

Introduction

Eschatechnologies of the Americas

[Americans] live only for salvation, the Second Coming, the reward of Rapture. They believe in Jesus, UFOs, decency, honest banking, and their right to buy assault weapons.

-- Andrei Codrescu, *Messiah* (256)

Rayford had cast his lot with God *and* the miracle of technology.

— LaHaye and Jenkins, *Desecration* (1; emphasis added)

In the first epigraph, Andrei Codrescu humorously defines the subject of this book, which I call eschatechnology, by juxtaposing three concepts: technological devices (UFOs, assault weapons); a disciplinary regime or “technology of the self” (decency, honest banking, the “right to buy”); and divine intervention in the form of the End of the World (Rapture, the Second Coming). Codrescu constructs a list from these three categories of items that characterizes a peculiarly American, millennialist view of the world that is the subject of this study. (Though Codrescu is referring to U. S. citizens, “American” throughout this book will refer to both North and South America, and to cultures where the dominant language may be English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish.) Anyone who has read the *Left Behind* series, on the other hand, knows that the authors of that millennial *magnum opus* take the link between God, technology, and the end of the world literally and seriously. It seems that over half of the main Christian characters are jet pilots; the Co-op that sustains Christian underground life around the planet arranges trades through digital communication; Tribulation Force reconnoits the Antichrist by hacking into his computers; the true prophet, Tsion Ben-Judah, delivers his message via the Internet; cell-phones are ubiquitous, and so forth.

This book compares literary eschatechnologies produced in a wide spectrum of communities across the Americas, from the colonial (and, as recorded in European languages, the

Pre-Columbian) origins to the present, from the letters of Columbus to the *Left Behind* series of Dispensationalist novels. The goal is to recover and to better understand a thematic that has defined the Americas since the arrival of Europeans, as a “technology of the self” that both furthers national and imperial agendas, and at the same time serves as a discourse of resistance for populations for whom a transvaluation of all values becomes the only means of survival. Historical, literary, and ethnographic records converge on the fact that the repeated irruptions of millenarian conflict have been both acts of resistance to the eradication of traditional ways of life in the process of nationalization and globalization, and also important sources in the search for origins and foundations. Americans in particular tend to understand their origins by narrating their End. In the Americas, dominant societies depend upon an erasure of the cultures of conquered indigenous peoples and of the histories of slaves and of slavery, and hence a denial of our own roots. In traditional cultures, people belong to the land, yet the first act of Conquest was always to seize the land and make it belong to a person. That the European conquerors of the Americas started from the viewpoint of land possession guaranteed the absence of origins, other than those provided by eschatechnology itself. Since this End is always imagined rather than experienced, the *logos* of fiction and of literature became instrumental in its propagation.