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Marcus O'Donnell
University of Wollongong, marcuso@uow.edu.au

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"If you can hold on...": counter-apocalyptic play in Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales*

Abstract

Richard Kelly's Southland Tales (2006) presents a dystopic, post-apocalyptic, near-future through an aesthetic, which fuses contemporary postmodern screens with the phantasmagorical of traditional apocalyptic visions. This article argues that Southland Tales is an example of what feminist theologian Catherine Keller calls the "counter-apocalyptic" (Keller 1996:19-20). Through strategies of ironic parody Kelly both describes and questions the apocalyptic and its easy polarities. In situating the film as counter-apocalyptic the paper argues that the film both resists the apocalyptic impulse however it is also located within it. In this sense it produces a unique take on the genre of the post-apocalyptic film and a powerful fluid critique of the post 9/11 security state.

Keywords

Apocalypse; Richard Kelly; Terrorism; September 11

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Author Notes

Dr Marcus O'Donnell, is a Senior Lecturer in the School of the Arts, English and Media, Faculty of Law Humanities and the Arts at the University of Wollongong. His research interests include the intersection of journalism, popular culture and religion.

Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* was widely panned by critics¹ for its narrative incoherence and indulgent style; neither was it well received by audiences at the box office. However, I will argue that the multilayered, multiscreened, indulgence of the film is making specific arguments about contemporary identities and contemporary ways of knowing. Kelly's film sets up images and tones, of news, scripture and surveillance, as intersecting apocalyptic ways of knowing and this unfolding spectacle reveals a playful parody of end-time dramas, celebrity cultures and the security state. The film's neo-baroque², indulgent visionary style which moves the film from kaleidoscopic collages to staged musical numbers, from storm trooper attacks to home video scenes, produces a sophisticated open-ended text which refuses to foreclose on only one interpretation or critique of the systems at play. In this sense it is a particularly clear example of what feminist theologian Catherine Keller calls the counter-apocalyptic³: a style, which through strategies of ironic parody, both describes and questions the apocalyptic and its easy polarities.

The apocalyptic is a mobile and dynamic narrative that can be identified in different forms across different media and has been linked to both a historic religious mythology and a range of contemporary political discourses⁴. It can be found in film, political speeches, journalism, television drama, literature and other forms of popular culture⁵. It can take on rhetorical, documentary, dramatic and visionary forms and it is linked to a range of other narratives and mythologies and is best understood as a hybrid form.

The western narrative of apocalypse is primarily drawn from the last book of the New Testament – the *Book of Revelation* or *The Apocalypse*⁶ – which describes a set of graphic end-time visions of strange beasts, cataclysmic wars, and terrible plague brought by God's avenging angels. But these cataclysmic visions are matched

with a promise of something new – the final descent from heaven of the New Jerusalem and the establishment of a millennial rule of peace. Contemporary apocalyptic narratives are therefore a set of anxious readings of the “signs of the times,” tracking “wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6) in expectation of these terror visions becoming reality; but this anxiety is mixed with a simultaneous hope for the utopic millennium arising out of disaster.

Various forms of apocalyptic narrative are critical to many recent mainstream and alternative films⁷ from the apocalyptic story arc of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson 2001-3) to the post apocalyptic survival narratives of *28 Days Later* (Boyle 2002), *The Road* (Hillcoat 2009) and *The Book of Eli* (Hughes & Hughes 2010); to the psychological apocalyptic reflections of *Melancholia* (Von Trier 2011) or *Take Shelter* (Nichols 2011); to the succession of blockbuster end of the world thrillers of Roland Emmerich: *Independence Day* (1996), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *2012* (2009).

Several scholars have sought to directly link an analysis of film narratives to the form of the apocalyptic myth as outlined by biblical scholars. Such attempts to identify the parameters of a cinematic genre of apocalypse produced a run of cinema studies volumes and articles at the turn of this century.⁸ While each of these studies makes contributions to unraveling the connections between the ancient and the contemporary apocalyptic traditions their collective attempt to come up with a cogent genre definition is even less successful than the early attempts among biblical scholars⁹. While Dailey¹⁰ for example holds up Terry Gilliam’s *Twelve Monkeys* as an exemplary apocalyptic film, which can be read against the classic genre definition of biblical scholarship, Stone¹¹ dismisses it as not fitting his definition of a “revelatory” apocalyptic film. In the end, such attempts to strictly define contemporary filmic

narratives against the conventions of Middle Eastern mythological literature are unhelpful in analyzing the wide variety of expressions of the apocalyptic as a continuing “network of discourses and practices in social and political use and circulation”¹².

Ostwald has recently suggested¹³ that the definitional impasse is best resolved by distinguishing between two categories. The traditional apocalyptic film retains both the visionary or dream like style of the biblical tradition as well as a sense of divine or supernatural agency in the revelation and resolution of the end-time scenario; while the secular apocalyptic film “borrows images and themes or symbols from the traditional apocalypse but the notion of a supernatural “unveiling” of supernatural sovereignty is missing.”¹⁴ This is astute in terms of a formal analysis of genre types but it obscures the historical context where the secular and religious visions of apocalyptic have often become dangerously fused. Lee Quinby argues that scholarly distinctions between religious and secular apocalypses are only “provisionally useful” and only then “in order to show the convergence of these two modes of apocalypse.”¹⁵ Her “genealogical” approach to apocalypse sees the apocalyptic as a fluid contemporary narrative that is still producing new and changing forms rather than one which must be strictly locked back to historic genre definitions.

This convergence of the traditional and secular apocalyptic traditions is critical in our current historic context, particularly so in an analysis of post 9/11 film culture. Both the *Book of Revelation* and the Bush administration’s ‘war on terror’ discourse present a vision of terror and crisis, and they both describe and enable a system of power, which is made manifest in specific spaces and bodies or zones of terror. For example, what Glenn Shuck¹⁶ calls *Revelation’s* “Beast system” – the fundamental division of the inhabitants of the earth into those marked with the sign of

the beast (Rev 13:7) and those marked by the seal of the servants of God (Rev 7:3) – can be seen to be mirrored in the absolute division between good and evil in the rhetoric of George Bush’s presidential speeches. *Revelation’s* visionary vignettes alternate between scenes in the heavenly throne room and scenes of plague, torture and war that ravage the earth. But this is also a description of a system of practices: an all-surveilling God from his central control room initiates a system of vengeful war and torture. Marina Warner puts this connection between visionary language and the systemic force of apocalyptic practices succinctly: “The language of intolerance, intemperateness, the anathema on the enemy amounts to this: a spell of exclusion.”¹⁷ George Bush’s intemperate rhetoric – “axis of evil” – is also translated into a systemic “spell of exclusion” through for example the creation of Guantanamo Bay and the extra-judicial marking of “unlawful combatants” tortured without recourse to any form of justice before the courts. It is this intersection between rhetoric, systemic practices and spaces of terror in both the apocalyptic and the Bush administration’s war on terror discourse that I have previously described¹⁸ as an overarching apocalyptic *terrorvision*, that enhances and is enforced by a *terrorsystem* which in turn evoke and produce a series of *terrorzones*.

Cinematic depictions of life in these apocalyptic terrorzones are often categorized as “post-apocalyptic”. Berger defines the post-apocalyptic as “a discourse that impossibly straddles the boundary between before and after some event that has obliterated what went before yet defines what will come after.”¹⁹ The post-apocalyptic in contemporary literature and film explores what happens after a potentially world-ending catastrophic event, such as viral outbreaks or nuclear holocaust. Mike Broderick²⁰ has suggested that rather than view post-apocalyptic films, as Susan Sontag did through a lens of their “aesthetic of disaster”²¹ they should

be seen as primarily about survival. In this sense they negotiate both the cataclysmic and the millennial, but they also intensify the apocalyptic as an ongoing lived experience rather than merely a horizon of future threat or hope.

Kelly's *Southland Tales* presents a dystopic, post-apocalyptic, near-future through an aesthetic which fuses contemporary postmodern screens with the phantasmagoric of traditional apocalyptic visions. I will argue in this paper that it presents a counter-apocalyptic critique of the post-9/11 *terrorvision*, *tersorsystem*, and *terrorzones*. In situating the film as 'counter-apocalyptic' I want to imply that it both resists the apocalyptic impulse however it is also located within it. In this sense it produces a unique take on the genre of the post-apocalyptic film. Through strategies of ironic parody Kelly both describes and questions the apocalyptic and its easy polarities.

Counter-apocalyptic vision

Keller analyses the variety of contemporary theological interpretations of *The Book of Revelation*, which underlines what she calls "the apocalypse habit" or the widespread "performance of an apocalypse script."²² Keller emphasizes not just the diverse exegetical interpretations within apocalyptic history but the concrete apocalyptic practices that are inspired by and propagate apocalyptic messages. These apocalyptic practices have an "operative ambiguity, capable of both revolution and reaction, and often of combustions of the two."²³ In an insightful analysis of both the religious and political context of apocalyptic Keller distinguishes between a variety of modes within this "apocalyptic pattern"²⁴:

- The retroapocalyptic – is the fundamentalist Christian’s literal retrospective adaptation of the 1st century biblical apocalyptic texts to contemporary political situations.
- The cryptoapocalyptic – is a broad “indistinct zone of repulsion and fascination”²⁵ which is broader than what we would normally associate with the explicitly apocalyptic and close to what Julia Kristeva ²⁶ calls “the abject.”
- The anti-apocalyptic – an attempt to deconstruct and renounce the destructive force of apocalyptic discourse in history.
- The neoapocalyptic – which includes progressive Christian movements such as liberation theology that attempt to draw a progressive anti-imperial (or feminist or environmentalist) politics from the biblical texts’ promise of victory of good over evil in the millennial kingdom of the saints.

Finally she elaborates what she calls a “counter-apocalyptic” reading which she favors: one which draws from the critique of the anti-apocalyptic while avoiding its demonizing tendencies and draws from neoapocalyptic progressive engagement with apocalyptic texts without ignoring the full spectrum of their alternately liberatory and oppressive histories. She defines it this way:

Counter-apocalypse dis/closes: it would avoid the closure of the world signified by a straightforward apocalypse, and it would avoid the closure of the text signified by an anti-apocalypse. As mediated through the discourse of the neoapocalypse, which reopens the book, the tradition of the Apocalypse has much to disclose....To criticize without merely opposing; to appreciate in irony not deprecate in purity our relation to the tradition; to situate ourselves in a fluid relation to the text, itself alarmingly mobile between multiple contexts. If, then, counter-apocalypse echoes and parodies apocalypse, in order to disarm its polarities, it also savors its intensity, its drive for justice, its courage in the face of impossible odds and losses.²⁷

Keller explicitly distinguishes her term from a straightforward oppositional or “anti-apocalyptic” stance. Although she recognizes Lee Quinby’s work, for example, as a “smart approach” and highlights her “delightful Foucaultian genealogies” she gently takes Quinby to task for the title of her 1996 book of apocalyptic studies, *Anti-apocalypse*, which she fears “performs the very kind of homogenization she criticizes as apocalyptic.”²⁸ However despite their different terminologies Quinby and Keller’s work is similar in spirit. Quinby makes clear that she stands with progressive analysts

in opposition to the reifying effects of apocalypticism in contemporary power relations. Like Keller's counter-apocalypse her anti-apocalypse is built on an open posture, which seeks engagement, disclosure and change as an outcome. I would argue that despite their terminological differences Quinby's work in fact provides further context to Keller's definition of the counter-apocalyptic.

Although Quinby organizes her analysis under the title "anti-apocalypse" it is also clear from her use of a range of other designators such as "countertext"²⁹ and "nonapocalyptic thought"³⁰ that her strategies of resistance are not locked into a rigid "anti" framework. She is quick to acknowledge that apocalyptic rhetoric can be, and is readily, used in progressive struggles. However she warns that a progressive critique that makes use of "on tap" apocalyptic rhetoric – easily available in contemporary culture – runs the risk of producing what may be a rhetorically affective statement, "exciting people about activism," but it also runs the risk of "displacing concrete political analysis"³¹ with highly charged fear-based statements³².

Keller's theo-political exegesis of the biblical text and Quinby's genealogical investigations of a diversity of cultural texts both aim to demonstrate the relevance of critical apocalyptic analysis as a contemporary performance of disruptive disclosure. Both authors are concerned with apocalyptic power relations and both authors are concerned with the intersection of apocalyptic rhetoric and apocalyptic practice. Both are concerned with the hybrid adaptive nature of apocalypse that Keller calls "fluid" and "alarmingly mobile" and Quinby characterizes as possessing "unusual elasticity."³³ *Southland Tales* can be understood in these terms: as a mobile text which explores the apocalyptic realities of contemporary life through a counter-apocalyptic vision of the future.

The baroque world of *Southland Tales*' terrorvision

Richard Kelly is best known for his 2001 debut feature *Donnie Darko* which features Jake Gyllenhaal as a teenager beset with visions of personal angst and the end of the world. It skillfully blends elements of sci-fi (with references to time travel and parallel worlds), horror (a mischievous giant rabbit) and teen family drama. Although slow to take off when first released, it gradually gained a strong cult following which enabled Kelly to release a new director's cut on DVD in 2004. *Southland Tales* takes his debut film's visionary style to the next level but its extreme neo-baroque style ensured that it had limited commercial success.

Southland Tales is a deliberate attempt at constructing a contemporary mystical text that responds to the current crisis of homeland security in America. Not only is it set in a post-apocalyptic America – after twin 2005 nuclear attacks on Texas – it explicitly references *The Book of Revelation* throughout and it mirrors the biblical book's visionary, fragmented structure. But Kelly's re-creation of *Revelation* is far from other re-writes, such as the inspirational evangelical literature of prophecy novels³⁴; rather, it is an idiosyncratic, contemporary, hallucinatory re-imagining. "It's like if someone took mushrooms and read the *Book of Revelations* and had this crazy pop dream," Kelly told one interviewer, "that's the film in a nutshell. And that's Justin Timberlake's character, who holds it all together".³⁵

It is also an explicitly post-apocalyptic text in the sense that Kelly has said that his vision for the film altered dramatically following September 11. The screenplay's original, pre-September 11 draft explored some of the same scenarios and characters but as a satire on the artificiality of the LA film world. According to Kelly the problem with the early draft was that it "never had any context. It was more about just

making fun of Hollywood.” The post-September 11 security environment provided this important missing context and, according to Kelly, gave the film a sense of purpose:

Now it's about—I hope—creating a piece of science fiction that is about a really important problem that we're facing now, and the problem is very complicated, and hence the nature of the narrative. And the delivery mechanism is subversive humour.³⁶

The film begins in 2005 with nuclear attacks on Texas and is followed by a sequence that summarizes the emergence of a new US security state and its commercial wing USIDent. This ten minute, carefully crafted, multiscreened, sequence summarizes the prequel story, which Kelly has told in more detail in a series of graphic novels.³⁷ The film then follows several interrelated characters in 2008. Republican vice-presidential candidate Senator Bobby Frost (Holmes Osborne) is in a race against the Hillary Clinton/Joe Liebermann Democrat ticket, his wife Nana Mae Frost (Miranda Richardson) is the deputy director of national security and heads up USIDent. Frost's son-in-law, an action movie star, Boxer Santaros, (Dwayne Johnson) goes missing and is found with Krysta Now (Sarah Michelle Gellar), a former porn star who is now developing a new “topical discussion, chat, reality show.” Together, Santaros and Now develop a futuristic film script, *The Power*, in which Santaros battles to save the world from destruction. The *Revelation* quoting narrator of *Southland Tales* is actor turned Iraq veteran, Pilot Abilene (Justin Timberlake), who has come back from the war after being a victim of friendly fire and the subject of drug experiments with “Fluid Karma.” This drug, the brainchild of Baron von Westphallen (Wallace Shawn), is also a potential major new energy source that harvests the natural energy of the sea. The resistance movement – the neo-Marxists – initiate a complex plot to embroil Boxer Santaros in a staged racist police shooting. To do this they use Ronald Taverner (Seann William Scott) whose twin

brother Roland (Seann William Scott) they are holding hostage as leverage. Ronald is also the Iraq soldier responsible for the friendly fire that injured Pilot Abilene. The film climaxes with a launch party on the Baron's new mega-zeppelin, the Jenny Von Westphalen, and as Pilot Abeline warns early in the film (remixing T.S Eliot): "This is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends not with a whimper but with a bang."

This elaborate plot is matched by an equally baroque cinematic style that expresses the film's visionary mode. Like the *Book of Revelation*, that can swiftly move from the heavenly throne room and a company of angels to a storm of fire mixed with blood and hail enveloping the earth, *Southland Tales* shifts frantically across split screens and multiple locations incorporating dreams, farce, violent explosions and sudden Busby Berkeleysque musical extravaganzas. On the film's theatrical release in 2007 one of the doyens of press film critics, Roger Ebert, concluded that Kelly might have emerged with "a more coherent product if he fed the footage through a revolving fan and spliced it together at random."³⁸

While the majority of professional critics tended to slam the film, several senior critics have lavished it with praise. The *New York Times*' Manohla Dargis and both J. Hoberman and Nathan Lee of *The Village Voice* ranked it in their top films of 2007. Dargis says that the film is "neither disaster nor masterpiece" but that it has "more ideas, visual and intellectual, in a single scene than most American independent films." She continues:

Kelly...doesn't make it easy to love his new film, which turns and twists and at times threatens to disappear down the rabbit hole of his obsessions. Happily, it never does, which allows you to share in his unabashed joy in filmmaking as well as in his fury about the times.³⁹

Dargis pinpoints here the film's apocalyptic fulcrum, the dialectic movement between joy and fury, or rather the desire that moves Kelly to find an aesthetic form

to express his fury. Ebert is also right to criticize its narrative coherence. Kelly certainly doesn't follow traditional Hollywood plot trajectories: his model for coherence takes its cues from different sources. Kelly's neo-baroque aesthetic prioritizes image and symbol rather than chronological narrative progression, it constantly mediates between the fantastic and the everyday; between the disciplinary work of an all-encompassing apocalyptic terrortsystem and the ability of individuals to morph between a series of chosen liberating identities.

Apocalyptic vision, surveillance and identity

The disciplinary work of surveillance is one of the central motifs of the film. The all seeing electronic eyes of *Southland Tale's* USIdent are a key aspect of the films' digitized split screen aesthetic, however, Kelly does not simply present a typical civil liberties critique of surveillance; he explores a much more layered contemporary understanding of mediated, surveilled, knowing. The narrative of the film is deliberately refracted through multiple points of view and multiple screens and we are often left watching the watchers watching.

The critique of the all-observant eye of surveillance technology is at the heart of *Southland Tales* post-apocalyptic world and Kelly plays with a number of the key dynamics central to the biblical apocalyptic vision. The "omniobservant eye of God"⁴⁰ is central to this traditional vision. But the apocalypticist's relationship to this all powerful surveilling divine vision is governed by what Lee Quinby calls the "twin millennial pillars of dread and desire"⁴¹—the desire to know and embrace the great cosmological secret and the simultaneous dread of being completely known and thus perhaps judged unworthy to share in the promise of that secret world. If submitting to

the omniobservant eye of God is a key way of knowing and being known for the author of *Revelation*, surveillance is also a key way of knowing in current security narratives and emerging popular culture narratives about the self, privacy and authenticity. *Southland Tales* explores this often contradictory cluster of ideas that includes both contemporary fears over surveillance's invasion of individual privacy as well as its seductive promise of a new path to self-monitored authenticity. Both these postures are in their own ways apocalyptic.

Richard Maxwell, following the work of David Nye, has commented on the power of the "technological sublime" in contemporary narratives of surveillance. The technological sublime "relies on and resides in the publicity of...technology's grandeur":

Once it becomes spectacle, surveillance technology can dazzle and intimidate. But for surveillance technology to overwhelm thought, a culture must embrace a living myth of the technology's awesome, central presence, from its barefaced and breathtaking forms to its unannounced operations within modern institutions. The technological sublime exercises a powerful hold on the imagination.⁴²

Southland Tales engages the techno-sublime myth of surveillance through its ever-present buzzing screens that assume a grand presence. Nana Mae Frost, the deputy director of homeland security, is often pictured surrounded by banks of surveillance screens and she displays a devilish, camp pleasure in the power with which these screens endow her. This performance can be read as the play between desire and power that surveillance technologies and the myth of the technological sublime enable. However the film also portrays surveillance technologies as completely normalised contemporary ways of knowing.

Southland Tales begins with kids taking shaky home video footage of a fourth of July celebration in Abilene, Texas. It is a typical set of family celebrations and this practice of children exploring their environment and their family by video recording

is a typical contemporary way of knowing. This footage becomes something other than ordinary when, unexpectedly, a flash and a mushroom cloud are caught on screen. This simple piece of home video footage suddenly takes on new meaning as a piece of forensic evidence of the beginning of a new age. In this opening sequence Kelly foregrounds many concerns of his film including: the contrast between the everyday life of the American family and the new post-apocalyptic reality, the mediated nature of this new reality, and the importance of screen knowledge as a mode of exploration and investigation. We see here the beginning of the film's obsession with the working of surveillance and screen culture and the various ways that apocalypse as crisis/catastrophe is unveiled or made known in a contemporary context.

Surveillance, news and revelation

Following the home video footage – which presents one way of knowing and one origin story for the narrative – we are introduced to a “Doomsday scenario interface” which graphically combines the format of computer games, news programs and interactive graphics. This layered, multiscreen collage titled, “America Hiroshima,” is a timeline that condenses two years of American post-apocalyptic history. The voiceover tells us: “In the aftermath of the nuclear attacks on Texas, America found itself on the brink of anarchy.” As multiple images flash by, a dense soundscape of overlapping newscasts is heard. It is a cacophony out of which we can just distinguish typical grabs such as “worst disaster in American history.” But we don't need to be able to explicitly distinguish what is being said; this is news as ambient soundtrack to the apocalypse, news as confirming sign rather than news as explanation. It is the

news tone that enables the listener to recognize this as part of the ongoing production of news as unspecified disaster.

Gradually the sound of a military bugle shifts the sonic signal from newscast to military campaign, which leads into split screens of war zones in Iran, North Korea, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. The narrator tells us: “World War 3 had begun.” Similar graphic/audio scenarios lead us through the country’s ensuing oil shortage, the need for alternate fuel, political changes and a new “Patriot Act,” the rise of the “neo-Marxist resistance” and finally the upcoming presidential campaign.

After another intertitle – “Los Angeles” – the color, tone, soundscape and visual style of the film all change dramatically. We move from the multi-screened, techno-mediated world of surveillance and news to a cloudy blue dawn and an electroacoustic musical soundtrack introducing a strange, softer world of human messengers in the City of Angels. The camera settles on an extreme close up of a dark figure laying on a beach at dawn (Boxer Santaros). This shot gives way to a similar close-up of a crawling, battery-powered, soldier, action-doll, and the electro-synth soundscape gives way to the unmistakable voice of a newscaster relating the story of actor-turned-soldier Pilot Abeline’s injury in a friendly fire incident. We then see Abeline, apparently now back from Iraq, sitting in the cold dawn, atop a pier-end structure that could be either a military installation or a fun arcade. Observing everything through the site of a gun, he quotes the opening chapter of *The Book of Revelation*:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. (Rev 1:1-3)

Like the grabs of news that we have heard throughout this introduction, the *Book of Revelation* is introduced here as scriptural tone more than scriptural content. At first we hear this passage almost inaudibly and then words and particular phrases – “things which must shortly come to pass” and “the time is at hand” – come into focus as the full view of Pilot Abeline also comes into shot. We realize that he has been our unseen narrator: “My name is Pilot Abeline and I’m a veteran of the war in Iraq. [Laughs somewhat maniacally] I’m going to tell you the story of Boxer Santaros and his journey down the road not taken,” he says as he raises his eyes from the bible. Then he intones: “This is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends, not with a whimper but with a bang.”

The camera pulls back from Abeline and we see Santaros rise and wander from the beach. This image becomes one of a number of screens and again the voice of the newscaster intervenes: “The search continues for missing action star Boxer Santaros. His wife Madeline Frost, daughter of vice-presidential candidate Senator Bobby Frost, could not be reached...” We are then led visually and sonically into the world of further split screens and a cacophony of overlapping news broadcast “white noise”: “A code red terror alert for holiday weekend....city prepares to celebrate third anniversary of nuclear attacks...”

Another intertitle – Temptation waits – then leads into the final narrative set-up of the opening sequences: the story of USIDent and its resisters. We see a group of protesters waving signs (Keep USIDent out of LA/USIDent kills puppies) and Pilot Abeline intones: “The government decided it could not properly conduct a war on terror unless cyberspace was placed under federal control. USIDent was the brainchild of the Republican party, a colossal think tank formed under the protection

of the Patriot Act.” We see Senator Bobby Frost and wife Nana Mae presiding over the ceremonial opening of the “first USIDent facility in the Southland”.

The film then jumps to Boxer Santaros looking at himself in the mirror, and Abeline takes up the story: “Boxer Santaros had returned from the desert with a case of amnesia. Someone had gotten under his skin...” The camera zooms in on Santaros’ back and a tattoo of a Jesus figure, and there are soft breathy sounds in the background, which give way to an orchestral crescendo as the camera quickly switches to a TV screen playing a scene from noir classic *Kiss Me Deadly*. The focus then draws back to reveal Krysta Now to one side of the TV screen, smoking a cigarette. Abeline continues: “Her name was Krysta Kapowski and together they had written a screenplay which foretold the tale of our destruction.”

These opening sequences do a masterful job of condensing a very complex narrative into a ten-minute timeframe and introducing the key characters, themes, and back-stories of the film. They also introduce the quick moving, hallucinatory neo-baroque style of the film and its multiple points of view. This is an apocalyptic film in a popular sense because it follows on from a nuclear attack and, as narrator Pilot Abeline tells us, it is story about the way the world ends. But it is also apocalyptic in the sense that it chooses multiple strategies to “reveal” the story “close at hand.”

Cinematographically the opening sequences are a meditation on “revelation” with the camera constantly moving in and pulling back to reveal different aspects of the story, moving between the macro and the micro, with screens splitting off from one another, overlapping and fading into one another. It also presents a complex interplay between revelatory texts. The sequences move between the voices of the news anchor, the *Book of Revelation*, the surveillance screens of USIDent and narratorial storytelling. Kelly has sandwiched the quote from *Revelation* about the

“things which must shortly come to pass” between a series of news broadcasts and sonically he treats them in the same way: as the *revelatory tone of scripture* or the *revelatory tone of news*.

Kelly introduced these condensed prologue sequences to the film in the second cut, following harsh critical reception at an early press screening at the 2005 Cannes film festival. They certainly serve an expository function, clarifying some of the key narrative elements of the film, however more importantly they establish its revelatory style and they seem to indicate that if we pay attention to the film’s tone, its ambient clues, the clutter of its narrative (in)coherence may seem less overwhelming.

In this elaborate opening sequence the film mimics the way apocalyptic events disrupt the narrative of the everyday, while its heavily textualized overlay – newscasts, scripture, poetry – simultaneously announces the apocalyptic search for the “legibility of history.”⁴³ This search for legibility is an active exegetical search engaged in by the interpretive communities of the apocalyptic tradition. Tom Thatcher has pointed to how this process is in part driven by what he terms apocalyptic “empty metaphors.”⁴⁴ They are “empty” in the sense that apocalyptic open-ended rhetorical and visionary forms depend on a series of related intertexts to complete their meaning.

But Kelly’s complex structure is doing more than creating a set of intertextual relationships. By punctuating the film with quotes from both the *Book of Revelation* and the voice of news broadcasts Kelly not only highlights the “signs of the times” from different perspectives but he sets them up as parallel ways of knowing. He sets them up as generic tones – visionary and reportorial – but at another level he collapses them into one another as equivalent examples of the revelatory “white noise” that produces what Michael Barkun has called “improvisational millennialism.”⁴⁵ The

third element in Kelly's triptych of revelatory texts is the surveillance screens of USIDent. Like the biblical quotes and the news broadcasts, images of surveillance function both as a specific and a generic narrative device; at times they are used to advance particular plot elements and at other times they are used to mark a contemporary form of apocalyptic epistemology.

The new authenticity and the surveilled self

As I indicated above, contemporary narratives of surveillance need to be viewed in a broader context than a simple Orwellian critique might provide. Screen technologies and various technologies of self-surveillance are an integral part of contemporary modes of identity production. The sense of not having anything to hide is both reified and problematized by contemporary surveillance cultures. If everything is in view then both the realness and the manipulative construction of character become evident, as do the prevailing models of normative characterisation. *Southland Tales* plays with this dialectic in several ways, most notably in the figure of Krysta Now. Like each of the key figures in the film, the porn star become reality TV host is presented as both caricature and archetype. She has some of the best – and silliest – lines in the film. She is a sex activist, with the hit single: “Teen horniness is not a crime.” Her utopian naiveté is perhaps best summed up in her wide-eyed statement: “Scientists are saying the future is going to be far more futuristic than they originally predicted.” However she is also a canny business woman who is pursuing the creation of her own “Topical discussion, chat, reality show” with a merchandising line including jewelry, clothing, perfume and a personalized energy drink.

In some ways Krysta's personal-transformation culture is presented as a point of resistance in the film. For example, she boasts this analysis of American Puritanism: "Deep down inside, everybody wishes they were a porn star...We're a bisexual nation living in denial, all because of a bunch of nerds. A bunch of nerds who got off a boat in the 15th century and decided that sex was something to be ashamed of. All the Pilgrims did was ruin the American Indian orgy of freedom." While this is clearly satirical it situates her in a range of oppositional discourses and sets her up against a fundamentalist Puritan interpretation of the *Book of Revelation* where she would clearly be aligned with the Whore of Babylon. But as Quinby points out, the film is also a deeply satirical critique of celebrity and Krysta's reality-style TV culture: "The suggestion here is that reality has become so pervasively imaged and distractingly sexualized, what is sometimes referred to as the porning of American culture, that it has altered our ability to perceive the vital truths necessary for human survival in this age of crisis."⁴⁶ *Southland Tales* is both an ironic critique of porn/reality/celebrity culture while Krysta, as embodiment of such a culture, simultaneously functions as a critique of any easy Puritan condemnation. It is through such doubled vision that the film constantly performs a counter-apocalyptic rather than merely an anti-apocalyptic critique.

Mark Andrejevic has argued⁴⁷ that the popularity of reality TV has helped "to define a particular form of subjectivity consonant with an emerging online economy: one which equates submission to comprehensive surveillance with self-expression and self-knowledge"⁴⁸ rather than a mechanism of corporate or governmental control. In this sense reality TV programs have become "training" documentaries for what Andrejevic calls lateral surveillance: the call for good citizens to watch one another.

In the new televisual economy that Andrejevic describes, this willingness to subject oneself to surveillance serves as a demonstration of the strength of one's self-image.

Being 'real' is a proof of honesty, and the persistent gaze of the camera provides one way of guaranteeing that 'realness'. Further, in a teeming society wherein one's actions often go unnoticed by others, the reality of those actions can be validated if they are recorded and broadcasted – they become more real to oneself to the extent they become real for others. Submission to comprehensive surveillance is a kind of institutionally ratified individuation: it provides the guarantee of the authenticity of one's individuality.⁴⁹

In his analysis of the film Steven Shavero points to a similar process in the multiplying identities, parings and performances of *Southland Tales*. He points out that the state's surveillance system is matched with the kind of self-surveilled "ratified individuation" that Andrejevic refers to. He notes that many of the characters are actors or celebrities or are developing business plans to become actors or celebrities. The surveillance of the film and its multiple use of screens within screens and performances within performances creates a "vast open performance space, carnivalesque, participatory, and overtly self-reflexive. Not only do we see multiple heterogeneous screens within the movie screen; we also see the characters in the movie appearing on these screens, creating content for them, and watching them – often all at the same time."⁵⁰

Southland Tales, through its multiplicity of imaging, surveillance and self-surveilling does not foreclose on any one critique or any particular embrace of the apocalyptic terrorsystem's mechanisms. As Quinby points out, in this film: "In contrast to the *Book of Revelation*, the oppositional forces that bring about the endtime are not Good versus Evil so much as Evil versus Evil, each convinced that its side is Good."⁵¹

Anti-apocalypse and counter-apocalypse in *Southland Tales*

Within the narrative of the film the primary point of resistance to the apocalyptic surveillance-state emerges from the neo-Marxists. But the neo-Marxists are what Keller would call anti-apocalyptic, a resistant strategy that has internalized the violence and divisiveness of the very apocalyptic system they are seeking to resist. In this sense they are a part of the film's vision of the totality of the apocalyptic system and not a representation of genuine counter-apocalyptic action. The neo-Marxists are riven with factions and embroiled in extreme violence and conspiracy. In this they are no better than or different from the deeply corrupt nexus between corporatized surveillance and electoral politics mirrored in the marriage of the Frosts – one the head of USIdent, the other a senator and candidate for vice-president. The film's clear anti-Christ figure, the seemingly benevolent but deeply malevolent scientist Baron von Westphallen is in league with both sides of politics, promising a utopian future with his Fluid Karma but secretly set on world domination.

The film's real critique lies not in its alliance with any one group but in the way it reveals the shape of power relations in the terrorsystem of the post-apocalyptic security state. Through its neo-baroque visionary mode it refuses to foreclose on a determinative interpretation. Ultimately the counter-apocalyptic nature of the film lies precisely in it being “puzzle-like,” as Kelly explains:

But the subject of this film was the end of civilisation as we know it: it had to be this big and elaborate and puzzle-like. Because that's the dilemma we're in right now as a country, as a species or as a planet, whether it's Iraq or global warming or health care.⁵²

The satiric is also key to his counter-apocalyptic critique and as Quinby points out in her perceptive analysis of the film, it is in the satiric impulse, together with the

its explicit but measured appropriation of the *Book of Revelation*, that it finds its deepest mode of critique:

His film mirrors *Revelation* just enough to insure recognition of its key elements. But by making his film a satire of apocalypse, he mocks the call to empire, showing instead how that impulse has for too long traumatized the body politic.⁵³

In Keller's terms this is a counter-apocalyptic move that "echoes and parodies apocalypse, in order to disarm its polarities".⁵⁴ *Southland Tales* produces a particular oscillation between a totalizing vision of the apocalyptic terror system's reach and an ironic deliteralization of that very vision.

Terrorvision Terrorsystem Terrorzone

If there are no simply defined good or bad figures – only permutations of bad, worse and flawed – there are also no easily defined safe spaces. This is made clear from the opening scenes when the original apocalyptic event invades the family July 4 celebrations. The world of the film has become an apocalyptic terrorzone. The opening sequence and various news sequences within the film also make clear that the "World" is at war, with conflict taking place not just in Iraq and Afghanistan but in Syria, North Korea and Iran. Although the "action" takes place in America 2005/2008, the elaborate baroque structure of the film constantly plays with any easy definition of space and time; one sub-plot, for example, has Boxer Santaros kidnapped and taken through a time rift into a "4th dimension." A vibrant street and beach culture still exists but the careless scenes on Venice beach can erupt into fighting or sniper shots at any point. A USIDent SWAT team can move from simple surveillance mode to attack mode at any point, as they demonstrate with their

evisceration of the neo-Marxist headquarters. Even Baron Von Westphalen's great experimental space and luxurious escape, the zeppelin, which floats above the city as a tribute to his wealth and the memory of his dead wife, ends in flames. Imagined, domestic and international spaces are stitched tightly into an all-pervasive terrorzone. This is matched of course by the omnipotent surveillance represented by Nana May Frost's impressive banks of screens: terrorsystem and terrorzone interpenetrate with a literal terrorvision. The audioscape of the film which as I noted earlier uses constant references to the *reportorial tone of disaster* and the *scriptural tone of apocalypse* further stitches together the cacophonous visual collage where the international, local and metaphysical spaces of disaster are collapsed into a single unrelenting terrorzone.

Strangely it is in this fierce unrelenting vision of a pervasive terror at the personal, national and international levels, that Kelly's puzzle-like film is at its most counter-apocalyptic. Keller imagines the counter-apocalyptic as "the dis/closive play of hope as a shifting luminosity at the edge of the present."⁵⁵ Signs of hope in Kelly's film are few and fragile but there is certainly an abundance of "dis/closive play." By showing it as a series of playful performances Kelly's vision deliteralizes the apocalypse. Even though the reach of Nana Mae Frost's surveillance technologies is frighteningly complete, for example, her performance is not that of a fiercely attentive, ideologically-driven bureaucrat but one rooted in the gleeful desire of a maniacal, comic book super-villain.

While the film may not provide a template for hope, hope is only one of the elements of the counter-apocalyptic, albeit usually a crucial one. Like apocalypse, the counter apocalyptic is a hybrid structure that is composed of an interconnecting web of mythic motifs and forms. Keller's definition of the counter-apocalyptic, quoted above, may be broken down into its several elements.

Its central posture of “dis/closure” engages in the basic apocalyptic strategy of “unveiling” while seeking to avoid the closure or literalization of either the apocalyptic or the anti-apocalyptic. This is a strategy of “dis/closive play” which “appreciate[s] in irony not deprecate[s] in purity.” The counter-apocalyptic demands both a “fluid relation” to apocalyptic texts or apocalyptic realities and an acute recognition that the apocalyptic itself is “alarmingly mobile.” The counter-apocalyptic therefore demands multiple strategies of reconfiguration and game playing. But it also demands deep and constant exegesis of the unfolding apocalyptic realities. Although it is driven by the apocalyptic sense of “intensity” it seeks to “disarm its polarities.” In Keller's terms it is mediated by the neo-apocalyptic or progressive tradition that draws on the millennial myth in its search for justice.

The cacophonous, performative bluster of *Southland Tales* never threatens to “make sense” in conventional narrative terms. Rather, it remains at the level of a “puzzle-like” structure; it has the fluidity characteristic of the counterapocalyptic and its puzzle demands the active exegesis of a counterapocalyptic response.

The counter-apocalyptic glimpse of hope

Southland Tales clearly engages in the counter-apocalyptic strategy of dis/closive play but does not seem to embrace the equally important appeal to hope. In the counter-apocalyptic vision, which refuses the certainties and easy polarities of the apocalyptic, any vision of hope is by necessity fragile and partial; glimpsed rather than defined. And in this sense perhaps there are glimpses of hope in *Southland Tales*.

Steven Schavero argues that there are in fact moments of “terrible sincerity”⁵⁶ in this post-modern display of surfaces and imitations; that there is an alluring pathos

in the troubled trajectories of the amnesiac actor Boxer Santaros, the post-traumatic soldier Pilot Abilene, the split twins Roland/Ronald and even the skittish Krysta Now. He points to two scenes in particular. One is momentary; a strange slow dance on the Jenny Westphalen where briefly Boxer Santaros relaxes, sandwiched between the gyrating bodies of his girlfriend Krysta Now and the wife he has forgotten, Madeline Frost (Mandy Moore):

In purely narrative terms the moment is absurd. But after two hours in which the characters have argued, plotted with and against one another, and generally gone around in circles, this final conjunction of Dwayne Johnson, Sarah Michelle Geller and Mandy Moore has a force of conviction which makes it almost sublime.⁵⁷

The other moment is an astounding musical sequence where Abilene/Timberlake lip-synchs to The Killers “All these things that I have done.” Kelly also points to this scene’s importance. In talking about the three staged “music-video” scenes in the film – the dance on the zeppelin, employees doing yoga at USIdent and this Killers sequence – Kelly designates this scene “the real fantasy” and contrasts it with the “literal” integration of the other music sequences into the chronology (loose as it is) of the film. He says The Killers sequence is “the heart and soul of the film.”⁵⁸ Interestingly, he notes that it is the emotional tone of the song that first attracted him:

When I heard it I thought, wow, think about that. That song breaks my heart and I don’t even know what they were thinking or talking about when they wrote the lyrics.⁵⁹

Similarly it is the acute emotional tone of this sequence rather than its content that leads me to claim it as a counter-apocalyptic glimpse of hope.

In the film, Timberlake’s character Pilot Abilene is an actor turned soldier recently returned from the battlefields of Iraq where he was the victim of friendly fire and, as we find out, also the victim of Baron von Westphalen’s experiments on

soldiers with Fluid Karma, which is at once an hallucinogen and a new energy source the Baron claims will free the world from its dependence on oil. This sequence is an hallucinatory vision after Abilene has injected himself with Fluid Karma but it also produces another illusion in the film's pantheon of performativity. As Shaviro points out the use of marque-name, pop-culture, celebrity actors like Timberlake, Johnson and Geller is a deliberate part of the film's playful performance of celebrity. So the "real" persona of Timberlake – singer turned actor – is never far from the surfaces of his performance as Abilene – actor turned soldier. However in this "music video" sequence the provenance of Timberlake as singer/actor is even more acutely merged with the performance of Abilene.

Set in a game arcade, Timberlake/Abilene dances deliriously, drinking and spraying himself with a can of beer as he lip-synchs the chorus of The Killer's song: "I've got soul but I'm not a soldier." He is supported (at times literally) by a cast of Busby Berkleyesque nymphets in skimpy play-nurse uniforms and Marilyn wigs.

"I've got soul but I'm not a soldier" is repeated mantra-like and in a sense becomes a meditation or prayer. As he begins to repeat the mantra he grabs and waves the dog-tags around his neck and at other times he hits his chest as a self-affirmation. This play with the dog tags – a soldier's key identifier – and the repeated mantra indicates some kind of desire for a transformation beyond the warrior identity. This is further emphasised by the fact that the sequence maps a gradual movement from the everyday to the state of complete reverie; it begins with a relatively "realistic" version of the video arcade as Timberlake walks away from a group of khaki dressed soldiers playing on the machines in the background, and leaves this world of his military colleagues as he moves deeper into the visionary zone of the sequence. The drug-induced reverie seeks a state of transformation, but of course the multiple "I's in this

sequence make any real notion of transformation problematic if not impossible. The sequence concludes with a fade from the song back to Moby's ambient electro soundtrack and Timberlake staring deliriously and daringly at the camera as he sways barely able to keep himself upright. Steven Schaviro captures the strange ambience of this scene:

Watching Timberlake strut and lip-sync among the fake-porno nurses, it's almost as if time had stopped for the duration of the song, looping back upon itself in order to intensify, by a sort of positive feedback, the film's overall sense of apocalyptic imminence: of something catastrophic not so much happening, as always being about to happen. Justin Timberlake dramatizes the state of teetering on a precipice without actually falling over; or better, falling over but never finishing falling over, never quite hitting the ground.⁶⁰

As Kelly indicated in the interview quoted above, it was not the exact meaning of the lyrics of The Killer's song that moved him but it's emotional ambience. However he has chosen a very specific section of the song for the film, as the focus is on the repeated refrain ("I've got soul but I'm not a soldier"), but the final verse is also used and is significant:

Over and again, last call for sin
While everyone's lost, the battle is won
With all these things that I've done
All these things that I've done
If you can hold on
If you can hold on

Musically, the phrase "Over and again..." introduces a rousing voice back into the song that arises dramatically and forcefully from the repetitive choral elements, and at this point Timberlake also suddenly snaps back and starts to meticulously, rather than mechanically, lip-synch the song again. As Kelly noted, the song's meaning is not exactly clear, but the juxtaposition of sin, a battle that is won, the plea to hold on and the overarching titular nostalgia of the song – the memory of things done – presents a potent cluster of images in an apocalyptic context.

This may not be an unambiguous glimpse of hope, but it certainly is a poignant moment: one that maps a possibility of transformation if not its enactment. Just as the counter-apocalyptic refuses to indulge in the easy anger of the anti-apocalyptic, which always runs the risk of tipping over into the vengeful apocalyptic, so too it refuses any easy promise of hope which erases the struggle of transformation.

Conclusion

I have argued that Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* presents a counter apocalyptic critique of the post September 11 Bush terrormachine. Rather than an anti-apocalyptic critique which runs the risk of reifying the violence it opposes, the counter-apocalyptic engages in strategies of parody and disclosive play to disarm the seemingly all powerful and impenetrable systems of terror and surveillance it critiques. Its visionary neo-baroque cinematic style presents a "puzzle-like" narrative which requires an active exegesis on the part of its audiences. This is similar to the visionary texts of traditional apocalyptic literature. These biblical texts employ a complex series of what theologian Tom Thatcher calls "empty metaphors"⁶¹ which require their interpretive communities to draw not only on the texts in front of them but on a series of literary and oral intertexts to complete their understanding of the visions. I have suggested that Kelly's visionary text creates a series of intertextual references with post 9/11 politics and celebrity culture and sets up a series of interrelationships between different contemporary ways of knowing. By employing such a complex strategy the film highlights the hybrid adaptive power of the terrormachine while opening it up to analysis and critique.

¹ Only 39% of critics at the web-based aggregator Rotten Tomatoes rate the film favorably.

² The field of neo-baroque studies draws on both cultural studies and new media studies and highlights the polycentrism, seriality and labyrinthian intertextuality of contemporary media forms See A. Ndalians, "Television and the Neo-Baroque" in Lucy Mazdon and Michael Hammond, eds, *The Contemporary Television Series* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2005).

³ See C. Keller, *Apocalypse now and then: a feminist guide to the end of the world* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1996), 19-32 and C. Keller, *God and power: counter-apocalyptic journeys* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2005), 135-152.

⁴ For an overview of the intersection of political and religious discourses in the apocalyptic see Keller, *Apocalypse now and then* and Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse: exercises in genealogical criticism* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 1994).

⁵ I have previously explored a range of these associations in Marcus O'Donnell, "'Bring it on': the apocalypse of George W. Bush," *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, No 113, (2004), 10-22; 'Jack Bauer: The Smart Warrior's Faustian Gift,' *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, No. 128 (2008); *Contemporary Apocalypses: crisis and revelation in the sphere of public imagination - case-studies in journalism and popular culture in a post-September 11 environment*, Ph.D. Thesis, 2012, University of Technology, Sydney.

⁶ Although the ongoing power of *The Book of Revelation* is critical, this book draws from a much wider Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition which dates back to late second-temple Judaism (late 3rd early 2nd century BCE) with the *Book of Enoch* and includes parts of the *Book of Daniel* and a range of other canonical and non-canonical works which culminate in the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls community and the *Book of Revelation*. Other cultural traditions such as Norse mythology also feed into the western mythology of cataclysmic endings and millennial new beginnings. For a full exploration of the apocalyptic genre see J.J. Collins, *The apocalyptic imagination: an introduction to Jewish apocalyptic literature*, 2nd edn (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1998).

⁷ For a recent exploration of apocalyptic in film see J. Walliss, & L. Quinby, L., eds., *Reel Revelations: Apocalypse and film* (Sheffield Phoenix Press: Sheffield, UK, 2010).

⁸ Conrad Ostwalt has recently summarised the parameters of these attempts in his: Conrad Ostwalt, "Apocalyptic," in John Lyden (ed) *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge: New York, 2009), 368-83. Ostwalt's earlier contributions to this debate include "Hollywood and Armageddon: Apocalyptic Themes in Recent Cinematic Presentation" in *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*, Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt, Jr., eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), 55-63, and *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (Trinity Press: Harrisburg, PA, 2003). Significant contributions have been made by a range of scholars including Joel W. Martin, "Anti-feminism in Recent Apocalyptic Film" *Journal of Religion and Film*, vol. 4, no. 1 (April 2000), Viewed 2 February 2011, <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/antifem.htm>; J. Stone, "A Fire in the sky: 'Apocalyptic' Themes on the silver screen," in Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy, eds, *God in the details: American religion in popular culture* (London: Routledge; 2001); F. Dailey, 'Bruce Willis as Messiah: Human Effort, Salvation and Apocalypticism in Twelve Monkeys', *Journal of Religion and Film*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2000), Viewed 2 February 2011, <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Messiah.htm>; and J.W. Martens, *The end of the world: the apocalyptic imagination in film & television* (J. Gordon Shillingford: Winnipeg, MB, 2003).

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- ³⁰ Ibid., xxii.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Quinby herself modifies her terms in *Millennial seduction: a skeptic confronts apocalyptic culture* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1999). She notes that she prefers to write about "skeptical revelations" rather than characterize her stance as primarily being in the " 'anti'camp which tends to reenact a dollop and sometimes a heavy dose of the very apocalypticism it opposes" (16).
- ³³ Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse*, xxii.
- ³⁴ There is a long tradition of novalised versions of the *Book of Revelation* and its prophecies produced as a form of inspirational literature for the Evangelical subculture. Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series achieved breakthrough success selling over 64 million copies – see C. Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (Oxford: London, 2009).

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