

# The Obama Code:

## Ghosts and Monsters in the Visual Datasphere

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### Introduction

"Historic" was the headline word of November 5th, 2008, the day Barack Obama became the next President of the United States. The international embrace of Obama was, of course, partly a response to his skin color and the historically racialized structure of American society, which for five centuries denied some or all of the rights of Americans not properly male, propertied and of Anglo-European descent. [1] In America and throughout the world, the idea of "race" is inescapably knotted with visible markers such as hair and skin color. Color stands in metonymic relation to a vast complex of stories, mythologies, images, emotions, scientific discourses and genomic sequences -- visible and invisible -- of what we know and define as race.

The concept of "color" is much easier to represent in pictures than in words, especially given the complexity of racial discourse in the United States; this may be why some voters who strongly opposed the new leader used the graphics software on their computers to express their concerns. Picturing is a form of speech, and in the context of an affluent, technologically advanced society that allegedly protects its citizens' right to free speech, voters use the Internet as a public arena for broadcasting messages of political dissent. Visual messages are valued for their ability to deliver high extra-linguistic impact with little or no exact meaning.

Many of these messages act as pictorial fictions. [2] Like the depictions of Catholic saints, the images rely on visual cues to reference well-known narratives from history (Obama-Hitler), science fiction (Obama-Alien), horror (Obama-Monster) and religion (Obama-Antichrist). The jumble of images and fragmented chat on the Internet suggests that McLuhan's age of multisensory "electric" media has successfully brought post-literacy and re-tribalization to Western societies. [3] The latter is particularly evident in far right wing Internet communities that view Obama in light of the antichrist legend. As my analysis of some of the most virulent imagery will show, McLuhan's view of the media as extensions of the nervous system can be rethought as even more deeply marked in the flesh, not just as extensions of the body, but as the body -- the genomic body -- itself. [4]

To explore the idea of genomic embodiment in Internet images of Barack Obama, I will examine how visual codes, Hebrew lettering and imaginary genetic sequences

loop into and through one another in a seemingly post-literate, biotechnological blur. In this richly vague space, where something primordial appears to be happening, I find trace elements of Arthur Kroker's posthuman universe in which "the missing mass of God touches the full-spectrum dominance of cyberculture." In Kroker's view, this touch is of a magnitude to bend space-time relations into a new fabric "simultaneously mythic and historical, past and future, technocratic and religious." [5] The images in this essay are considered in light of this theoretical possibility: a dimensional infolding of visible spaces becoming touched by God.

## **Categories of Digital Collage Images of Barack Obama**

Digital pictorial fictions of Obama tend to fall into general categories, give or take some inevitable slippage. In every category, color stands in part-whole relationship to race, and visual cues refer the viewer to cautionary tales culled from history, popular culture, science fiction, horror and religion. The purpose in this section is to show that visual confluences of Obama with infamous characters extend beyond antichrist, and that such confluences reflect more than the individual viewpoints of their makers. Each image relies upon the momentum established by the others to hold its place in a pattern of figures enmeshed in the mytho-historical fabric of western culture.

One of the great cautionary tales of the 20th century was the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany. The instantly recognizable visual metonym for this horror is Hitler's toothbrush mustache. To transpose Hitler's mustache onto an image of Obama is to metaphorically resurrect Hitler as an American Black supremacist with secret ambitions to ethnically cleanse the U.S. of its White population as punishment for the sins of slavery. Like the theory of paranormal activity in which ghosts are said to emanate from emotional memories or imprints in physical matter, here the "slave revolt" mentality seems to resonate in the fibrous mass of some bodies, communities and landscapes. [6] Racist extremists like the followers of Lyndon LaRouche share an invisible membrane with poltergeists. The molecular cluster of part-objects spin in vanishingly small registers. This could be considered evidence that myth and history, past and future, are indeed infolding or being folded by God at the threshold of an emerging universe, as Kroker suggested.

Another figure is Obama the Joker, which owes its visual style to Heath Ledger's portrayal of Batman's arch-nemesis in the 2008 crime thriller film, *The Dark Knight*. According to the Joker's fictional biography, the villain fell into a river of chemical waste that left him with bleached white skin, red lips, green hair and a permanent evil grin. [7] The (deceased) movie star Ledger managed to make the Joker's face both horrifying and sexy, thanks to the celebrated make-up artist, John Caglione Jr.. But Barack Obama's metaphorical dip in the river of chemical waste

creates an e/affect quite different from Ledger's. Uncannily wandering large painted lips on the face of the President impart a different monstrosity that punctures the comic book surface and exposes a temporal dimension of violence beneath. Here, the Joker falls through a wormhole or river of filth carrying stubbornly unerased traces of minstrelsy, white face, black face, racial drag, tap-dancing and the arts of feigning stupidity, signifying slavery and subordinated status to the propertied white man. Here, on the necropolitan vaudeville stage, they are doing the genomic cakewalk.

Some images are like slivers crafted for the sole purpose of lodging under the thin skin of white bleeding heart liberals. Rush Limbaugh, king of right wing talk radio, gave the members of the white working class a voice, a perspective and a mission to rise up against liberal humanist multicultural tolerance. Other radio and cable television personalities such as Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly and Ann Coulter heightened the rhetoric and coarsened the language, so that by shock value alone, they became mainstream. This is what Thomas Frank, in his book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* called conservative populism: the shift from traditional politics based on class struggle to polarization around cultural issues such as abortion, gay marriage and Affirmative Action. The object of conservative ire moved from "fat cats" to "liberal elites," creating a dilemma for organized labor. [8] Progressive labor leaders have struggled to woo the white working class, the unionized blue-collar workforce in the northern states in particular, into a coalition of organized Latina/o workers and politicized young people. [9] But race in the United States remains a potent wedge issue, one that Republican strategists and conservative voices have exploited for votes since the culturally volatile late 1960's.

Journalist David A. Love traces the Obama-Joker image to President Obama's September 9th, 2009 healthcare address to Congress, during which a Republican House Member shot out of his seat with a shout of "You lie!" Love situates the congressman's outburst within a growing secessionist movement in the United States:

some people say they want their country back. The issue for them is whether the states have a right to be free from Black rule in the form of Barack Obama. This includes states' rejection of healthcare reform . . . and calls for investigations into the President's citizenship. [10]

On Blackcommentator.com, Love warns of the formation of a coalition of Republican lawmakers, corporate lobbyists, right wing militias, "birthers" (people who believe Obama was not born in the United States, therefore unqualified to be President), anti-immigration Minutemen (citizen militias who "guard" the U.S.-Mexican border), White nationalists, "tea baggers" (wealthy conservative tax protesters); and right-wing talk radio hosts. Mainstream cable news networks -- most noticeably FOX News, but CNN also -- collude in the creation of the illusion of "objective" news, activating a

cycle of center-to-(right wing) fringe ideology that serves to empower relations among and between (sometimes) odd bedfellows. It is not enough for one group to despise Obama; the hate must wear many masks and must thrive between veils of consciousness, where a kind of undead "Masque of Blackness" incessantly plays on. [11] As Zizek wrote, "the 'real' evil of late-capitalist social disintegration has to be transposed into the archaic magic-mythic evil of 'monsters'." [12]

In the magic-mythosphere, the gentle folklorists of the future may possibly discover that Carl Jung had a point: the concept of synchronicity as "an acausal connecting principle" -- of ideas, affects, events, images and stories traveling at the speed of light in virtual systems -- is more relevant than the old "real." [13] If the space-time fabric has truly been ruffled, then has not the classic Newtonian principle of causality surpassed itself, leaving an excess of fields of possibility with permeable boundaries and fluctuating content? In response to God's touch, to know is to be co-emergent with groupings of psycho-physical phenomena that make fleeting sense, through sense-making, acausal, analogical chains or semi-transparent planes of signification: an open system.

A different category of images sets out to blur the semiotic distance between the President and a primate. The catalog of visual artifacts representing people of African descent as half-human, half-primate is too weighty and torn to do adequate justice in the space of this essay. One example of an artifact of this kind would be the anatomical sketches of the 16th century Dutch physician, Petrus Camper (1722-1789), who created scientific charts portraying the evolution of man. As art historian Michael Harris pointed out, the most developed humans on the chart were modeled after Greek sculptures, while Africans were associated with primates in an earlier stage of evolution. [14] Camper's charts circulated widely throughout Europe and the Americas, remaining in pedagogical use in medical schools into the late nineteenth century. This racializing iconography is the subject of Joseph Pugliese's essay, *'Demonstrative Evidence': A Genealogy of the Racial Iconography of Forensic Art and Illustration*, which examines visual conventions "that constitute the contemporary production of caucacentric forensic body charts" and their ideological effects. [15] Forensic charts served as a kind of visual discourse to support theories and practices of scientific racism, social Darwinism and eugenics, which set out to prove the existence of white racial superiority.

The Obama-Space Alien category of images has a decidedly more playful morphology. The idea of what aliens look like has changed over time, according to a 1997 study of media representations and drawings by alien abductees under hypnosis in clinical settings. [16] Of particular interest here of is the 1961 abduction of Betty and Barney Hill, a married couple living in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Barney Hill, who was of Ethiopian descent, sat on the local board of the U.S. Civil Rights

Commission. Betty Hill, who was Caucasian, was employed as a social worker. Theirs was the first widely publicized case of alien abduction in the United States. The couple told the press of driving home from a vacation late one summer night. An enormous flying saucer landed in the road directly in front of their vehicle, forcing them to a halt. Barney Hill stepped out of the car to investigate. According to Barney's testimony, aliens telepathically summoned him, Betty and their small dachshund, Delsey, to board the spacecraft. As for what happened next, the Hills could not recall except through fragmented memories, recurrent nightmares, and strange bodily sensations. They claimed to have "missed time" due to the episode. [17] A fascinating visual artifact of the Hill case is a photograph of Barney Hill at home in his study (see Figure 1). In the photo, Barney Hill rests his hands on the family television set. Prominently placed on top of the television is what appears to be a model 16th century Dutch or Portuguese slave ship. A large map of the stars spans the wall behind the clustered figures. Viewed through Jung's acausal connecting principle, the figures in the photograph could be said to resonate webs of pasts and futures, myths and histories, bodies and technologies. The webs overlap in the invisible, though patently *there*, space-time that the Hills claimed to had lost.



**Figure 1:** Barney Hill, (circa 1966). Photograph in the University of New Hampshire Library, Milne Special Collection.

The categories discussed so far have borrowed from the cultural stockpile of iconic murderers, idiots and madmen, and transposed them onto the figure of Barack Obama. Clumsy or sleek, absurd or revolting, all are politicized, racialized images freighted with contested histories and silences. Into this niche step the Devil and his friends, the devouring monster and the clever antichrist. They have one trait in common: a

penchant for promiscuous mixing. Mary Shelley's monster mixed the human with the machine, creating a lonely beast. The Golem of Jewish folklore mixes animate and inanimate matter; in Psalms 139:16 of the Bible, the word golem is used to refer to a raw, embryonic or incomplete substance. [18] In the classic narrative, the Golem is formed and brought to life by a rabbi through the performance of rituals and Hebrew incantations. As the Golem grows, it becomes more violent, turning on gentiles and in some versions of the story, killing its own creator.

In visual art, the mother of the most monstrous of all media is collage. Its children -- montage, sampling, morphing -- all inherited the traits of promiscuous mixing and matching of texts and images from disparate sources to form a new thing. Therefore it is fitting that makers of racist imagery choose this medium; ironic that they cannot broadcast their products outside of biotechnological systems of digitally coded communication. Do the picture-makers feel themselves becoming-monstrous too?

The pictorial fiction chosen for close analysis in this study is Obama-antichrist. The star of popular novels and movies, antichrist is monstrous, alien, sub-human, insane and violent -- traits found in all of the other categories. The antichrist narrative is embedded in Christian religiosity, and has enjoyed a resurrection, so to speak, with the rise of popular Evangelical Christianity in the mid-twentieth century. As the Joker is to Batman, so the antichrist is to Jesus. As the imaginary embodiment of evil, he is the causeless cause of all things wrong in the world. The appropriate response to social problems such as injustice and inequity is not to organize and strategize for action, but to prepare oneself and ones loved ones for the coming Rapture -- the return of Jesus Christ. During the Rapture, followers of Jesus who have thoroughly given themselves to Him will be taken up to heaven. Unbelievers and inadequately prepared Christians will be left behind to fend for themselves in a world ruled by antichrist, who metes out gruesome punishments such as crushing people like grapes in a winepress. [19]

The personification of evil is a load-bearing principle, structurally essential to the mental architecture of western ethics. One has to have an embodiment of evil to have an embodiment of good in Jesus Christ. The existence of one demands the existence of the other, perpetually engaged in an epic struggle for dominance. To provide a contrast, the concept of evil in Buddhism -- if there is one -- is the result of greed, anger and the delusion of a separate self. Suffering gives rise to *samsara*, the transmigration of souls through earthly lives. Nature gives and takes life. Even on the cellular level, the evil of decay and death exists side by side with the good of growth and health. [20] This difference, which underscores the structural necessity of evil in western thinking, is why the politicized, racialized depiction of antichrist is considered a matter of importance in this study. It is, in effect, a way to peer inside the modern Anglo-American Christian mind.

## Prophecy Literature

*The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson was the first Christian prophecy book to break through to mainstream audiences. [21] Known for its hair-raising vision of the future, Lindsey wove biblical prophecy with contemporary events to create a believable scenario of World War III erupting in the Middle East. The book rode a wave of interest in mystical writings until Bantam, the first major press to publish a work of Christian prophecy, picked it up from a small Christian publishing house for release in a mass market edition.

Lindsey's book paved the way for the 16-book *Left Behind* series by Pastor Tim LaHaye and ghostwriter Jerry Jenkins. [22] The phenomenal success of the series (65 million copies sold) led to feature articles in *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone* and others. [23] Three of the books -- *Left Behind*, *Left Behind II: Tribulation Force*, and *Left Behind: World at War* -- became feature films released by Cloud Nine Pictures. In addition, the novels were adapted for children in a forty-book series that has sold over 11 million copies to date. [24]

Secular scholars have probed the political and economic implications of *Left Behind* and the flourishing prophecy movement in the United States. Monahan and Strombeck argue that the books further a narrow conservative agenda while simultaneously reinforcing themes of markets and privatization. [25] *Marks of the Beast* by Glenn Shuck evaluates the role of apocalypse in contemporary evangelical America and beyond. Shuck views *Left Behind* as a series of "adjustment narratives" helping modern prophecy believers make sense of the complexities of network culture and political issues while preserving their collective evangelical identity. [26]

Marina Warner's *Engines & Angels: The Culture of Apocalypse* examines apocalyptic imagery in film and digital media, contending that technology's realism captures viewers in webs of seductive illusion where themes of intolerance, vengeance and excessive violence are incessantly played out. [27] *Born Again Ideology: Religion, Technology, and Terrorism* by political scientist Arthur Kroker, and works by Stephen Pfohl elaborate technological aspects of the movement from a posthuman perspective and are key to the analysis presented in this article. [28]

This article examines a specific set of visual angles and cultural relations that are implied but not directly addressed in Shuck, Pfohl and Kroker's philosophical investigations of technology in evangelical communities. It interrogates the visual-social aspects of images made by some socially conservative white evangelicals during the 2008 presidential campaign season. More broadly, the article sets out to develop the visual cultural aspects of current scholarly discussions of prophecy belief

and apocalypse. This is considered necessary because of the predominance of images in digital communication technologies. As McLuhan predicted, Gutenberg Man is in decline, communication has freed itself from the linearity of print technology; the eyeball has become the coveted object of marketing techniques designed to grab the attention of distracted consumers. [29] Images have become the locus of competitive sales and advertising because of their ability to pack a high density of information into a small area and elicit emotion from viewers. Researchers of visual persuasion maintain that the "implicit nature of visual argumentation and the relative lack of social accountability which images enjoy in comparison with words," means that pictures can be used to make claims that would be unacceptable if spelled out verbally. [30] The audacity of some of the Obama images would appear to bear this out.

These developments led the popular forecaster, John Naisbitt, to announce the arrival of "The Postliterate Future" in an article for *The Futurist*. [31] As evidence, he cited the decline of newspaper sales, the rise of graphic novels and the U.S. government's release of its *9/11 Report* in comic book form. [32] If book retail sales are an indicator of the ascendancy of the visual, Naisbitt may be correct: in 2003 the graphic novel genre had outsold every other book category for four years running, according to Micha Hershman of Borders. [33] Part of the popularity of the genre must surely be its adaptability to movie and video game formats. A 2008 article in *Publishers Weekly* reported a 12% rise in sales in graphic novels from 2006, figures that were boosted exponentially by crossover hits such as Stephen King's bestseller, *The Dark Tower*. [34]

Scholarly work has kept pace of the trends, giving rise to the overlapping sub-disciplines of visual culture, visual semiotics, and visual rhetoric. Scholarship in these areas has created what Moriarty and Barbatsis called, "a plane of creativity constituted by lines of flight," or new perspectives on the study of visual communication. Contributing to these perspectives are scholars from professionally oriented fields such as art education and mass communication, and offshoots of more settled disciplines such as cultural studies and information systems. As Moriarty and Barbatsis explained, the emerging field of visual signification tends to mix and match pieces that have disciplinary roots in different areas but have no unifying theory or methodologies of their own. Furthermore, the multi-centric field "does not operate in a traditional linear or language-centered reality. Rather it displays . . . an approach that is both organic and dynamic." (35) It is in this spirit of organic multidisciplinary that I present my research on images that conflate Barack Obama and the figure of antichrist.

## **Images conflating Barack Obama and Antichrist**



Late in the 2008 presidential campaign, digital images depicting Barack Obama as a false messiah, a space alien, a terrorist, a beast, a fascist dictator and antichrist began to surface on the Internet. "Satan's Son" by Grim Reaper (see Figure 2) was one of many such images. Grim Reaper's digital prints appeared on the artist's Flickr photostream, grimreaper131349 (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/9665916@N08/3293462424/>) alongside other works, some expressing political views and some not. According to the profile, Grim Reaper is a male who lives in the city of The Colony, Texas. According to publicly available data on The Colony, 77.5% of its residents self-identify as Non-Hispanic Whites (compared to the 63% national average according to the US Census Bureau, 2008) and estimate their median household income at \$78,272 -- substantially above that of Texas as a whole (\$47, 548). [36] The significance of this data will become more apparent in the next section, where White evangelical racial perceptions and attitudes are seen to correlate with self-segregation. [37]



**Figure 2:** Grim Reaper,

"Satan's Son," digital print  
(2008): <http://www.flickr.com/photos/9665916@N08/3293462424/> (accessed 21 July 2009).

Another type of image is *The Passion of Obama*, (Figure 3) posted to Perspectives of a Coffee Conservative (coffeconservative.com) on April 24, 2009, by Richly Chheuy. It is representative of a genre that emerged when Barack Obama became a serious contender for the U.S. Presidency. The iconography draws from stock (traditional or popular) Christian imagery while supplanting Obama for the Jesus figure, presumably to mock Obama (but not Jesus). The visual rhetoric and juxtaposition of symbols suggest a belief that Obama is a false messiah or antichrist.



**Figure 3:** "The Passion of

Obama," digital image posted by Richly Chheuy (26 April 2009): <http://coffeeconservative.wordpress.com> (accessed on 15 August 2009).

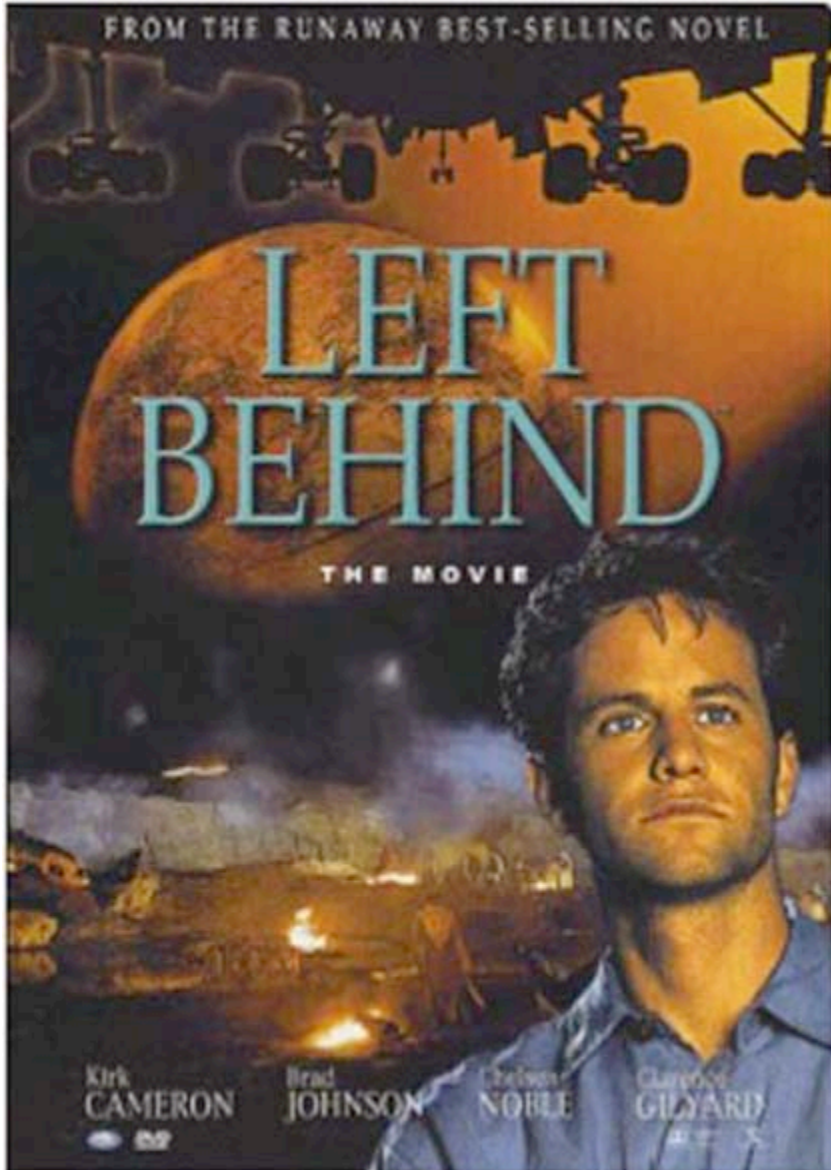
The theme of apocalypse, and its coded anxiety, was fully exploited by the McCain campaign with its ad, *The One* (see Figure 4). Released online in early August 2008, the ad depicts McCain's democratic rival as a self-appointed messiah. A rapid sequence of images merges the figure of Obama with Charlton Heston in the role of Moses in the 1956 Cecil B. DeMille technicolor extravaganza, *The Ten Commandments*. A musical crescendo matches the iconic image of Heston's arms flung wide for the Red Sea to part in obeisance to God's covenant with the children of Israel. The sequence glows in a magical incantation of images, sounds, meanings and code: the very conditions for the strange, spectral visage of an Obama-golem to appear, eerily similar to the egomaniacal antichrist figure of Nicolai Carpathia in the *Left Behind* novels. As the glow quickly fades, the heroic figure of Charlton Heston as Moses dissipates into Heston the hair-brained right wing zealot and celebrity chairman of the National Rifle Association, ground zero of America's fixation with guns and post-9/11 "panic insecurity." [38]

According to a *Time* magazine article by Amy Sullivan, the creator of *The One* ad was Fred Davis, a top media consultant for McCain with close ties to the Christian Coalition. [39] Visually, the ad evokes the cover art of the *Left Behind* books and DVDs (see Figure 5). At several points in the ad, an ominous orange glow surrounded by dark clouds fills the screen. In one frame, the image of an otherworldly staircase appears in a golden mist. Similar meteorological signs and Hollywood-inspired visual devices appeared in digitized images contemporaneously with *The One* ad.

The One



**Figure 4:** "The One" McCain political campaign ad, digital video (2008).



**Figure 5:** Cover art for the film, *Left Behind* DVD package (United States: Cloud Nine Pictures, 2000).

Warner and other historians of religion have written about the propagandic use of apocalypse narratives by authoritative regimes of the past. [40] In 2008, political marketers and their media conglomerate partners manipulated apocalypse symbols and codes of the *Left Behind* brand to mobilize grassroots evangelicals to vote for the secularist McCain in the November election. [41] With data showing that 63% of self-identified Christians in the U.S. believe in the rapture of the church, "that is, that before the world comes to an end, the religiously faithful will be saved and taken up to heaven," and that about one-quarter of the U.S. population believes that the book of *Revelation*, with its fantastic descriptions of the Whore of Babylon, Armageddon and The Last Judgment, is the absolute Word of God, it is a wonder that political

marketers and strategists did not exploit the "irrational core of the apocalypse narrative" any more than they did. [\[42\]](#)

## White Evangelicals on Race in America

Scholars believe that the figure of antichrist in *Revelation* was a reference to its author's (known as "John the Divine" or "John the Revelator," c. 100 C.E.) contemporary, Roman Emperor Nero. This never stopped inquiring minds from searching for antichrist elsewhere. In the court of public opinion, Frederick II, Peter the Great, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, members of the British royal family, a whole series of Popes, the United Nations, John F. Kennedy, Bill Gates and many others have stood accused. [\[43\]](#) So it should not come as a surprise that Barack Obama became a suspect.

Most people have heard Barack Obama's story and are aware of what made him a unique choice for president of the United States. As Dee Dee Myers wrote in a 27 January 2009 blog for *Vanity Fair*:

His black African father, white American mother, Muslim middle name, and childhood spent partially in Asia make him more than the 21st-century embodiment of the classic American melting pot; his story makes him accessible to people the world over who might see in his life a few scenes from their own. [\[44\]](#)

These same biographical details are what make some white evangelicals uneasy about Obama. [\[45\]](#) As Jonathon Alter wrote in *Newsweek*, four decades of political strategizing designed to exploit racial fears among rural, southern and working class Whites (Nixon's "Southern Strategy") had primed voters to react negatively to racial cues (such as the darkened face of Willie Horton). [\[46\]](#)

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, studied the racial attitudes of white evangelical Protestants through a national telephone survey of 2,500 self-identified White evangelicals and 200 face-to-face interviews. [\[47\]](#) Applying the sociological concept of "cultural tools" to interpret their findings, Emerson and Smith concluded that individuals using theologically rooted evangelical cultural tools tended to: "(1) individualize and minimize the race problem, (2) assign blame to Blacks themselves for racial inequality, (3) obscure inequality as part of racial division, and (4) suggest unidimensional solutions to racial division." [\[48\]](#) Furthermore, focus on the primacy of personal relationships prevented individuals from recognizing the structural and institutional dimensions of race in economic, political, educational, social and religious systems. Political opposition was more likely to be expressed in personal

attacks on a candidate than in organized activity. Emerson and Smith found that anti-structural views and racial isolation were self-reinforcing. Thus the most racially isolated white evangelicals, "think and act as if [racial] problems do not exist." [49]

African American and Native American evangelicals in Emerson and Smith's study took a very different view of racism. To these respondents, the "monster of racialization is Satan, who delights in division and oppression," the researchers reported (see Figure 6). [50] One Native American participant spoke of racism as an evil spirit or poison passed on through generations. This monstrous Other of the white Christian imaginary is vividly encoded in Fra Angelico's (1425-30) image of Satan in *The Last Judgment* and other works of western art.



**Figure 6:** Fra Angelico, *The Last Judgment* (detail), tempera on panel (1425-30). Museum of San Marco, Florence.

## **The Ghost of *Leviticus***

The end of the world in John the Revelator's vision is a world of Levitical law turned upside-down. The *Old Testament* book of *Leviticus*, which describes the duties of the priests in the tribe of Levi, legislated laws of cleanliness that are grossly transgressed in *Revelation*. [51] In *Leviticus* 26: 1-2, the authors command:

You shall not make idols for yourselves; you shall not erect a carved image or a sacred pillar; you shall not put a figured stone on your land to prostrate yourselves upon, because I am the LORD your God.

In *Revelation* 13: 14-15:

...[the beast] deluded the inhabitants of the earth, and made them erect an image in honour of the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived. It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that it could speak, and could cause all who would not worship the image to be put to death.

Levitical laws governing sexual conduct forbid intercourse with animals "as to make yourself unclean with it;" no woman should "submit herself to intercourse with a beast: that is a violation of nature." [52] In *Revelation*, the polymorphous beast in 13: 1-2 "was like a leopard, but its feet were like a bear's and its mouth like a lion's," implying unholy parentage. The Whore of Babylon in *Revelation* 18: 2-3 is described as "a dwelling for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, for every vile and loathsome bird. For all nations have drunk deep of the fierce wine of her fornication." These rules matter to the Tribe of Levi because in their mattering, in their material construction of the bodies of women and the blood traits of children of Levi, lies the boundary between who is of the Tribe and who is Other. The matter is one of identity and patriarchal control.

The text of *Leviticus* explains the need for strict holy laws in terms of transgressions:

The people who were there before you did these abominable things and the land became unclean. So the land will not spew you out for making it unclean as it spewed them out. For anyone who does any of these abominable things shall be cut off from his people. [53]

In her classic analysis of the abominations of *Leviticus*, anthropologist Mary Douglas questioned why certain objects, acts and relations should be categorized as clean and others as unclean: "Why should the camel, the hare and the rock badger be unclean? Why should locusts, but not all, be unclean? What have chameleons, moles and crocodiles got in common that they should be listed together?" [54] To Douglas, the general principal of cleanness in animals was that they conform fully to their class. Species that were imperfect members of their class, "or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world," were judged unclean. [55]

Douglas' insights help make sense of the racial fear felt in some white evangelical communities at the time of the 2008 presidential election. As Douglas noted: "Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused." [56] A man of European American and African descent with a Muslim-sounding name whose intelligence defies demeaning stereotypes might be perceived as "of a class [that] confounds the general scheme of the world" by some racially isolated whites. [57]

Postings to the *Barack Hussein Obama is the Antichrist* Facebook group support this hypothesis. According to group's moderator, Gino Borri: "Proof: It says in the bible, he will come as a man mounted on a white horse. Translation: His mother is a white woman with 6 african (*sic*) husbands. White horse? Or white whore?" [58] Later in the posting, Borri echoes a lapel button sold at the 2008 Republican state convention in Texas -- "If Obama is president...will we still call it the White House?" -- (see Figure 7) -- but refashions the question into a statement of proof that Obama is antichrist: "Obama would be a 'black' president in the 'white' house (satan is described as black in attribute and who seeks to take over the white mansion known as heaven)." [59] On a similar note, the moderator of the web group, First Light Forum, called Obama a "Satanic Son of a Socialist Slut." [60]



**Figure 7:** Button sold at the Republican state convention in Texas (2008): <http://thedailyvoice.com/voice/2008/06/tx-gop-convention-button-if-ob-000774.php> (accessed on 21 July 2009).

Obama's parentage clearly triggered a racist reaction deeply rooted in American society. In an article on genetics and race in horror films of the 1950s, Gonder noted that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, magazines such as *Parents* and *Better Homes and Gardens* published articles about the influence of harmful genes, specifically called "black genes." [61] In 2008, anti-miscegenation fantasies returned to the public eye. During the presidential election, a pipe-fitter from Mobile, Alabama told a *New York Times* reporter, "He's (Obama's) neither-nor. He's other. It's in the Bible. Come as one. Don't create other breeds." [62] A retired textile worker told the same reporter: "God taught the children of Israel not to intermarry. You should be proud of what you



are, and not intermarry." [63] These and other comments reflect the "one drop" rule of the old racialized order: a single drop of "black" blood in a person of otherwise "white" racial identity rendered the person legally black. [64]

Douglas' analysis of *Leviticus* also helps us to read The Revelator's end-times horror as an implosion of the strict holiness laws, a traumatic cultural memory bursting through the linguistic surface. Trauma, as Katherine Hayles discussed in relation to digital code, overwhelms the human ability to process it. "The characteristic symptoms of trauma -- dissociation, flashbacks, re-enactments, frighteningly vivid nightmares..." are, as Hayles sees them, a "powerful resource through which new communication channels can be opened between conscious, unconscious, and non-conscious human cognition." [65] In 2008, some prophecy believers analogically linked the momentum of the *Revelation* narrative to the juggernaut of Barack Obama's candidacy, as an image used in a CNN segment on Obama clearly and purposefully suggested. For one flickering second, the face of a dark-skinned man with his mouth open like the maw of a beast fills the television screen in a flow of images prepared for the segment (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** "Obama the Antichrist?" Segment aired on CNN (15 August 2008): [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQoV\\_Ngl-G8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQoV_Ngl-G8) (accessed on 21 July 2009).

In a sense, *Leviticus* could be said to haunt the unconscious regions of digital code and (human) interfaces. As a ghost, its authoritative demands for precise forms of social behavior re-enact the traumas of boundary transgression inherent in the human-cyber interface. Haraway's statement that technologies are not mediations between bodies but are rather organs, "full partners," genes in the sense of computer code in the sense of techno-morphogenetic interflow, expands virally by analogy. Terror of the "unclean," miscegenated body and the stain of "black genes" in white blood may be

the repressed of the white evangelical mind, multiply encoded in the distributed networks of digital ecologies. [66]

As Strozier noted in his study of fundamentalism and violence, religious paranoia is inherently apocalyptic. [67] Fueled by rigid dualistic thinking, the believer's tendency to construct the other in apocalyptic terms can culminate in violent fantasies and actions. According to Strozier, the actual psychological illness of paranoia is rooted in trauma that is beyond the sufferer's reach to understand. Projective fantasies of pure evil embodied by some racial or ethnic group can escalate into a drive to destroy it by any means necessary, including assassination and genocide, as seen in 20th century genocidal projects in Germany and Yugoslavia. At a symbolic level, the deployment of "beastly" apocalypse imagery in response to the perceived racial threat posed by Barack Obama seems to parallel the trauma of persecution informing the author of *Revelation's* monstrous visions during the bloody reign of Roman Emperor Nero. The same trauma reverberates in the LaRouche Youth Movement, whose pictorial fictions of Obama as Hitler fling the viewer into a reaction-formation of perpetual crisis and flight, an uncanny return of the ancient Jews fleeing captivity, persecution, and the unbearable oppression of the monstrous Self/Other (see Figure 9). [68] This is the flashpoint where meaning implodes: an illuminated dust cloud of affect envelops its sudden, absolute disappearance. Thus the 2008 presidential election brought forth images, "embedded in the collective self, capable of assuming virulent form in moments of historical and social crisis." [69] And as we have seen, digital images expressing this virulence were in no short supply.



**Figure 9:** Anti-Obama poster displayed by LaRouche Youth activists at the Arlington Heights post office on August 19, 2009. Published in the Arlington Heights, Illinois online

newspaper: <http://www.arlingtoncardinal.com/category/politics/protests/> (accessed on 05 December 2009).

## In "The strange language, 'genish'"

The first scene of the 1999 end-times thriller, *The Omega Code*, takes place in the study of an aged Rabbi. [70] The eye of the camera closes in on the desktop, showing the viewer a Hebrew manuscript and a DNA strand drawn on parchment. In the same frame is a scroll, crumpled and yellowed with age (see Figure 10).

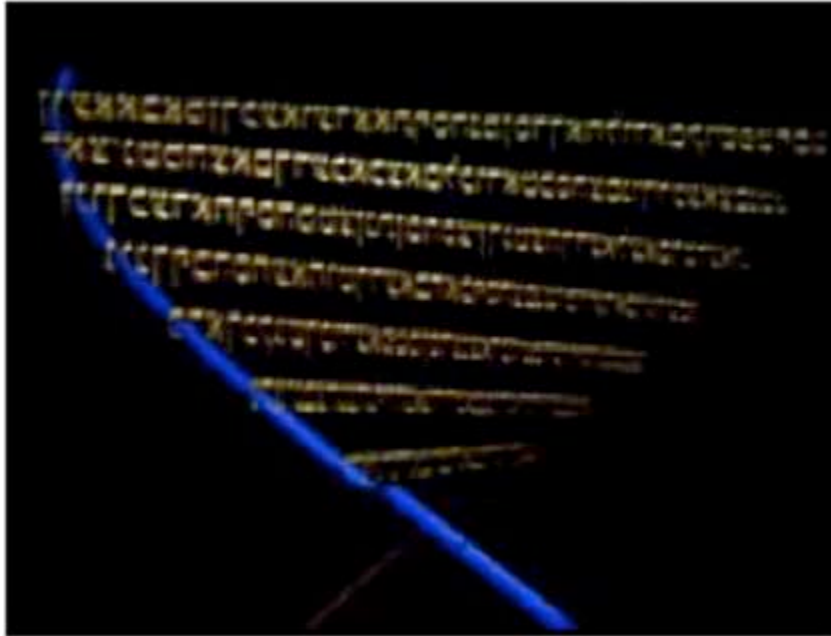


**Figure 10:** Robert Marcarelli, director, *The Omega Code* motion picture (United States: Providence Entertainment, 1999).

The camera angles up to a computer screen displaying Hebraic text -- presumably the bible -- in a revolving double helix (see Figure 11). As the plot of the film thickens, the audience is told: "Bible is a holographic program to be read in three dimensions." In this program, prophetic bible code merges with DNA to produce, "The genetic code of the universe." Here it is useful to know *The Omega Code* was co-written by Hal Lindsey, co-author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Lindsey was an outspoken voice in the "Obama is Antichrist" crusade during the 2008 presidential campaign, revising and nuancing his position only after Obama became President. [71]

It is no coincidence that best-sellers with titles like *The Bible Code* by Michael Drosnin (also author of *The Bible Code II: The Countdown*), *Cracking the Bible Code*, *Bible Code Bombshell*, *The Apocalypse Code* -- the list goes on -- flooded the market during the decade and a half when the Human Genome Project (HGP) determined "the complete sequence of the 3 billion DNA subunits (bases), identified all human genes, and made them accessible for further biological study." [72] A

contagion of affect took hold of the notion of controlling of the mechanisms of life by "cracking" a code. Everyone became an armchair code breaker, and out of the confused excitement came the image of the Bible-encoded DNA spiral (see Figure 12). [73]



**Figure 11:** Robert Marcarelli (Director), *The Omega Code* motion picture, Bible-infused double helix screen shot (United States: Providence Entertainment, 1999).



**Figure 12:** Michael Drosnin, "DNA Spiral / In adam the model, template," *Bible Code II: The Countdown*. (New York: Viking--Penguin, 2002):<http://www.prophecy.worthyofpraise.org/Biblecode/codekey20.jpg> (accessed on 21 July 2009).

The Bible-encoded DNA image brings to mind Marcia Ian's analysis of Christian commodity culture and objects invested with transcendent affect by their users. As Ian sees it, such objects blur the boundary between sacred and secular, reiterating, "the original 'blurring' putatively achieved by the Incarnation" -- of God in the flesh body of Christ. [74] Like a paradoxical surface that has only one side and one boundary: "Christ *is*...the nonexistent point where one side of the möbius strip becomes continuous with the other; he is the immanent transcendence of material nature

become the signifier of culture-American culture." [75] Similar to the möbius strip and the three-dimensional double möbius, the DNA double-helix is composed of two intertwining spirals, symbolic of natural and spiritual understandings of environment and cosmos. [76]

The double-helix in the work of vernacular artist and lay minister Dean Thomas Coombes is, as Brian Massumi might put it, a topological figure in continuous transformation in and out of visual manifestations. [77] These manifestations do not stop at the picture's edges: they extend, loop and envelop Coombes himself in mutual reciprocity. Life escapes and returns through the symbology of code. In "DNA: The 'Book of Life,'" Coombes describes DNA as: "a large instruction book, approximately 800 Bibles long, written in the strange language 'genish,' which consists of only four letters (A, C, T, G)." [78] In "The Serpent Overlapping Bel, that Stretches from his Crown to his Foot," the spiral enveloping the human is at once scroll, serpent, lamp, lightning and double-helix (see Figure 13). Another image in the "Bel" series shows an erratic red spiral breaking free of the figure, like a bolt of de-pressurized intensity bursting out of Coombes' serial renderings of Bel (see Figure 14). [79]



**Figure 13:** Dean Thomas

Coombes, "The Serpent Overlapping Bel, that Stretches from his Crown to his Foot," crayon on graph paper, *Baal Bible Code* (2008): <http://www.bible-codes.org/Cherub-balance-bible-code.htm> (accessed on 21 July 2009).



**Figure 14** Dean Thomas

Coombes, "The Lightning (variation)," crayon on paper, *Baal Bible*

Code (n.d.): <http://www.bible-codes.org/Cherub-balance-bible-code.htm> (accessed on 22 July 2009).

Bel or Baal is an Old Testament figure who appears most dramatically in *The Book of Isaiah*, which corresponds historically with the Jew's post-exilic period. As one of the titles of Marduk, the main Babylonian deity, Bel represents chaos or, as the translators of the *The New English Bible* put it, the "empty void." [80] Bel refers to the archaic gods and foreign cultural influences that threatened Israel's solidarity and unique monotheistic covenant with God during the period of exile in Egypt. In *Isaiah* 46:1, the author promises the downfall of the Babylonian gods:

Bel has crouched down, Nebo has stooped low:  
     their images, once carried in your processions,  
 have been loaded on to beasts and cattle,  
 a burden for the weary creatures;  
     they stoop and they crouch;  
 not for them to bring the burden to safety;  
 The gods themselves go into captivity.

The "processions" referred to in this passage were the liturgies of Babylonian cultic festivities, among them the New Year's celebration, which included "processions of their images." [\[81\]](#)

In the United States, the two dominant, seemingly incompatible myths of creation are Christian creationism and naturalistic explanations of the Big Bang and Darwinian evolution. In recent years, evangelical Christianity's creationism has been repackaged as "intelligent design," ostensibly to make the idea more palatable to school boards and curriculum publishers. To philosophers of science, Christianity's anthropomorphic account is non-credible, despite the syntheses sought by progressive theologians such as David Ray Griffin and Joseph Bracken. [\[82\]](#) Tellingly, the cover art of Griffin's influential book, *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith*, depicts a spiral. Yet scientific theory and philosophy of science have moved closer to conceptualizations of cosmic self-organization, emergence philosophy and biocomplexity theory, which view matter and creative force as inherently fused. [\[83\]](#)

It is pleasant to imagine the shattered world becoming whole again, returning to the primordial motherland, where proteins, like the basic elements of signification, link and de-link in statistically impossible ways. Freud wrote in *The Uncanny* of unrequited love and the homesick longing for return to the womb.

As soon as something actually happens in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny; it is as though we were making a judgment something like this: 'So, after all, it is *true* that one can kill a person by the mere wish!' or, 'So the dead *do* live on and appear on the scene of their former activities!' and so on. [\[84\]](#)

The desire to become "genish," and then, like the mark of red crayon in Coombe's drawing of Bel, to escape containment by way of lightning bolt or other supernatural force may also be the desire to embrace and release the uncanny familiar.

Popular theories may consider or even welcome God's return to the world, assuming this God will resemble Bel more than Yahweh. They do not anticipate the arrival of the full mass of a wrathful, selfish or jealous God, a God whose very presence precludes the possibility of making images or anything that cuts up the wholeness of consciousness. Yet the closed posthumanist universe of Kroker's vision may be in the process of already becoming iconoclastic; in other words, intolerant of things that stand still, it may trap spirits and crush them in small spaces as prisoners of inexorable entropy. The posthuman universe may yet be that space of spirit recovery. The terms of God's return may demand nothing less than the unconditional release of time and space from representation: the scattering of dead cells in which evil itself reproduced.

# Notes

[1] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 -- Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

[2] I am indebted to my doctoral student, Trey Shirley, for allowing me to use his term, "pictorial fiction."

[3] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (London: Routledge, 1964).

[4] For purposes that will be explained in this essay, the "genomic body" and "race" are closely knit concepts. A 2005 research article in *Science* magazine explains that the genetic marker, SLC24A5, effects variation of pigmentation in humans. "The evolutionarily conserved ancestral allele of a human coding polymorphism predominates in African and East Asian populations. In contrast, the variant allele is nearly fixed in European populations . . . and correlates with lighter skin pigmentation in admixed populations, suggesting a key role for the SLC24A5 gene in human pigmentation." Rebecca L. Lamason, et. al., "SLC24A5, A Putative Cation Exchanger, Affects Pigmentation in Zebrafish and Humans," *Science* 310, no. 5755 (2005), DOI: 10.1126/science.1116238

[5] Arthur Kroker, "Digital Cosmologies," in *Critical Digital Studies: A Reader*, ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 344.

[6] Jeff Dwyer, *A Ghost Hunter's Guide to California's Wine Country* (New York: Pelican, 2008), 18. "Hauntings may be environmental imprints or recordings of something that happened at a location as a result of repetition of intense emotion. As such, they tend to be associated with a specific place or object, not a particular person."

[7] Alan Moore and Brian Bolland, "The Killing Joke," *Comic Vine*, <http://www.comicvine.com/the-killing-joke/39-40503/> (Accessed on 14 November 2009)

[8] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

[9] Robert Borosage, "Bringing the White Working Class into the Progressive Majority," *Campaign for America's Future* (10 April 2008), <http://www.ourfuture.org/blog-entry/bringng-white-working-class-progressive-majority> (accessed on 15 November 2009). This article is an excerpt of remarks delivered on April 9, 2008 at the *Conference on a New Deal* in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute. Progressive labor organizations such as ASFCME (public employees) led by president Gerald McEntee, and the AFL-CIO, led by political director Michael Podhorzer, are among those who have tried to win over white working class labor. See also: George Packer, "The Hardest Vote," *The New Yorker* 84, no. 32 (2008): 60. And: David Moberg, "Wooing Unions for Obama," *The Nation* 287, no. 11 (13 October 2008): 20, 22-23.



[10] David A. Love, "Secesh 3.0: Fear of a Black President," *The Black Commentator* (17 September 2009), [http://www.blackcommentator.com/342/342\\_cover\\_col\\_fear\\_black\\_president.html](http://www.blackcommentator.com/342/342_cover_col_fear_black_president.html) (accessed on 14 November 2009).

[11] Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65-67. Ben Jonson wrote the *Masque of Blackness* in 1603 for the Queen of England, who personally requested the court masque so that she and her ladies could pretend to be black Moors. Vaughan writes, "What is radical in Queen Anne's request is her desire to use black pigment. Why, one wonders, would a Queen of England, six months pregnant, wish to appear in public, her face and arms coated with black grease? The answer may lie in the song that opens the *Masque of Blackness*, which was performed in the Banqueting House at Whitehall on 6 January 1605...." Jonson's song has the lyric:

[N]ow honored, thus,  
With all his beauteous race:  
Who, though but blacke in face,  
Yet are they bright,  
And full of life, and light.  
To prove that beauty best,  
Which, not the colour, but the feature  
Assures unto the creature.

In her analysis, Vaughan defers to the insights of one of the Queen's biographers (Leeds Borroll), who noted that by using black make-up, Anne and her ladies "devised a structure in which she and her court became a spectacular presence in a glittering and politically symbolic social season." The biographer added that courtiers in the audience struggled to discover who the ladies were under the blackface, although "with some effort they were knowable as 'aristocratic ladies who are part of the golden world of the court'."

[12] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 26-27.

[13] Carl G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

[14] Molly Davis, "Professor Explores Visual Imagery," *The Emory Wheel* (29 October 2009), <http://www.emorywheel.com/detail-pf.php?n=27581> (accessed on 02 November 2009).

[15] Joseph Pugliese, "'Demonstrative Evidence': A Genealogy of the Racial Iconography of Forensic Art and Illustration," *Law and Critique* 15 (2004): 287-320.

[16] Joseph Nickell, "Extraterrestrial Iconography," *Skeptical Inquirer* no. 21 (1997): 18-19.

[17] "Books: Testament for Believers," (Review of *The Interrupted Journey* by John Fuller) *Time*, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,828455,00.html> (accessed on 12 November 2009).

[18] For a scholarly interpretation of the Golem legend in Jewish folklore, see: Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, NY: State University of New York at Albany, 1990).

[19] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[20] For a comparative religion analysis, see: Peter Koslowski, ed, *The Origin and the Overcoming of Evil and Suffering in the World Religions* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).

[21] Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970). Also see: David Matthews, "Hal Lindsey's Prophecies: A Study of The Late Great Planet Earth," (1997), <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Agora/3958/hal1.htm> (accessed on 20 June 2009).

[22] Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995). See also: Jerry Jenkins, "From 'Left Behind' back to Jesus," *The Washington Post* (05 February 2009), [http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2009/02/from\\_left\\_behind\\_back\\_to\\_jesus.html](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2009/02/from_left_behind_back_to_jesus.html) (accessed on 10 July 2009).

[23] The series' sales volume caused an extensive media buzz -- and some serious journalism. See: Michael Gross, "The Trials of the Tribulation: In the 'Left Behind' Novels Things Get Very Bad -- The Planet is Invaded by '200 Million Demonic Horsemen,' for Example, and That's Before Armageddon and the Last Judgment," *The Atlantic Monthly* 285 (2000): 122-128; Melanie McAllister, "An Empire of the Own," *The Nation* 277, no. 8 (2003): 33-6; David Van Biema, "The End: How It Got That Way," *Time* (01 July 2002): 46-7; David Gates, "The Pop Prophets," *Newsweek* (24 May 2004): 44-50; Robert Dreyfuss, "Tim LaHaye -- He's the Best-Selling Author of Novels About the End of the World, but his Real Mark on the World May be Pushing George W. Bush Even Further Toward the Christian Far Right," *Rolling Stone* (19 February 2004): 46-53.

[24] Leftbehind.com, "The Kids Series," [http://www.leftbehind.com/01\\_products/browse.asp?section=Kids](http://www.leftbehind.com/01_products/browse.asp?section=Kids) (accessed on 24 June 2009).

[25] Torin Monahan, "Marketing the Beast: 'Left Behind' the Apocalypse Industry," *Media, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2008): 813-830. "In 'Left Behind,' the world economy may serve the interests of evil, but the apocalypse industry is thoroughly integrated with the capitalist economy and is amazingly lucrative. Media and networking technologies may be the tools of antichrist, but they are also the tools of the authors and the novels' heroes." Also see: Andrew Strombeck, "Invest in Jesus: Neoliberalism and the 'Left Behind' Novels," *Cultural Critique* 64 (2006): 161-195. Strombeck argues that market capitalism and Christian Far Right ideology merge in the *Left Behind* narrative: "Neoliberalism emerges as humanity's only protection against apocalypse; security and economic freedom work in flue coexistence with premillennialist theology."

[26] Glen Shuck, *Marks of the Beast* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 195.

[27] Marina Warner, "Angels & Engines: The Culture of Apocalypse," *Raritan* 25, no. 2 (2005): 12-41.

[28] Arthur Kroker, *Born Again Ideology: Religion, Technology, and Terrorism* (CTheory Books, 2006), bai07: <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=546> (accessed on 02 October 2009). Also see: Steven Pfohl, *Left Behind: Religion, Technology, and Flight from the Flesh* (CTheory Books, 2006), lbh12: [www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=553](http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=553) (accessed on 1 October 2009).

[29] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962). For information on "eyeball marketing," visit [www.eyeballmarketing.com](http://www.eyeballmarketing.com). "We find your audience through our guerilla marketing tactics and target them through keyword coding, search engine registration, creative placement, banner swaps, text links, press releases, email, chatroom participation, newsgroup posts, and other permission marketing tactics."

The view from academia, as articulated by visual culture theorist W.J.T Mitchell, is: "To live in any culture whatsoever is to live in a visual culture ... As for the questions of hegemony, what could be more archaic and traditional than the prejudice in favor of sight? Visual has played the role of the sovereign sense since God looked at his own creation and saw that it was good, or perhaps even earlier when he began the act of creation with the divisions of the light from the darkness." W.J.T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 165-181.

[30] Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), xix.

[31] John Naisbitt, "The Postliterate Future," *The Futurist* 41, no. 2 (2007): 24-26.

[32] Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

[33] Andrew D. Arnold, "The Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary," *Time* (14 November 2003), <http://www.time.com/time/columnist/arnold/article/0,9565,542579,00.html> (accessed on 13 November 2009).

[34] Heidi MacDonald, "ICv2 Confab Reports 2007 Graphic Novel Sales Rise 12%," *Publishers Weekly* (18 April 2008), <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6552534.html> (accessed on 13 November 2009). This points out the circuitry between literature, comics, the movie industry, *The Dark Knight*, Heath Ledger's portrayal of the Joker, white face, minstrelsy, racism, President Obama and those who accuse him of practicing socialism. Not so surprisingly, most of the circuit is controlled by Time Warner Media Group, which owns DC comics and graphic novels, the Batman franchise, Warner Bros. film studios (which released *The Dark Knight*), Warner Bros. video games, CNN, AOL, as well as marketing tie-ins and licensing agreements.

[35] Sandra Moriarty and Gretchen Barbatsis, introduction to *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, eds, Ken Smith, Sandra Moriarty, Gretchen Barbatsis, and Keith Kenney (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), xxi

[36] Data on the cost of living, weather, median household income, house values and "Races in The Colony," can be found at: <http://www.city-data.com/city/The-Colony-Texas.html>

[37] Emerson and Smith, 20.

[38] Kroker, 10. "Like Hegel's vision of the owl of Minerva which takes flight at dusk, the **God of the New Testament** may have died in European consciousness in the age of progress precisely because a new incarnation of God, the **God of the Old Testament**, fusing a crusading politics of redemptive violence and a domestic tutelary of panic insecurity, was being born by way of the American political covenant."

[39] Amy Sullivan, "An Antichrist Obama in McCain Ad?" *Time* (8 August 2008), <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1830590,00.html> (accessed on 25 June 2009). "The ad was the creation of Fred Davis, one of McCain's top media gurus as well as a close friend of former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed and the nephew of conservative Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe."

[40] Warner, 24. Also see: Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), for an examination of the social conditions of the Roman Empire under which *Revelation* was written. Michael Standaert, *Skipping toward Armageddon: The Politics and Propaganda of the Left Behind Novels and the LaHaye Empire* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2006) focuses on the political meanings of the *Left Behind* books in the context of Bush-era American empire. For a critical reading of the *Book of Revelation* and other parts of the *New Testament* through the postcolonial theoretical lens developed by Homi Bhabha, see: Steven D. Moore, "Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 16, no. 5 (2008): 516-518.

[41] John King, "Evangelicals Reluctantly Embrace McCain," *CNN* (24 October 2008), <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/24/mccain.evangelical/index.html> (accessed on 10 June 2009).

[42] A Pew study found: "...63% of self-identified Christians in the U.S. believe in the rapture of the church, 'that is, that before the world comes to an end, the religiously faithful will be saved and taken up to heaven'": Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Ten Nation Survey of Renewalists* (September -- October 1996), [http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/Roperweb/pom/StateId/DyHUQIA7aj\\_0OZmkbM7ttwjqZZvAy-VTOX/HAHTpage/Summary\\_Link?qstn\\_id=1668397](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/Roperweb/pom/StateId/DyHUQIA7aj_0OZmkbM7ttwjqZZvAy-VTOX/HAHTpage/Summary_Link?qstn_id=1668397) (accessed on 27 June 2009).

Basing their information on the same Pew study, newspapers reported, "about one-quarter of the U.S. population believes that the book of *Revelation*, with its fantastic descriptions of the Whore of Babylon, Armageddon and The Last Judgment, is the absolute word of God."

NBC News and The Wall Street Journal, "U.S. Public Opinion on Religion -- Self-Described Born Again or Evangelical Christians," (2009), [http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/Roperweb/pom/StateId/DyHFVAA7ua100-VFbM7hRh3MZvT\\_-3yN2/HAHTpage/Summary\\_Link?qstn\\_id=1737328](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/Roperweb/pom/StateId/DyHFVAA7ua100-VFbM7hRh3MZvT_-3yN2/HAHTpage/Summary_Link?qstn_id=1737328) (accessed on 27 June 2009).

[43] Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994). Steven Pearson, *The End of the World: From Revelation to Eco-Disaster* (London: Robinson, 2006). Arthur Pink, *The Antichrist*, (Blacksburg, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008). Some churches have issued an official statement regarding their position on the antichrist. For example, see: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "WELS Doctrinal Statement on the Antichrist," (1959), <http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?2617&collectionID=795&contentID=4441&shortcutID=5297> (accessed on 15 June 2009): "This teaching that the papacy is the Antichrist is not a fundamental article of faith . . . It is not an article on which saving faith rests, with which Christianity stands or falls. We cannot and do not deny the Christianity of a person who cannot see the truth that the Pope is the Antichrist."

[44] Dee Dee Myers, "Is Obama the Most Famous Living Person Ever?" *Vanity Fair* (27 January 2009), <http://www.vanityfair.com/online/politics/2009/01/is-obama-the-most-famous-living-person-ever.html> (accessed on 15 June 2009).

[45] Naomi Shaefer Riley, "Loyal to the End: Evangelicals Stay the Course," *Wall Street Journal* (07 November 2008), <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122601904162807153.html> (accessed on November 14 2009); and: Theodore Roelofs, "Will Evangelicals Respond to Obama's Overtures?" *The Christian Century* 125, no. 16 (2008): 12-13.

[46] Jonathon Alter, "Hope vs. Fear," *Newsweek* 152, no. 18 (2008): 36-7.

[47] Emerson and Smith, 86. In U.S. politics, the "Southern Strategy" refers to a Republican Party method of winning southern states in the latter decades of the 20th century and early 21st century by exploiting opposition between "Negrophobe whites" (who had traditionally voted Democrat) and members of the New Left, Civil Rights, desegregationist, and anti-Vietnam War movements. See: James Boyd, "Nixon's Southern Strategy: 'It's All in the Charts,'" *New York Times* (17 May, 1970): 215.

[48] *Ibid*, 75-76, 170.

[49] *Ibid*, 170.

[50] *Ibid*, 74.

[51] *King James Bible*, Leviticus 1-15.

[52] *Ibid*, 18: 23.

[53] *Ibid*, 1: 27- 1: 30.

[54] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 41. Also see: Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*(Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[55] Douglas, 55.

[56] *Ibid*, 53.

[57] *Ibid*, 55.

[58] Gino Borri, "Why He's the Antichrist," *Barack Hussein Obama is the Antichrist* Facebook Group (2008), <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=38222960469> (accessed on 05 July 2009).

[59] James Joyner, "Obama 'White House' Buttons," *Outside the Beltway* (17 June 2008), [http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/archives/obama\\_white\\_house\\_buttons](http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/archives/obama_white_house_buttons) (accessed on 06 July 2009); and Borri, *Ibid*.

[60] JR, "Obama -- Satanic Son of a Socialist Slut in More Ways Than One," *First Light Forum* (2009), <http://jewsribsinbearjaw.wordpress.com/2009/04/11/obama-satanic-son-of-a-socialist-slut-in-more-ways-than-one> (accessed on 08 July 2009). "For lets face it, Obama's Kansas born white mother got off sexually by deliberately rejecting white men in favour of fornicating with dozens of foreigners (especially of Negro or Asian or ethnicity); and she no doubt did that to show her commitment to communism that the Jews use to break down the morals and racial purity of a Gentile nation so that the Jews can reign supreme over the moneyless cattle of the common people (the "proletariat") by their money in brave new age."

[61] Patrick Gonder, "Like a Monstrous Jigsaw Puzzle: Genetics and Race in Horror Films of the 1950s," *The Velvet Light Trap* 52 (2003): 33-44. "Common in the articles discussing heredity during the 1950s are descriptions of the influence of harmful genes 'significantly called black genes,' as contrasted to 'more benevolent genes.'"

[62] Adam Nossiter, "For Some, Uncertainty Starts at Racial Identity," *New York Times* (14 October 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/15/us/politics/15biracial.html> (accessed on 10 July 2009). See also: Stephen Ducat, "Why They Hate Obama: Miscegenation and Other Nightmares of the Racist Political Imagination," *Huffington Post* (26 October 2008), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-ducat/why-they-hate-obama-misce\\_b\\_137935.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-ducat/why-they-hate-obama-misce_b_137935.html) (accessed on 05 July 2009).

[63] Nossiter, 1.

[64] F. James Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

[65] Katherine Hayles, "Traumas of Code," in *Critical Digital Studies: A Reader*, ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 28.

[66] Donna Haraway, "Crittercam: Compounding Eyes in Naturecultures," in *When Species Meet*, ed. Donna Haraway. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 249. Also see Gonder, 35.

[67] Charles B. Strozier, "The Apocalyptic Other: On Fundamentalism and Violence. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11, no. 1 (2007): 84-96. Also see: Stanley Schneider, "Fundamentalism and Paranoia in Groups and Society," *Group* 26, no. 1 (2002).

[68] The LaRouche movement's imagery ironically recreates Obama as the author of "the final solution."

[69] Strozier, 81.

[70] Robert Marcarelli (Director), *The Omega Code* (Motion picture) (United States: Providence Entertainment, 1999).

[71] Lindsey, 1970, *Ibid*. Examples of Lindsey's views on Obama can be found in: Hal Lindsey, "How Obama Prepped World for the Antichrist," *WorldNetDaily* (01 August 2008), <http://www.wnd.com/index.php?pageId=71144> (accessed on 19 June 2009). Lindsey reports his views on current events via podcast. See: Hal Lindsey, "Watchman Warning: Is Obama the Antichrist?" *The Hal Lindsey Report: Watchman Warning* (15 June 2009), <http://www.hallindsey.com/> (accessed on 15 June 2009).

[72] Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). Drosnin is also author of *The Bible Code II: The Countdown*. Other Christian genre books on the "Bible code" theme are: Jeffrey Satinover, *Cracking the Bible Code* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1998); R. Edwin Sherman, *Bible Code Bombshell* (Green Forest, AZ: New Leaf Press, 2005), Hank Hanegraaf, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007) -- to list a few.

[73] Completed in 2003, the Human Genome Project was a 13-year project coordinated by the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health. According to the HGP website, the project goals were to: "identify all 20,000-25,000 genes in human DNA; to determine the sequences of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA; to store this information in databases; to improve tools for data analysis; to transfer related technologies to the private sector; and to address the ethical, legal, and social issues that may arise from the project." Human Genome Project official website, [http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human\\_Genome/home.shtml](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml) (accessed 13 November 2009).

[74] Marcia Ian, "'Invisible Religion': The Extimate Secular in American Society," *Religion Between Culture and Philosophy* 3, no. 1-2 (2009): 6, <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v3i12/ian.htm> (accessed on 05 July 2009).

[75] *Ibid*, 6.

[76] Dawn Whitehand, "Patterns That Connect," *Leonardo* 42, no. 1 (2009): 10-15.

[77] Dean Thomas Coombes, *Bible Code Pictograms: Bible Codes that Form Images and Predict the Future* (05 November 2009), <http://www.bible-codes.org/index.htm> (accessed on 13 November 2009). "As Brian Massumi might put it..." Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

[78] Dean Thomas Coombes, *DNA: "The Book of Life" Bible Prophecy Code*, <http://www.bible-codes.org/dna-code.htm> (accessed on 13 November 2009). The chemical structure of DNA is made from repeating units of nucleotides Adenine (A), Cytosine (C), Thymine (T) and Guanine (G). This is why "the strange language, 'genish,'" consists of only the letters A, C, T and G. See: Saenger Wolfram, *Principles of Nucleic Acid Structure* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1984).

[79] Dean Thomas Coombes, "The Image of Baal," from *The Baal Bible Code*, <http://www.bible-codes.org/Cherub-balance-bible-code.htm> (accessed on 13 November 2009).

[80] Gene M. Tucker, trans., *The Book of Isaiah in The New English Bible with Apocrypha, Oxford Study Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 780.

[81] *Ibid*, 780.

[82] David Griffin, *Two Great Faiths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). See also: Joseph Bracken, *The One and The Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdsman, 2006).

[83] On cosmic self-organization and natural genesis: Jan Ambjorn, Jerzy Jerkiewicz and Renate Loll, "The Self-Organising Quantum Universe," *Scientific American* 299, (2008): 42-49. Skirting around the soft spots of New Age pop philosophy: Stuart Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason and Religion* (New York: Basic, 2008) and Michael Shermer, "Sacred Science," *Scientific American* 299, no. 1 (July 2008): 38-38.

[84] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 154.

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