

Thesis Abstract

The thesis examines manifestations of transgression in Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977), Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971), William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) and *The Nova Trilogy* (1961-1967), and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) on a structural and thematic level. Georges Bataille's theory of escalated excess and Michel Foucault's theory of the transgression-limit power dynamics, outlined in Chapter One, provide the theoretical framework through which the texts are analyzed, as through concepts of the spectacle, the carnival, taboo, and the Situationist *détournement* practice. The nature of the American Dream Machine is explored in regards to its chief components of control; the American war on abstractions, American exceptionalism, and the American Dream, examined through their contradictory connotations and historical relevance. The thesis proposes that despite their anti-systemic drive, the selected texts are complicit with and dependent on the American Dream Machine in perpetuating their power play.

In Chapter Two, the hyperbolization of American Cold War propaganda rhetoric is analyzed in Coover's *The Public Burning*. Chapter Three details Thompson's gonzo writing against the Establishment embodying the *potlatch* principle of escalation. Both Coover and Thompson assault the monopoly on objectivity claimed by "serious" journalism and mainstream media outlets, spotlighting their discourse of propaganda in regards to the Cold War (Coover) and the War on Drugs (Thompson) which enables and perpetuates the spectacularization of reality. In Chapter Four, Burroughs exaggerates the demonization inherent to propagandist discourse through his grotesque control machines, mirroring the repressive bureaucratic, institutional machinery in real life. Both he and Acker attack the normative language used by these institutions and its enforced monopoly on modes of expression curtailed by taboos, social norms, and the laws of language – Burroughs by exposing the "language virus," and Acker through her "forbidden" language (Chapter Five). Additionally, Acker's novel explores the cause and effect of revolution realized within the reach of the American Dream Machine.

The discussed texts use hyperbole, parody, and excess to spotlight the system's hypocrisy in transgressing its own rules. Chapter Six provides an overview of the paradox of transgression and the role of the transgressive writer, confirming the fictionality and inherently contradictory (and self-destructive) nature of the anti-systemic transgressive drive in fiction

which, despite opposing institutional authority, remains (and must remain) complicit in the power exchange in order to fulfil its purpose.