Shock and Awe

William V. Spanos

Published by Dartmouth College Press

Spanos, William V.
Shock and Awe: American Exceptionalism and the Imperatives of the Spectacle in Mark Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/26546.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/26546
SHOCK AND AWE
Re-Mapping the Transnational
A Dartmouth Series in American Studies

Series Editor
Donald E. Pease
Avalon Foundation Chair of Humanities
Founding Director of the Futures of American Studies Institute
Dartmouth College

The emergence of Transnational American Studies in the wake of the Cold War marks the most significant reconfiguration of American Studies since its inception. The shock waves generated by a newly globalized world order demanded an understanding of America’s embeddedness within global and local processes rather than scholarly reaffirmations of its splendid isolation. The series Re-Mapping the Transnational seeks to foster the cross-national dialogues needed to sustain the vitality of this emergent field. To advance a truly comparativist understanding of this scholarly endeavor, Dartmouth College Press welcomes monographs from scholars both inside and outside the United States.

For a complete list of books available in this series, see www.upne.com.

William V. Spanos, Shock and Awe: American Exceptionalism and the Imperatives of the Spectacle in Mark Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court

Laura Bieger, Ramón Saldívar, and Johannes Voelz, editors, The Imaginary and Its Worlds: American Studies after the Transnational Turn

Paul A. Bové, A More Conservative Place: Intellectual Culture in the Bush Era

John Muthyala, Dwelling in American: Dissent, Empire, and Globalization

Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe, editors, Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies

Lene M. Johannessen, Horizons of Enchantment: Essays in the American Imaginary

John Carlos Rowe, Afterlives of Modernism: Liberalism, Transnationalism, and Political Critique

Anthony Bogues, Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom

Bernd Herzogenrath, An American Body|Politic: A Deleuzian Approach

Johannes Voelz, Transcendental Resistance: The New Americanists and Emerson’s Challenge
William V. Spanos

Shock and Awe

American Exceptionalism and the Imperatives of the Spectacle in Mark Twain’s
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court

Dartmouth College Press   Hanover, New Hampshire
FOR ADAM AND SHORHEH,
who
dwell
now
(bo nyn kairos)
in the coming polis
You see, it was the eclipse. It came into my mind, in the nick of time, how Columbus, or Cortez, or one of those people, played an eclipse as a saving trump once, on some savages, and I saw my chance. I could play it myself, now; and it would not be plagiarism, either, because I should get it in nearly a thousand years ahead of those parties.

—Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than “that which appears is good, that which is good appears.” The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

How can thought collect Debord’s inheritance today, in the age of the complete triumph of the spectacle? It is evident, after all, that the spectacle is language, the very communicativity and linguistic being of humans. This means that an integrated Marxian analysis should take into consideration the fact that capitalism . . . not only aimed at the expropriation of productive activity, but also, and above all, at the alienation of language itself, of the linguistic and communicative nature of human beings, of that *logos* in which Heraclitus identifies the Common. The extreme form of expropriation of the Common is the spectacle, in other words, the politics in which we live. But this also means that what we encounter in the spectacle is our very linguistic nature inverted. For this reason (precisely because what is being expropriated is the possibility itself of a common good), the spectacle’s violence is so destructive; but, for the same reason, the spectacle still contains something like a positive possibility—and it is our task to use this possibility against it.

—Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End*