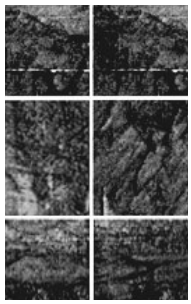
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ARTICLE

Prime-time Satanism: rumor-panic and the work of iconic *topoi*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines images of *The Satanic Bible* and clips from a 1969 shockumentary titled, *Satanis: The Devil's Mass*, tracing the gradual transformation of their imagery into what is termed, variously, 'iconic *topoi* ' or 'visual abbreviations'. Mapping the visual abbreviations of Satanic imagery demonstrates how the mass media enable the invention of rumor-panics from a limited number of 'texts'. Once divorced from their actual content in media programs, the imagistic forms of the book and film collectively served as ready-made *topoi* for the invention of a clandestine and criminal Satanic 'underground' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This article also argues that the fragmentation of the book and film into stock footage reflects the conditions of their production, helping to highlight the cultural logics typical of late capitalism.

KEY WORDS:

fetishism • iconic *topoi* • late capitalism • occultism • rumor-panic • Satanism • visual abbreviation

> This conspiracy must be radically rooted out and execrated. They recognize each other by secret marks and signs [on their bodies] and fall in love before they scarcely know each other ... they consecrate and worship the head of an ass ... Others tell that they reverence even the genital organs of their bishop and priest ... And, now, the stories told about the initiation of their novices: they are as detestable as they are notorious. An infant covered with dough crust to deceive the unsuspecting is placed beside the person to be initiated into their secret rites. This infant is killed at the hands of the novice ... The infant's blood – oh horrible – they sip up eagerly; its limbs they tear to pieces, trying to outdo each other; by this victim they are leagued together ... These sacred rites are more shocking than any sacrilege. (Minucius Felix, 1950[c. 200], summarizes rumors about early Christianity, in *Octavius*)

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In 1977, a troubled Michelle Smith told her psychiatrist, Lawrence Pazder, some troubling stories. She said that at the age of 5 she was given to the Devil by her mother. Systematically abused and tortured, Michelle said that she was made to witness the sacrifice of countless animals and babies. To terrify her into silence, she said that she was put into a dark pit with snakes, spiders, aborted fetuses and rotting corpses. After a car accident, she claimed that she was given over to a cadre of Satanic nurses who pulled out her teeth. Toward the end of her 2-year ordeal, near the age of 7, she even claimed to have seen Satan himself (Smith and Pazder, 1980).

Despite the outrageousness of Smith's stories, Pazder believed them and moved to publish them on a large scale. The result of his zeal was the Smith and Pazder (1980) international bestseller, *Michelle Remembers*, which soon became the most notable survival story of a growing body of popular literature devoted to exposing a vast, conspiratorial underground of devil worship, ritual abuse and child pornography.[1]

By the late 1980s, Pazder and numerous self-proclaimed experts on Satanism were frequently appearing on television programs that claimed to 'expose' a clandestine Satanic underground. These high-profile shows, from *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to *20/20* news specials, helped to propel conspiratorial claims into the popular imaginary. After the media panic abated in the mid-1990s, however, Smith was exposed as a fraud, and many of the hypnotic regression techniques used to elicit horrible childhood memories were roundly criticized by scholars within the psychological community.[2] The present consensus of scholars, law enforcement officials and journalists is that these sensational media events were just that – sensational media events – largely the product of imaginations run wild, fueled by a popular sense of crisis and anomie.[3] Indeed, in the academy these media events have been described as constituting a 'rumor-panic', a phenomenon in which various folk legends build momentum and metamorphose into realities in the popular media, often because of larger, political struggles (e.g. the rise of the Christian Right) or in response to social crisis and anomie (e.g. economic downturns, a perception of national 'moral decline', and so on; see Victor, 1993; Ellis, 2000).

What is particularly interesting from an argumentative perspective is the primary, albeit fallacious, claim offered in support of the victims' stories: those who allegedly have been forced to eat feces and sacrifice babies tell the same story. As a number of self-proclaimed experts on Satanic crime have argued, because the stories are so similar in detail, there *must be* something horrifically Satanic taking place. Valerie Sinason, a renowned psychologist and champion of 'survivors' of Satanic ritual abuse, even argues that the 'issue of belief and disbelief ... is, in the end, "unhelpful"' (Sinason, 1994: 5). Padzer agrees. Years after the widespread criticism of hypnotic regression, the co-author of *Michelle Remembers* remarked that 'we are all eager to prove or disprove what happened, but *in the end it doesn't matter*' (Allen and Midwinter, 1990: 41, emphasis added).

The primary reason why the truth or falsity of the survivors' claims about Satanism does not matter to these 'experts' is that many of these 'survivors' were, in fact, abused.[4] My concern in this article, however, is that these experts ignore the possibility that Satanism is invoked by abuse survivors because it is the best narrative approximation, the best vocabulary, for describing the abject terror of traumatic experience. Such a perspective implies that Satanism comprises a familiar repertoire of symbol and imagery, and hence suggests the possibility that many Satanic ritual abuse survivors are victims of their own imaginations, drawing on myths that reside in collective memory and internalizing them as if they were constitutive of a lived past. The relative absence of documented cases of Satanic ritual abuse prior to 1980, and the subsequent appearance of them after the publication of *Michelle Remembers* and related television programs, marks the Satanic aspect of ritual abuse as a recent embellishment. Thus the most glaring sin of the self-appointed 'experts' who believe in a Satanic underground is their facile dismissal of the fictions of cinema and television as possible source material for so-called 'recovered memories' of Satanic crime. For example, in regard to the well-covered McMartin preschool case – a case in which the preschool owners were falsely accused of running a Satanic child-prostitution ring – police 'expert' Sandi Gallant argued categorically that the children's stories were too consistent and horrific to be fantasies inspired by the cinema (Bass and Davis, 1994: 421). Further, Sinason (1994) argues that her 'child and adult patients do not find horror films horrifying' because they 'are a pale shadow of the reality of their experience'. Satanic ritual abuse survivors, she argues, could not possibly 'develop ideas or fantasies as a result of watching films' (p. 7).

What is striking about these dismissals is that they are a blatant repudiation of the power of the imagination and, hence, the power of the rhetorical: the ability of discourse to frame and mediate our relationships to our pasts and render our experience of reality *as something meaningful*. Indeed, with an eye toward the persistence of Western legends of the past, one discovers that the sacrifice and eating of babies is not a new narrative. These kinds of stories can be traced back to the second century of the common era, when Minucius Felix reported that many pagans believed that *Christians* were promiscuous, baby-eating mule worshippers (see epigraph). The uniqueness of modern depictions of Satanism in the popular media is thus located in the imagery that is used to abbreviate these longstanding myths: figures chanting in dark robes or hooded garments, altars surrounded by inverted pentagrams, inverted crosses and blatant images of death (such as skulls), are ubiquitous in Satanic ritual abuse survivor stories as well as televisual and filmic portrayals of Satanism. The imagery is also relatively recent, only appearing with significant frequency in the popular media after the infamous Satanic priest, Anton Szandor LaVey, opened his Church of Satan in San Francisco in 1966.[5] LaVey's imagistic representations of Satanism were, and continue to remain, profoundly influential in the popular media.

In this article I describe *how* the mass media – thoroughly and completely entangled in the logics of late capitalism – enables 'rumor-panic' through the transaction of a symbolic unit that I term variously an 'iconic *topos*' or a 'visual abbreviation'. 'Rumor-panic', defined as a 'collective stress reaction in response to a belief in stories about immediately threatening circumstances' (Victor, 1993: 59), is a phenomenon catalyzed by the accelerating exchange of images in contemporary society. As a result of the logics specific to the commodity form in the Western, industrialized world, I argue that when an object particular to any discursive system – in this case, modern occultism – is caught up in the circuit of media/capital, its content and use-value is destined to become eclipsed by its symbolic- or 'sign-value' and exchange-value. Although this logic, often referred to as the logic of commodification, is well known, very little work has explored how commodification works to enable popular or mass discourse rhetorically – that is, how the mystifying logics of commodification in late capitalism influence mass audiences to do and think things through 'texts' that are dispersed among multiple mediums simultaneously (that is, by means of diffuse intertexts). Hence in this article I examine how the relatively innocuous imagery created by a prankster-Satanist in the late 1960s was disseminated and resignified in the popular imaginary to validate the myth of Satanic ritual abuse. In other words, I show how contemporary media logics fragment images, move them around, re-edit them, re-touch them, and re-signify them in accord with longstanding cultural myths, legends, and the like. I have chosen to examine Satanism not only because its unusual character enables us to see better a rhetoric of commodification at work, but also because Satanism, as an occult discourse that orbits the themes of secrecy and mystery, points up the mystification of content – a meaningful dynamic that plays directly into the fetishism of commodification in general.

To these ends, this article is divided into two parts. In the first part, I redescribe occultism in relation to the commodity form and explain how adopting a materialist perspective requires one to think about occult discourse as a collection of symbols and images that circulate in patterns typical of the media logics of late capitalism. In this section, I explain what is meant by 'late capitalism' and detail the logics of the commodity form as well. In the second section, with the example of LaVey's brand of Satanism, I illustrate how the rhetoric of Satanism comprises the exchange of visual tropes or iconic abbreviations by examining *The Satanic Bible* and a number of high-profile television programs. By tracing the imagery created by LaVey in the mass media, I provide a map of the dissemination of Satanic, imagistic *topoi* that helps to explain how Satanism became available to people as a collection of visual abbreviations that could be used to invent personalized occult narratives.

COMMODITY OCCULTISM

In order to understand how the transactability of occult form gives rise to predictable patterns in rumor-panic discourse, it is necessary to explain the relationship of the discourse to commodity form. By coming to terms with the logic of the commodity in relationship to 'text' in a general sense, one can also better understand how Satanism became so ubiquitous in the popular news media during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the next section, I argue that the apparently spontaneous mobility of Satanism as a collection of visual abbreviations in the popular imagination is intimately related to its commodification.

The commodity form and late capitalism

In the first volume of his widely read and profoundly influential study of economics, *Capital* (1990[1867]), Karl Marx begins with a discussion of the 'elementary form' or fundamental unit of any monied society: the commodity. Simply put, a commodity is something that (a) satisfies a human need of any kind, and (b) can be exchanged. Marx held that every society must produce its own material conditions of existence, and that when a society organizes this production in terms of a system of exchange (from bartering to buying and selling), the product is called a commodity (pp. 125–77). The ways in which these commodities are exchanged and used by individuals determine a society's fundamental 'mode of production'. In the feudal mode of production, for example, the commodity of food was produced by farmers for their own sustenance, and any surplus went toward the rent of the land they tilled, which was usually run by a feudal lord. Analogously, in the capitalistic mode of production, commodities are produced in ways that generate a 'surplus value' by extracting more labor from a worker than is compensated for, a value which is typically liquidated into profit by those who own the means of production (pp. 270–80).

Today, the primary mode of production in the United States is often referred to as 'late capitalism', a term that signifies both a moment in the historical trajectory of Western economic development as well as an economic system for which the tendency to generate surplus value has radically transformed the material features of the commodity (Jameson, 1995: xviii). These newer transformations in the logic of capital are discernible in the many synonyms that are used for late capitalism, such as 'multinational capitalism', 'spectacle or image society', 'media capitalism' and 'postmodernism'. Central to all of these labels is the notion of a global market of exchange and, more important for this article, *the incorporation of media images and symbolic codes as commodities themselves*. The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard (2000) has insisted that in late capitalism or 'postmodernism', the primary commodity is *the image*, a sign that, unlike concrete objects of exchange, has the capacity to 'murder' the referent or the reality that it purportedly re-presents (p. 5). That the West has entered an

'economy of information' signals our entrance into an economy of the image: internet web pages, television, movies and other image-based media have come to dominate the world of commodity exchange. Baudrillard is wary of the economy of image because it extends the commodity form into the popular imaginary and, by extension, the individual imagination.

Thus in late capitalism the form of the image, in all its manifestations, is a vehicle of culture and has come to take on an economic value that it did not have previously. Fredric Jameson (1995) suggests that the commodification of image is symptomatic of a moment in United States economic history when the global economic system collapsed onto cultural systems – a moment when culture itself, inclusive of artifacts, institutions, and ideologies, became commodified and pushed into the circuit of capital (pp. xx–xxi, 1–54; also see Adorno, 2002[1981]). Consequently, because cultural forms like televisual or filmic images have become part of an economic system of exchange, their analysis will necessarily evince the underlying logics of capitalism.

One of these logics is a tendency toward the exchange of an object's image or representation instead of the materiality or concreteness of the object itself. This tendency works to conflate the symbolic or sign-value and the transaction-values of objects of exchange in ways that eclipse use-value altogether. In Marxian political economy, use-value refers to the material, practical utility of a commodity (inclusive of the labor that was expended to produce it) – what one *does* with it. As the primary value of a commodity, use-value is opposed to 'transaction-' or 'exchange-value', which is the value assigned to an object as something that can be exchanged or traded among people (Marx, 1990[1867]: 138). The meaning of a commodity or cultural object is always caught in a basic, ontological tension between its material, concrete use and its being an object of exchange. In late capitalism, however, objects of culture and commodities proper tend to become more valuable by virtue of their reproducibility and transactability as objects. For example, the political economist Jacques Attali (1996: 87–132) argued that music, a material and ritualistic phenomenon *created* by human beings, underwent a profound transformation as it moved into the circuit of capital. Once it become commodified as a tangible object that could be 'owned' (first with the advent of musical notation, then with the wax cylinder recording device of Edison, then with the advent of the phonograph, and today as a compact disk), the use-value of music – the pleasures of listening to and creating song – threatens to be overwhelmed by exchange-value. The music or book collector – someone (such as the present author) who owns more music albums or books than he or she can possibly use/enjoy – is an apt illustration of the transaction value of music or books overwhelming their use-value. Insofar as the ownership of a high *quantity* of objects also confers prestige, one can argue that exchange and sign-value have become intertwined.

I have discussed the collector because the phenomenon of collecting helps to illustrate a key concept that is necessary for understanding the logic

of the commodity in late capitalism: *fetishism*. In anthropological literature at the end of the 19th century, a fetish was an object that was afforded 'secret powers'. In non-industrial societies, a typical fetish is described as animism. In contemporary society, a traditional fetish would be akin to a sprig of white heather or a colored rabbit's foot as token of the powers of 'good luck'. Freud appropriated the term from anthropological literature and recast the meaning of a fetish in a way that seems to be more common today: affording patently non-human, non-sexual objects with sexual power. Largely defined as a male phenomenon in psychoanalytic literature, the proverbial and ubiquitous fetish in the popular imagination is the woman's shoe. In Marxian political economy, however, fetishism is used in a related but different sense: fetishism is the phenomenon of attributing commodities with social, non-human power that they do not actually possess (e.g. the mystique of diamonds, the magical personification of cars). Human beings give commodities their meaning, and hence, their power, but the commodity form works to *erase* or *obscure* the role of humans in assigning that meaning and power. As Sut Jhally (1990) puts it, 'fetishism consists in seeing the meaning of things as an inherent part of their physical existence when in fact that meaning is created by their integration into a *system* of meaning', a system that is created and maintained by human beings (pp. 9–12). So, for example, in the object of the musical compact disk, what is obscured or hidden is the labor that went into that disk: the work of musicians, producers, and executives – their late-night disagreements and their studio triumphs; the designing and packaging of the music; the underpaid workers who fashioned the disk's jewel case in stifling factories, and so on. Instead of knowing these things which are a part of the disk's meaning, they are obscured by the value of the compact disk as a transactable good, and are replaced with symbolic or imaginary meanings that do not exist in the disk-in-itself.

Form, content and the occult commodity

The logic of late capitalism relates directly to occult discourse insofar as the occult comprises a number of objects that are deliberately fetishized and mystified – most especially books, films and television programs – to make money. As a commodity, occult objects should harbor a tendency toward their sign and transaction-value over what we might term the 'traditional content' of occultism – that is, secret knowledge. One way to capture this tendency is in terms of the very familiar, literary understanding of the relationship between textual form and content. From a general, Marxian vantage, form implies a materiality, such that the repetition of the critical object or text in question is necessarily tangible or concrete, or related to something tangible or concrete, such as a medium. A materialist perspective on the relationship between textual form and content thus concerns how the medium or materiality of the text relates to its content – if at all. From

this vantage point, the distinction between form and content concerns how a particular *material* content determines form (e.g. Lukács' conviction that the formal features of literature bear the impress of its historical and social character; see Jameson, 1981: 17–102), or how a particular *ideational* form determines content (e.g. how the previous knowledge of a genre determines how some readers understand a romance novel).

In order to wed the traditional textualism of rhetorical criticism with the critiques of objects of material culture more typical of materialist modes, the commodification of 'text' must be understood in relation to use-, sign- and exchange-value. Fused to a textual notion of form and content, the tendency of objects of exchange in the circuit of capital is toward an overemphasis of form at the expense of content. Theodor Adorno's famous critique of popular music, for example, reduces to the parallel between material reproducibility on one level and to textual form and content on another: The mass-produced swing record (or in contemporary terms, the boy-band compact disk) foregrounds the 'banality' of the repetition of the sonata form (ABA), and thus the pleasures of consumption have more to do with the enjoyment of the music's return to the tonic (home key) than with innovation, artistry, or musical composition (Adorno, 1989–90[1964]: 45–69; 2002[1981]). In this way, the materiality of mass reproducibility, a formal feature of the musical commodity, is reflected in the 'content' of the music itself, a content that capitulates to formal repetitions. Similarly, the pleasures of mass paperback romance novels are products of the recognizable 'formula' used to produce them, a formula that is an alternate repetition of the reproduction value of the paperback form.

If late capitalism heralds a transition from modernism in terms of the foregrounding of exchange and form and the eclipse of use and content, then commodified occultism should herald its own demise as its content – its secrets – recede behind their packaging. In other words, commodity occultism is form that inspires mystery without mysterious content. As I argue in the next section, this is precisely what an analysis of Satanic discourse reveals, and coming to terms with the increasing depthlessness of Satanism as such begins to explain the ease with which mass rumor-panics are set in motion. The story of the Satanic rumor-panic of the late 1980s and early 1990s begins with the comic-book rhetoric of *The Satanic Bible* – or more to the point, its *cover*.

SATANOMICS: ANTON LAVEY'S SATANIC (MEDIA) CIRCUS

On the night of 30 May 1966, Anton LaVey ceremoniously shaved his head with a straight razor to 'leave the world of the descendants of Adam', guilt-ridden and sullied by original sin (Barton, 1990: 82). This gesture was part of a rite of passage that was assembled from various texts that ostensibly chronicled the rituals of the Yezidi, an Islamic sect of 'devil worshippers' who

searched for a series of secret, subterranean caverns and rivers that flowed into Hell. LaVey, convinced that 'man needs ritual and dogma', chose the Yezidi rite to mark what he called 'year one, *Anno Satanis*', the first year of the reign of Satan and the opening of the United States' first Satanic church (LaVey, 1969: 44). The opening coincided with *Walpurgisnacht*, the eve of May Day that has 'been memorialized as the night that all demons, spectres ... and banshees would come forth and hold their wild revels' (LaVey, 1969: 97).

The opening of the Church of Satan was, according to LaVey, the logical outcome of the weekly meetings of his 'Magic Circle', a group of friends who met in LaVey's black Victorian home (the 'Black House') in San Francisco to dabble in the occult. An adept of Aleister Crowley's brand of 'magick' and other occult traditions (see Crowley, 1997), LaVey claimed that it was time to use magick to 'break apart the ignorance and hypocrisy fostered by the Christian churches' by establishing his own church (Barton, 1990: 9). Although the opening was not heavily reported in the press, LaVey and his followers made a concerted effort to publicize the church, an effort that would prove, in the end, extremely successful. LaVey staged a 'Satanic Wedding' that was reported worldwide, followed by a Satanic Baptism of his 6-year-old daughter, Zeena (Barton, 1990: 15–31). Because of these widely reported events, as well as the wildly successful film about a young woman bearing the Devil's son, *Rosemary's Baby* (directed by Roman Polanski, 1968), LaVey and his followers proved to be good copy for the press. LaVey and his church were featured in local newspapers across the country, as well as in a number of high-profile magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen* and *Look* (Barton, 1990: 24–5).

Today the activities of the Church of Satan have fallen far from public view. Despite his immense popularity in the 1970s, LaVey's death in October 1997 received little more than an extended news service obituary circulated in a number of regional newspapers. Having claimed to have once been a lion tamer and circus performer, a carnival hypnotist and magician, a police photographer, an accomplished organist, and an on-call ghost-buster, LaVey's love of spectacle and notoriety was no secret, and the irony of his inconspicuous death goes without saying.[6] What has survived LaVey, however, is the iconic existence of his international bestseller, *The Satanic Bible*, and as I argue later, a widely recognized representation of occultism as a visual idiom – a kitschy, garish, '60s go-go brand of occultism that, in terms of popular memory, outrivals the rhetorical contributions of all of 20th-century occultists combined.

Judging a book by its cover: *The Satanic Bible*

LaVey's status in the popular imaginary is secured by *The Satanic Bible*, an average-sized paperback that helped to set a new system of occult imagery into motion. Although there were a number of popular occult books in the

1970s (especially those which concerned astrology), none received as much attention and notoriety as *The Satanic Bible*. The origin of the book is an excellent study of the logics of fetishism, as the dialectic of mystification and demystification is carefully deployed in its marketing: although the title and packaging of the book betoken an alignment with the supernatural powers of darkness, the philosophy contained within its pages is a secular individualism that dismisses any belief in the existence of a deity – good, evil or indifferent. The book is prima facie ironic insofar as what it contains has little to do with demons or forbidden knowledge.

Two years after the establishment of the Church of Satan, LaVey had written a number of polemical essays and screeds that he assembled into a mimeographed packet of colored paper, dubbed by church members 'the rainbow sheets'. These sheets proved useful at the end of 1968 when Peter Mayer, an editor at the mass paperback publisher Avon Books, contacted LaVey about a book project. Mayer had heard of LaVey's church in the popular press, and in the wake of the success of occult fiction and film in the mid- to late 1960s, he concluded that a Satanic bible penned by the already notable LaVey would sell very well. Mayer was right (Aquino, 1999: 52).

A former friend of LaVey and fellow Satanist, Michael Aquino (currently leader of his own Satanic church, The Temple of Set), recalled that the problem that LaVey confronted with Mayer's offer was that he did not have enough written content 'to produce a sufficiently-fat paperback' (Aquino, 1999: 52). Aquino claims that as the deadline approached, LaVey resorted to plagiarizing a section from a little-known racist-tract book titled *Might is Right*, penned by Arthur Desmond under the name of Ragbar Redbeard, in 1896 (Aquino, 1999: 54; also see Redbeard, 1999).[7] Aquino further claimed that LaVey hurriedly appended a number of occult rituals to the end, and the collection went to press in December 1969. In January 1970, *The Satanic Bible* was published. Since that time the paperback version has been through multiple reprintings and has sold close to an estimated 700,000 copies (Gilmore, 2001, personal communication).

In general, *The Satanic Bible* can be divided into two parts. In a how-to manner, one part presents a number of rituals to be performed by the Satanist and details the sorts of materials he or she should acquire, a simple rehash of the directives of ritual magicians found in books like Aleister Crowley's *Magick: Elementary Theory* (1997: 47–116). The other, more substantive part of the book advances a strident libertarianism reminiscent of Ayn Rand's 'Objectivist' philosophy, which touted the 'virtues of selfishness' in books like *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* (in fact, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, LaVey remarked that his 'religion' was 'just Ayn Rand's philosophy, with ceremony and ritual added'; Ellis, 2000: 180). The 'Nine Satanic Statements' that appear at the head of the book reflect the rational self-interest of Objectivism and serve as an apt summary of the philosophical contents of the book:

1. Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence!
2. Satan represents vital existence, instead of spiritual pipe dreams.
3. Satan represents undefiled wisdom, instead of hypocritical self deceit!
4. Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it, instead of love wasted on ingrates!
5. Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek!
6. Satan represents responsibility for the responsible, instead of concern for psychic vampires!
7. Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his 'divine spiritual and intellectual development,' has become the most vicious animal of all!
8. Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, and emotional gratification!
9. Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years!

(LaVey, 1969: 25)

The idea of Satan has been resignified by LaVey to represent the essence of human nature, and Satanism is offered as a philosophy of playful individualism that is better equipped to cope with this essence than Christianity.[8]

In light of the nine statements' similarity to Objectivism, the philosophy espoused in *The Satanic Bible* is neither offensive nor surprising, as it is an obvious distillation of ideas common among members of the United States counter-culture in the 1960s. As Aquino (1999) aptly observes:

> [*The*] *Satanic Bible*, while exposing [the] scam [of justifying political prescriptions with divine authority], nonetheless drinks at the same well by clothing itself in the supernatural authority of the Prince of Darkness and his daemons. Less this element, *The Satanic Bible* would be merely a social tract by Anton LaVey – not High Priest of Satan, but just one more 1960s-counterculture-cynic atop a soap-box. (p. 53)

Aquino implies that the formal characteristics of the book and the mystifications of its packaging as 'Satanic' have more to do with its commercial success than its actual content. It is not surprising, then, that LaVey himself divests *The Satanic Bible* of possessing the 'secret' content typical of the books in the occult tradition. True to the prima facie expectations we have for occult and new age books, LaVey opens *The Satanic Bible* announcing a demystifying intent. However, the demystification is one that goes against the typical proposal of a new vocabulary or the discovery of new, transcendent truths:

> This book was written because, with very few exceptions, every tract and paper, every 'secret' grimoire, all the 'great works' on the subject

> of magic, are nothing more than sanctimonious fraud – guilt-ridden ramblings and esoteric gibberish by chroniclers of magical lore unable or unwilling to present an objective view of the subject. Writer after writer, in efforts to state the principles of 'white and black magic,' has succeeded instead in clouding the entire issue so badly that the would-be student of sorcery winds up stupidly pushing a planchette over a Ouija board, standing inside a pentagram waiting for a demon to present itself ... in general making a blithering fool of himself in the eyes of those who *know*! (LaVey, 1969: 21)

Apparently, those who *really* know occultism know that *the secret is that there are no secrets*. This brand of demystification denies any content to the occult tradition, refiguring centuries of revealed knowledge as an aesthetic contrivance, a form of human myth-making and fantasy that appeases a human need for ritual. 'Herein you will find truth and fantasy', avers LaVey (1969). 'Each is necessary for the other to exist; but each must be recognized for what it is' (p. 22). For LaVey, truth, as much as fantasy, is entertainment.

Unlike its content, the packaging and formal characteristics of *The Satanic Bible* are unique, and the book's importance as an element of occult discourse has much more to do with its uniqueness as totem or a fetishized object in popular culture than with its 272 pages of directives. With LaVey's remarks about the fantasy function of his bible in mind, one is drawn to the style of the book – which is written in an obvious tongue-in-cheek manner – and more significantly to its noteworthy cover. The front of the popular paperback edition features a minimalist design, the title and author in a simple white font on a completely black background. Underneath the text appears the 'Sigil of Baphomet' in purple, which is the representation of a goat head, contained by an inverted pentagram or encircled star (see Figure 1). Each point of the pentagram accommodates the goat's horns, ears and chin. Around the pentagram and goat are two circles in which appear the ubiquitous occult symbols – Hebrew characters – spelling 'Leviathan'. The back of the paperback is equally striking. Over a black background appears a photograph of LaVey, his glaring eyes, bald head, and meticulously groomed goatee encircled by a large Sigil of Baphomet, such that he appears horned.

In most contemporary depictions of Satanism in books and television programs, the cover of *The Satanic Bible* is often presented as a visual surrogate for the practice of Satanism, and sometimes for the whole of occultism. This focus on the cover marks a formal mystification that models the logic of commodity exchange in late capitalism: the focus on the book's cover is an erasure of its content, an eclipse of the book's use-value by its sign- and transaction-value. A typical example of this kind of commodity occultism is found in a video program, popular among charismatic and evangelic Christian groups, titled *Devil Worship: The Rise of Satanism* (1989) In the opening segments of the video, LaVey and the Church of Satan are introduced through a series of shots in which *The Satanic Bible* frequently



Figure 1 The Sigil of Baphomet. Reproduced courtesy of Peter Gilmore and the Church of Satan.

appears. A woman with a British accent narrates the imagery over a characteristically 'creepy,' synthesized soundtrack (see Table 1). The final comment in these series of shots illustrates how *The Satanic Bible* is rendered into a visual fetish, its contents ignored and deliberately mystified in order to promote a Christian message of redemption: Although it is the case that *The Satanic Bible* attacks the notion of purity as an impossible ideal, it is not the case that the book categorically opposes 'goodness' and 'selfless behavior', nor is it the case that the book forwards a belief in the supernatural. In the video presentation, the focus is on the formal aspects of the book at the expense of its actual content.

The success of the cover of *The Satanic Bible* as a totem, of course, depends on a general cultural knowledge of the signifiers of evil, which LaVey used to create a rhetoric of mystery, as well as a rhetoric of irony premised on the need of imagery for code. The ability to separate a signifier from its signified, which is best exemplified by the image as a form in need of interpretive codes, is the logic behind the secrecy of occultism: what one sees is not necessarily what one gets, as dissimulation is a basic element of all occult organizations (e.g. the Freemasons). Thus the erroneous accounts of the book's content mean that its packaging is doing exactly what it was intended to do: the work of fetishization and consequent mystification, the creation of a sense of mystery that can only be dispelled by purchasing and reading the book. The notoriety and power of *The Satanic Bible* as a totem is derived from the purposively misleading connotations of the signifiers that comprise it: the dark, minimalist composition of its front cover, LaVey's characteristically devilish appearance on the back cover, the humorously bombastic style of its text, the word 'Satanic' in the title, and other elements collectively connote 'evil'.

In light of the rumor-panic of the late 1980s and early 1990s, however,

Table 1 Description of visual and audio elements in a segment of *Devil Worship: The Rise of Satanism*

Shot	Audio
1. Black and white head-shot of Anton LaVey.	In 1966, Anton LaVey founded the ...
2. Medium-shot of black Victorian home that houses the Church of Satan	... first Church of Satan in San Francisco, which ...
3. Medium-shot of LaVey in 'devil' costume, slow zoom toward his face.	... at one point, claimed 10,000 members.
4. Close-up of the cover of *The Satanic Bible.* The Sigil of Baphomet is the focal point.	LaVey authored *The Satanic Bible* and ...
5. Close-up of the title page of *The Satanic Rituals.* The Sigil of Baphomet is the focal point.	... *The Satanic Rituals*, Satanism's most important books.
6. Close-up of the back of *The Satanic Bible.* Depiction of Anton LaVey in front of a Sigil of Baphomet.	Astonishingly, when *The Satanic Bible* was first published ...
7. Close-up of the spine of the Christian Bible.	... it outsold the Bible two-to-one in many parts of America ...
8. Long-shot of college campus. Students with back-packs walk away from the camera.	... and ten-to-one on some college campuses.
9. Close-up of page 149 of *The Satanic Bible.* It reads, 'Invocation Employed Towards the Conjuration of Destruction.'	It teaches tenets that are totally opposed to goodness, purity, and selfless behavior.

LaVey's playful attempts to resignify highly connotative signifiers of darkness and evil as 'kitsch' failed, for his church was later plagued by accusations of ritual murder, child abuse, and other occult crimes. In other words, although he was the architect of a successful Satanic spectacle, LaVey was incapable of *controlling* that spectacle once it was released into the popular media and, by extension, the popular imaginary.

LaVey's inability to control the meaning of the imagery that he created can be explained in reference to the ontology of the image: because images need contextualization for their meaning, they are more easily detached from primary or original contexts and *moved* to others that supply alternative codes (see Barthes, 1985: 3–62). I term this ease of movement the 'mobility of image'. The mobility of image refers to the simple transaction of visual abbreviations among different, multiple texts (films, television programs, books, and so on), enabled by formalization and furthered by repeated transaction or use. In relationship to what I have been describing as a visual abbreviation or trope, mobility refers to the ease with which an

image, such as one that contains the Sigil of Baphomet (Figure 1), is wielded to mean different things in different contexts. The less ambiguous or discrete the image, the less mobile it will be (e.g. an image of an elephant is much less mobile than a strange symbol, like the Sigil of Baphomet). Hence the mobility of the image does not only refer to the fact that images are discrete and can thus be moved and recontextualized, but that they can be assigned radically different meanings in the service of a given representation. From a rhetorical perspective, the mobility of the image is analogous to what rhetoricians refer to as a *topos* (or *topoi* in plural). While scholars disagree about what *topoi* meant for ancient rhetoricians, today the term generally refers to both 'the stuff of which arguments are made and the *form* of those arguments' (Lanham, 1991: 152, emphasis added). If one substitutes 'argument' with 'representation' in this definition, then the mobility of image is synonymous with the idea of a visual or iconic *topos*. The perfect example of visual *topoi* in television production is 'stock footage', fragments of films or other media texts that are made to signify a number of different things depending on their contextualization.

In addition to the cover of *The Satanic Bible,* an excellent example of the mobility of Satanic imagery is the use of a 1969 documentary on the Church of Satan as stock footage. Examining this film as it moves through a number of televised representations helps one to observe better how Satanism was deployed as a collection of visual abbreviations that were recycled, time and time again, into new representations. Through the mapping of this stock footage, the rhetoric or suasive movement of rumor-panics is shown to depend on the reality effect of the image (that is, that pictures 'do not lie' and that 'seeing is believing'), and at a more basic level, on the movement toward the sign-value typical of commodity fetishism. In the popular imaginary, the intentionally humorous and wildly entertaining rituals created by LaVey for this documentary have been resignified to serve as factual and incontrovertible evidence for the existence of blood sacrifice.

Televisual occultism and rumor-panic: the case of *Satanis*

Given its reduction of centuries of secret knowledge to ritual play, *The Satanic Bible* represents the death of 'modern' occultism as the study of secrets, and its rebirth as a 'postmodern', aesthetic form – its function thus becoming primarily one of entertainment in the service of capital. Through the lens of Satanism, an observation of the movement of occult discourse toward form helps to explain how the rather limited repertoire of occult imagery could come to signify the ritual abuse of children. In media depictions of the cover of *The Satanic Bible,* the contents of the book are mystified in the active constructing of a visual repertoire that helped to revive longstanding cultural myths about human sacrifice and blood ritual; the book becomes a thinned-out object, a glossy surface that is divorced from its primary referent system – its actual content – and resignified into a

different referent system as the visual abbreviation of evil. This process of emptying occult texts of their content and resituating their formal elements into alternate referent systems foregrounds the rhetorical dimension of rumor-panics in the televisual age: the rather limited iconic repertoire of the occult is at base a site of invention, a locus of highly connotative imagistic forms that are used and reused, signified and resignified, for extrinsic purposes. The relative paucity of Western representations of evil placed LaVey's brand of occultism at risk of resignification, despite the fact that there is nothing patently 'evil' – at least in terms of the existence of supernatural forces – about his philosophy.[9] An analysis of the film *Satanis: The Devil's Mass* dramatically illustrates this commodified process of resignification.

Directed and produced by Ray Laurent, *Satanis: The Devil's Mass* (1969) was yet another attempt by LaVey to spread the philosophy of the Church of Satan (and to sell copies of *The Satanic Bible,* of course) within an ongoing publicity campaign headed by fellow Satanist and professional publicity agent, Edward M. Webber (Aquino, 1999: 26–35). The campaign began with a public 'Satanic Wedding' between the journalist John Raymond and a New York socialite, Judith Case, in February 1967. The Wedding was good copy for the national press and soon became a newsreel segment that ran in theatres through the late 1960s. The Wedding was followed by a Satanic Baptism of LaVey's daughter, and later a Satanic Funeral, both of which were also covered by the press. The movie *Satanis* was caught in the momentum of this publicity. Unfortunately for LaVey and Laurent, the film did poorly at local showings and failed to reach national distribution, seemingly passing into cult-movie obscurity by the mid-1970s. Presumably, Laurent failed to register the film and subsequently lost control of copyright, because today it is considered to be in the 'public domain'.

According to Blanche Barton (1990), LaVey's widow and current head of the Church of Satan, the film originally hit theaters in early 1970,

> often playing on a double bill with another movie Anton appeared in – Kenneth Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. The ads for the film, showcasing LaVey's scowling countenance, promised bloody, sexually explicit rituals ... serious cautions were included in the large display ads: '*Satanis* is the most pertinent, and perhaps the most shocking film of our time. But it's definitely not a movie for everyone. If you choose not to see it, we will understand'. (p. 25)

Although the film does feature nude women who serve as 'altars' in a number of rituals, the 'shockumentary' is relatively tame in comparison to the 'sexual situations' of contemporary mainstream Hollywood film.

In general, the film alternates between interviews of LaVey, interviews of his neighbors, and scenes from a kitschy, garishly lit Satanic ritual. The most memorable and frequently used part of the film is the opening, which depicts a 'Satanic' ceremony that is both dramatic and humorous. The

opening begins with a procession of hooded figures down a hallway dimly lit with green and red light. The soundtrack is of a pipe organ playing a gloomy set of notes that do not seem to constitute a formal work. The procession enters a ritual chamber fully furnished with ghoulish artifacts. A nude woman lies on her side, in the company of a skull and a bell, on an altar in the front of the room. An organist wearing a skull mask plays an organ in dramatic movements in the corner. Behind the altar is a large Sigil of Baphomet. The participants circle around the altar, and masks are presented to two of the participants: one is of a horse head, the other, a devil's head. The participants put on the masks. Then, a bearded young man with priestly attire takes a bell from the altar and rings it in the directions of north, south, east and west. He then returns to facing the altar and in deep, commanding voice intones, '*In dominis Satanis, Lucifer excelcis dei*. In the name of our most exalted god, Satan Lucifer, I command thee to come forth!' From a low angle, the camera cuts to a close-up of the bearded man's face as he picks up a ceremonial sword: 'Come forth, and bestow these blessings of hell upon us. Come forth by these names: Satan, Lucifer, Belial, Leviathan, Shemhamferash!' The participants reply, 'Shemhamferash'. The man returns, 'Hail Satan!', and they reply, 'Hail Satan'. A chalice is taken from an unseen location, and ceremoniously given to Anton LaVey, who emerges from the circle wearing a hooded, horned devil costume. LaVey drinks, and then comes to the center of the circle and continues the ritual. The documentary then cuts to interviews with neighbors, LaVey and his followers, periodically returning to the ritual until the end of the film.

That the film is considered public domain has all but guaranteed its dominion over public conceptions of Satanism. Despite its obscurity as a whole, in pieces the film has had quite a showing as stock footage in a number of documentaries and local and national news stories. The most prominent of these programs, an ABC *20/20* segment titled 'The Devil Worshippers', and a Geraldo Rivera special titled 'Exposing Satan's Underground' on NBC, are responsible for broadcasting segments of *Satanis* to millions of viewers.

The first of these prime-time programs was the *20/20* segment, which aired on 16 May 1985. The television anchor, Hugh Downs, introduced the segment by claiming that the program would describe 'perverse, hideous acts that defy belief. Suicides, murders, and ritualistic slaughter of children and animals.' Witnesses in the program testified that 'hearts were cut out, and ... children were made to chew pieces of these children's hearts, pieces of their flesh.' Prominent in this program are clips from *Satanis*, which are used to visually stabilize the stories of Satanic ritual abuse survivors with memorable, concrete images. In one segment, the film is used as an example of the 'religious Satanist', as opposed to the 'dabbler' or 'generational' Satanist. The editing of the stock carefully weaves the soundtrack of one part of the film as a voice-over for another. In Table 2, the reporter's voice is signaled by his last name, 'WOODEN', and the voice of LaVey, used from

Table 2 Description of visual and audio elements in a segment of 'The Devil Worshippers'

Shot	Audio
1. From *Satanis*: LaVey takes a ceremonial sword in one hand and a book in another. He is in a 'devil' outfit and lit by a green light. ZOOM out to a framing of the stock footage by a blue background. The words 'Religious Satanist' appear above the framed footage.	WOODEN: The Church of Satan, and other organized devil-worship groups, represent our second category ... ... religious Satanists.
2. Cut to different part of *Satanis* ritual. A devil mask is handed to a participant by a hooded figure. The participant puts on the devil mask.	Although LaVey would not talk to us, we can get a glimpse of his theories and rituals in this 1970 documentary on his church.
3. Cut to organist wearing a skull mask. S/he is bathed in red light.	LAVEY: 'We feel a person should be free to indulge in all the so-called fetishes that they would ...
4. Overhead shot of ritual group in a circle, LaVey in the middle holding out a ceremonial sword.	... desire, as long as they don't hurt anyone that doesn't deserve or wish to be hurt.'
5. Head shot of an older, male participant in dark, formal clothing.	
6. Head shot of LaVey.	PRIMARY *Satanis* SOUNDTRACK: 'Hail Satan!'
7. Head shot of another participant wearing a hood. He repeats the words of LaVey in chorus.	'Hail Satan!'
8. Medium shot of LaVey with sword. LaVey turns toward camera with sword. The sword is put down. LaVey takes his cape and slowly, arms grasping it on each side, pulls it over his head.	LAVEY: 'We perform human sacrifices by proxy, you might say. The destruction of human beings who would, let's say, create an antagonistic situation towards us in the form of curses and hexes. Not in actual blood ritual, because, certainly, the destruction of a human being physically is illegal.' WOODEN: Police we spoke to say they have never made a link between this Satanic church and the Satanic crimes being committed.
9. Cut to a different part of the ritual. A coffin is opened, and a nude woman is revealed to be inside. '666' is written in black paint across her chest. A black bar obscures her breasts for television censors.	However, some incidents described to us by witnesses ...

10.	Head shot of LaVey in green light.	... around the country are ...
11.	Medium shot of coffin. A man in a light colored robe climbs into the coffin with the nude woman, and other participants lower the lid.	... strikingly similar to these ritualistic scenes.

Satanis as a voice-over material, is denoted with 'LAVEY'. The segment continues by describing the coffin ritual as an 'embrace of death', and moves to a discussion of voodoo dolls. Although footage of *Satanis* is used in other parts of the program, the 11 shots described in Table 2 are sufficient to illustrate how easily the film is used as a visual abbreviation of practices that it does not depict. The soundtrack of an interview of LaVey which appears much later in the film is used as a voice-over to contextualize the opening ritual as fetishistic (in the sexual sense) and as human sacrifice 'by proxy'. Although careful to avoid libel by noting that there is no evidence that the Church of Satan has committed crimes, Wooden clearly implies there is a link by suggesting that 'some incidents described to us by witnesses [of Satanic crime] are strikingly similar to these ritualistic scenes'. The necessary ambiguity of these images divorced from their original context is used to create the impression of an empirically verifiable Satanic ritual in which people are killed. The mobility of these Satanic images is reflected in the ease with which they are moved around in order to provide codes of interpretation that are different from their original codes. Their recontextualization in a program concerned with human atrocity and Satanic crime supplies new codes of interpretation that use the basic reality effect of the image to suggest the reality of Satanic murder. In other words, *that these images depict a Satanic ritual at all* helps to create a kind of illusionism whereby an empirical crime that occurs outside the frame is implicated within the frame.

The alarmist tone of the *20/20* program would continue with two high-profile programs by Geraldo Rivera, the first airing on 19 November 1987 as an episode of his *Geraldo* talk show, and the second on 25 October 1988 as an NBC News prime-time special titled, 'Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground'. In this prime-time special, Rivera and his producers resignify and contextualize *Satanis* footage in a more exaggerated manner than the *20/20* episode as undeniable evidence of crime. The difference is that Rivera's program implies that the ritual abuse and murder of adults and children is inspired by the supernatural forces of evil. The segment sample in Table 3 begins after a discussion of demonic possession. In Rivera's program, the ritual footage of *Satanis* is rearranged into a new chronological order, such that the first element the viewer sees after the image of a seemingly 'possessed' woman is a devil mask, followed by the ominous figure of LaVey. The ending of the segment cuts to a scene previous to those depicting LaVey in the original chronology of *Satanis*, so that it features the dramatic, deep

Table 3 Description of visual and audio elements in a segment of 'Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground'

Shot	Audio
1. Medium shot of a woman, crying, clutching a wooden cross to her chest. Her voice is strained and she moves her head from side to side as she speaks.	'I won't let her go! No!' Organ music from the soundtrack of *Satanis* fades in.
2. Cut to ritual footage from *Satanis*. A participant in the ritual circle takes and puts on a devil mask.	
3. Cut to a medium shot of LaVey taking the ceremonial chalice. He drinks from the chalice.	GERALDO: Devil worship is as old as religion itself. It's the grim alternative ...
4. Cut to skull-masked organist bathed in red light.	... the flip side of life ...
5. Caped participant sprinkling mock 'holy water.'	... evil over good ...
6. Medium shot of LaVey picking up the ceremonial sword in his 'devil' costume.	... dark over light, Satan over God himself!
7. Cut to low angle shot of bearded man holding sword.	PRIMARY SOUNDTRACK OF *SATANIS:* 'Come forth, and bestow these blessings upon us.'
8. Jump-cut to image of Eliphas Levi's famous Sabbatic Goat (the 'Baphomet').	RIVERA: Forced underground by the religious hysteria of the middle ages ...

voice of the bearded man imploring Satan to 'bestow these blessings of hell upon us'. This new re-arrangement highlights the role of the mobility of image in the creation of supernatural truths, as Rivera's program hijacks the reality effect of the image by using *Satanis* as evidence of the existence of demons: rituals like these are responsible for opening the portals to hell.

Rivera's rhetorical excesses, however, deconstruct the program's underlying logic as one of deliberate and sensational deception. Rivera opened the widely watched news special with a galvanic warning: 'The very young and impressionable should definitely not be watching this program tonight', which was later followed by, 'I am begging you ... Please get them out of the room or change the station!' Ironically, during the daytime when many children are at home and awake, a number of popular talk shows – *Geraldo*, *Donahue*, *Sally Jesse Raphael* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* – devoted programming to survivors of the Satanic underground. Notwithstanding their hypocrisy, the irony of Rivera's warnings about the impressionability of

children undermines the fundamental assumption of those who insist on the validity of Satanic ritual abuse survivor stories, that the similarity of the stories is a measure of their authenticity and not of collective fantasy. What is implied in the warning is that a child cannot distinguish illusion from reality as well as an adult, and this much is true. But this assumption also implicitly challenges the notion that the similarity of survivor stories is *not the product of media images*. Rivera's warning about his program indicates he is at least partially aware of his furnishing the popular imaginary with powerful imagery – to wit, clips of *Satanis* juxtaposed with a hotchpotch of visual abbreviations of the occult. Indeed, that Rivera would urge children away implicates the media in blurring the distinction between illusion and reality – fundamentally for the sake of entertainment and, in turn, advertising dollars. The power of the genres of documentary and news resides precisely in their claim to truth, premised entirely on an amplification of the reality effect of the image. Such is the logic of the carefully edited tabloid news programs, and such is the logic of the reality of Satanic ritual abuse.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: LOSING THE AGENT WITH OUR RELIGION

Although I have discussed only a couple of the ways in which the imagistic *topoi* of Satanism were created, disseminated and taken-up, these examples are sufficient to illustrate the highly associative logics of rumor-panic. As a discourse, Satanism is diffuse and neither reducible to LaVey nor the frenzied, media portrayal of Satanic ritual abuse, but rather consists in a seemingly infinite number of visual signs that circulate in the popular imaginary, some coming into focus while others are fading away. I have argued that the cover of *The Satanic Bible* and clips from *Satanis* were, and are, two of the most prominent signs in focus during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Understood sympathetically, LaVey's Satanism represents an intellectualized form of play grafted onto an Objectivist philosophy of radical individualism, a *praxis* (or theoretically informed practice) of ritual gaming that tapped into a human need for psycho-drama.[10] What LaVey failed to realize, just as much as those who believe strongly in the validity of Satanic ritual abuse stories, is the powerful and unruly logics of the popular imaginary, a reservoir of myth and trope that has been created by the mass media, that is maintained by mass media, and that is molded by the sensationalist (and hence capitalist) rhetorics of tabloid journalism.

My mapping of two visual abbreviations, the cover of *The Satanic Bible* and portions of the film, *Satanis: The Devil's Mass*, reveals their distribution and their subsequent re-signification within the circuit of capital – a circuit that I believe, like Adorno, Baudrillard, Jameson, and other post-Marxian scholars, is almost synonymous with the circuit of mass media.[11] This cartography of the transaction of imagery describes one way in which

discourses are created by the mass media and inserted into the popular imagination through the process of fetishization: an original object, such as an occult film, is released into the circuit of media/capital. In its transaction as stock footage, for instance, its original use-value and content is hollowed out. It is reduced to a form or a series of fragments, and transacted as imagistic *topoi* that can then be taken up and re-signified or re-situated into a different referent system, such as the discourse of demonic criminality. In regard to the Satanic panic, then, I have argued that LaVey's Satanic imagery provided a concrete and memorable set of condensation symbols, imagistic *topoi*, that were used to vivify and seemingly authenticate, on the basis of the reality effect of the image, the reality of cannibalism, human sacrifice, and blood ritual.

This analysis implies that contemporary rumor-panics can be understood as a phenomenon of late capitalism premised on the overall drive toward the commodification of culture and the consequent thinning of cultural objects into transactable, highly consumable forms. Unlike rumor-panics of the past, which were largely localized and contained (e.g. the Salem Witch trials or Orson Welles's famous 'War of the Worlds' panic in New York city in 1938; see Victor, 1993: 59), contemporary rumor-panics are widespread and perpetuate themselves on the basis of a limited set of iconic stimuli that are first disseminated or released into the popular imaginary, and then resignified as evidence for a given cultural narrative or myth. As I noted in the introduction, 'blood ritual' is a very old narrative that has been a part of Western mythos for centuries. The wide dissemination of visual *topoi*, such as that enabled by LaVey's publicity campaigns of the late 1960s and early 1970s, provided visual abbreviations which were taken up, stripped of their original content or use-value, resignified, and then capitalized on for their reality effects. The example of the Satanic rumor-panic helps to shed light on more recent rumor-panics, such as the widespread fear of an 'evil', exogenous 'terrorism'. Three years after the World Trade Center was leveled by Islamic extremists on 11 September 2001, the Dresden-like images of 'ground zero' continue to circulate and resignify in support of various cultural narratives: the appearance of a demon in the smoke in an image of one of the burning towers has been read as a sign of the arrival of the Antichrist by some Evangelicals; images of ground zero have been used to arouse fear that an insidious and hidden evil has infiltrated Western borders in a manner akin to the Red Scare (Gunn, 2004).

Although this article has focused on *how* the mass media work as an apparatus of dissemination for rumor-panics, something should be said about the reasons or motives behind panics themselves. In general, folklorists have tended to explain scares, rumor-panics and hysterical epidemics as 'a form of psychological healing' in the sense that the revival of legends and myths gives coherence and stability to a widespread sense of incoherence and instability (Ellis, 2000: 283; the same is true of apocalyptic discourse, see

Brummett, 1991). In regard to the Satanic panic in particular, the consensus of scholars seems to be that which is summed up by Jeffrey Victor (1993):

> Satanic cult rumors are symptoms of anxieties deeper than fantasy worries about secret, conspiratorial kidnappers and murderers. These rumors are collaborative messages in metaphorical form, which speak of a moral crisis. That moral crisis, as people perceive it, involves a loss of faith in the moral order of American society, a perception of the rapid decline in traditional moral values. People are saying, in essence, that 'our world is falling apart, because all things good and decent are under attack by evil forces beyond our control.' (p. 55)

That thousands – if not millions – of people in the late 1980s and early 1990s regained a sense of control through the perpetuation of rumors about Satanic crime seems almost counter-intuitive. Yet when one looks more deeply at the individuals involved in the Satanic panic during this time, the therapeutic function of Satanic rhetoric is clear. For example, most of those who claim to have been ritually abused are women. One is hard-pressed to think of a better vocabulary for describing patriarchal oppression and terror, for abuse at the hands of a man, than that of Satanism.

Finally, rumor-panics serve an ideological function as well, teaching us how to be citizens through rituals of spectacle. In his book *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture*, Edward J. Ingebretsen (2001) argues that rhetorics of monstrosity function pedagogically to discipline citizenry, offering 'instructions for performance, justifying emotions, feelings, [and] actions that otherwise remain under civil erasure' (p. 172). The rhetoric of rumor-panic thus works to absolve individuals of responsibility for systemic social ills while simultaneously confirming the moral order of the status quo. The survivor stories concerning the abuse and oppression of women, for example, suppress the structural, ideological cause of such abuse (patriarchal misogyny) in favor of reifying the importance of the nuclear family in combating Satan – paradoxically inclusive of the patriarchal norms that motivate participation in rumor-panic (see deYoung, 1996). Thus the loss of any one individual's control of his or her rhetoric in the popular imaginary – for example, LaVey's inability to control the imagery he set in motion – parallels the ideological work of the rhetoric of rumor-panic, absolving audiences of their own complicity in the social ills which rumor is made to explain away. In late capitalism we have lost the agent in more ways than one.

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NOTES

1. Another successful mass paperback, Lauren Stratford's *Satan's Underground* (Stratford and Michaelson, 1991), describes rituals and details instances of childhood torture that are almost interchangeable with those offered by Smith: for example, Stratford also claimed that she was locked away in a small space with four dead babies until she agreed to participate in a ritual sacrifice. These kinds of books continued to appear until the mid 1990s (also see, e.g., Brown, 1993).
2. A Christian magazine titled *Cornerstone* was responsible for exposing Stratford and a number of other Satanic ritual abuse survivors, such as Mike Warnke, as frauds (see Passantino et al., 1989; Hertenstein and Trott, 1993). A number of academics continue to believe in Satanic ritual abuse, however (see Sakheim and Devine, 1992; Sinason, 1994). Challenges to hypnotic regression techniques are found in Richardson et al. (1991) and Showaltar (1997: 144–58).
3. On a CBNC program titled, 'Wrongly Accused and Convicted of Child Molesting', Geraldo Rivera recanted his sensational 1980s programs on Satanic ritual abuse:

   > I want to announce publicly that as a firm believer of the 'Believe the Children' movement of the 1980s, that started with the McMartin trials in California, but now I am convinced [sic] that I was terribly wrong ... and many innocent people were convicted and went to prison as a result ... and I am equally positive [that the] 'Repressed Memory Therapy Movement' is also a bunch of crap. (ReligiousTolerance.org, 2001)

4. Although there is little evidence to support the contention that there exists a vast, Satanic underground, there is some evidence to suggest that *some* pedophiles have deliberately used cultish garb and pseudo-ritual to *frighten* their victims into silence (see Lanning, 1992).
5. Of course, rituals that were deliberately intended as Satanic or described as such already appeared in popular literature and occult tomes since the emergence of occultism – as the study of secret knowledge and ritual – in the mid- to late 17th century. Hammer horror films are largely responsible for their emergence on the silver screen in the 1960s (see, for example, *The Devil Rides Out*, released in 1968; Hammer is the name of the production studio). Widespread popular interest in Satanic ritual, however, can be laid at the feet of Anton LaVey, and to a lesser extent, the rituals that appear in Roman Polanski's 1972 box office success, *Rosemary's Baby.* Prior to the creation of the Church of Satan, for instance, the now ubiquitous symbol for a goat's head circumscribed by an inverted pentagram – the Sigil of Baphomet – was not widely recognized as a Satanic symbol. After the book's publication and LaVey's publicity campaigns, the symbol began to appear frequently in horror movies, and Dennis

Wheatley's popular 'black magic' novel series was repackaged with the Sigil prominently displayed on the covers.

6. These past odd jobs are frequently repeated in exposes of LaVey, although there is little evidence to substantiate their truth. Given LaVey's penchant for dissimulation, it is likely that large parts of LaVey's autobiography are simply fabrications (Aquino, 1999: 15–25). The 'authorized' biography is Blanche Barton's *The Secret Life of a Satanist* (1992).
7. *Might Is Right* is popular among neo-Nazis. It should be mentioned that Aquino's The Temple of Set and the Church of Satan are at 'war' with one another, and that Aquino's accounts are not (as with *any historical narrative*) objective. Nevertheless, his research seems balanced and it is well documented. Zeena LaVey has corroborated all Aquino's claims about the Church of Satan. The Church of Satan's official position about these claims is that Zeena and her partner wished to take control of the church, and when met with resistance, made up lies about LaVey and the Church of Satan.
8. These nine statements are an apt condensation of John Galt's screed against altruism and mysticism in *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, 1992: 927–93).
9. For an interesting account of the United States lacking a good repertoire of representations of evil, see Delbanco (1995), and Gunn (2004). LaVey's Satanic philosophy *is* dangerous, however, insofar as it courts fascistic beliefs – something that LaVey acknowledged.
10. 'Fantasy plays an important part in any religious curriculum,' writes LaVey, and Satanism makes great use of fantasy.

> What constitutes the difference between a Satanic ceremony and a play presented by a theatre group? Often very little: mainly it hinges on the degree of acceptance on the part of the audience. It is of little consequence whether an outside audience does or does not accept the substance of a Satanic ceremony: the strange and grotesque always has a large and enthusiastic audience ... the purpose of most Satanic ceremonies is to *elevate* the self rather than *demean it*. [Thus] A ceremonial chamber essentially provides a stage for a performer who wishes complete acceptance from his audience. (LaVey, 1972: 17–18)

Thus ritual and ceremonial magic are described as forms of therapy, not the manipulation of supernatural forces. In a telephone conversation with a High Priest of the Church of Satan and a key figure in its current leadership, Peter Gilmore (2001, personal communication), it was explained to me that rituals are designed to appeal to the human need for psycho-drama. If there are 'unexplained magical effects' as a result of ritual, Gilmore said, 'that's great', but the primary function is psychological. From its inception, the Church of Satan has 'made no

grandiose promises of infallible enlightenment and [has] emphasized that each must be his or her own redeemer ... "Satan" is a representational concept, accepted by each according to his or her needs'. LaVey sometimes compared his church to an amusing circus, a spectacle that entertained the public and helped church members simply have fun. 'The Church of Satan' was, for LaVey, a 'Cosmic Joy Buzzer' (LaVey, 1992: 30–2).

11. As Baudrillard has persuasively argued, in late capitalism, power is located in the control of the codes of representation and signification, *not* in the control of the conditions and means of production (Baudrillard, 1981; Jameson, 1995: ix–xxii, 353–6).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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