of CBG when compared to OBG (from "... a militant theocracy..." to "the human civilisation of the 'Twelve Colonies' [which] appears pluralistic, secular, and remarkably similar to contemporary society..." (Tranter, 2007: 49)) is effectively incidental.

Such approaches to CBG holds to the classic analytical model for theorising sci-fi fictions, where the envisaged future is no more than a mirror to our present (a model I have adhered to throughout this chapter), or the present as once envisaged, in our past (with that "old" sci-fi now offering, to paraphrase Jameson, "archaeologies of the future"). For CBG as Bush-era popular entertainment, the symmetries are apparent: Neoliberal sci-fi that dreams of the good battle, and heroism in the face of the attacks on civilisation; the discourse of apocalypticism, with "freedom" over "human rights", moralism as ideology. In respect of the fictional realisation of the

⁹ This is summarised in *The Spirit of Terrorism*: "The first two world wars corresponded to the classical image of war. The first ended the supremacy of Europe and the colonial era. The second put an end of Nazism. The third, which has indeed taken place, in the form of cold war and deterrence, put an end to Communism." (Baudrillard, 2002: 11-12) The third, note Hardt and Negri, was relatively quiet: "It seems to many today that the global order of our recent past, the cold war, was paradoxically the last moment of relatively peaceful global cohabitation..." (Hardt, Negri, 2005: 352). The fourth occurs in relation to antagonisms within the drive to globalisation, a "... *triumphant globalization battling against itself*. In this sense, we can indeed speak of a world war – not the Third World War, but the Fourth and the only really global one, since what is at stake is globalization itself." (Baudrillard, 2002: 11) For the genesis of the notion of permanent exception, cf (Passavant, Dean, 2004: 166-167).

permanent state of exception, CBG seem to accept the parameters of the debate of “the war on terror”, despite the gestures towards dissent identified above. These occur in local instances of implied or implicit criticism (such as the brutal nature of occupation and subjection) – criticism which, in the best liberal tradition, seeks to present both sides of the argument (or, rather, simply withholds comment). Therefore CBG, in its micropolitical fascism, first normalises the exception *before*, irrelevantly therefore, offering limited measures of criticism against it.

Revisiting the classic analytical model for theorising sci-fi fictions with an appropriately postmodern sensibility (appropriate when confronted with CBG and its deterritorialised warfare and loss of cognitive certainties across a cosmos-wide cyberspace; a contemporary science fiction trope identified as a “radical capitalist... gnostic-digital dream” by Žižek (Žižek: 2008, 5)) raises one area for further consideration. What, exactly, is mirrored? The classic moral structuring of sci-fi (usually a warning about the atomic age – as in *Them!*, for example) does not seem to be in operation. And, in the context of CBG, any such moral or warning would be pre-empted by the prior acceptance of the new parameters of the permanent state of exception. Rather, the relationship between the fantasy and the actual it mirrors has changed: the mirroring is of the fantasmatic ideological underpinnings of that society, presenting the mirage of society (as Situationists would have it) as it now presents itself to its disorientated inhabitants.¹⁰ In this respect, CBG seems more akin to the

¹⁰ Or, with the final plot twist of CBG (which shares with the “rebooted” *Star Trek* also of 2009 a return to the origins before the originals), then in purely thematic terms the mirroring is of the historical-mythical-metaphysical underpinnings of what *had* seemed to be the coming society of the distant future. And this society, at the close of the series, is suddenly revealed to predate our backwards present, rendering these underpinnings as a newly-revealed mythology (a device akin to the suggested Egyptian origins of the space colony of OBG). In the context of this critique, could it not be said that – with the spliced biological / robotic origins of man – what appears to have been just micropolitically fascist is unmasked as DNA-encoded or molecular fascism? At any rate, this belated arrival in the early twenty first century also confirms the eradication of the actual pre-history of CBG, as argued here; the pedant could note that this visit to actual planet Earth had or has already occurred, in *Battlestar Galactica 1980*.

propaganda model of red scare films of the 1950s, but with the menace now firmly ensconced within Western society, and on the verge of victory. And the mirage itself – the fully militarised, self-defending fortress-commune of civilisation in the wastes of the hostile desert, its survivors a dwindling cohort that it is possible to number (at the outset of each episode, in the “survivor count”) – how is this to be understood in the context of popular television drama? The Retort collective, discussing the nature of the “US-Israel bond” finds the Bush-era Neo-Conservative Whitehouse bedazzled by an “exemplar of a society in which total militarization and spectacular modernity were fully compatible [to the extent that] Israel has mirrored and mesmerized the American state for nearly four decades.” (Retort, 2005: 110) In this light, and the light of the nature of its break from OBG, CBG seems not so much mesmeric, but an exercise in mesmerism. But this is an exercise which – usefully – reveals the contours of the fevered imaginings of a future life in the permanent state of exception.

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