

## COUNTERFEIT CULTURE

*Counterfeit Culture* explores the possibility of writing an epic in an age of alternative facts. Examining six attempts to forge an American prose epic since 1960, this study goes on to trace a national tradition of inauthenticity, stretching back across four centuries. In works by authors such as Pynchon, Gaddis and Burroughs, the contemporary turn away from truth and authenticity can be seen as a return to an established line of literary tricksters and confidence men, with tropes of fraud and artifice running deep in the American grain. Combining archival work with historically inflected analysis of literary narrative, this book ranges through questions of identity, technology, history and music. From Marguerite Young's inquiry into psychological disintegration to William T. Vollmann's ongoing cycle of false histories, the study introduces a new reading of the American epic.

Rob Turner is a lecturer in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature at the University of Exeter. He studied for his doctorate at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. His research is focused on American literature, with particular interest in the epic mode and the poetics of hip-hop. He is a regular contributor to the *Wire* magazine.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE  
 AND CULTURE

*Editor*

Leonard Cassuto, *Fordham University*

*Founding Editor*

Albert Gelpi, *Stanford University*

*Advisory Board*

Robert Levine, *University of Maryland*

Ross Posnock, *Columbia University*

Branka Arsić, *Columbia University*

Wai Chee Dimock, *Yale University*

Tim Armstrong, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Walter Benn Michaels, *University of Illinois, Chicago*

Kenneth Warren, *University of Chicago*

*Recent books in this series*

- 182 ROB TURNER  
*Counterfeit Culture*
- 181 MARIANNE NOBLE  
*Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*
- 180 KATE STANLEY  
*Practices of Surprise in American Literature after Emerson*
- 179 JOHANNES VOELZ  
*The Poetics of Insecurity*
- 178 JOHN HAY  
*Postapocalyptic Fantasies in Antebellum American Literature*
- 177 PAUL JAUSSEN  
*Writing in Real Time*
- 176 CINDY WEINSTEIN  
*Time, Tense, and American Literature*
- 175 CODY MARS  
*Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War*

*(Continued after the Index)*

# COUNTERFEIT CULTURE

*Truth and Authenticity in the American  
Prose Epic since 1960*

ROB TURNER

*University of Exeter*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-108-42848-4 — Counterfeit Culture  
 Rob Turner  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
 New Delhi – 110025, India  
 79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108428484](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108428484)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108625418

© Rob Turner 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Turner, Rob, 1985– author

TITLE: Counterfeit culture : truth and authenticity in the American prose epic since 1960 / Rob Turner, University College London.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Series: Cambridge studies in American literature and culture | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2018051984 | ISBN 9781108428484 (alk. paper)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Epic literature, American – History and criticism. | American fiction – 20th century – History and criticism. | Authenticity (Philosophy) in literature. | Literature and society – United States – History – 20th century.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PS169.E63 T87 2018 | DDC 813/.5409–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018051984>

ISBN 978-1-108-42848-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

*For Alfie*

*The U.S.A. is one of the most inauthentic nations on earth.*

*William T. Vollmann*

## *Contents*

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <i>List of Figures</i>   | <i>page</i> viii |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>  | ix               |
| Introduction: America and the ‘Way to the Devil’                               | 1                |
| 1 Marguerite Young’s Flood of Consciousness                                    | 15               |
| 2 William Gaddis and the ‘Novel-Writing-Machine’ of Andy Warhol                | 47               |
| 3 ‘Paper Reality’: William S. Burroughs and the Cut-Up Method                  | 78               |
| 4 ‘Bad History’: Thomas Pynchon and the Apocryphal Epic                        | 110              |
| 5 ‘History Shambles On’: William T. Vollmann and the <i>Seven Dreams</i> Cycle | 145              |
| Conclusion: ‘Every Story Has Two Tails’  | 187              |
| <i>Bibliography</i>  | 199              |
| <i>Index</i>   | 215              |

## *Figures*

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 2.1 Advertisement, <i>The Palm Beach Post</i> (11 May 1933), p. 5 | <i>page</i> 73 |
| 2.2 Article, <i>The Palm Beach Post</i> (13 March 1953), p. 13    | 74             |
| 3.1 Cut-Up Method (Mark 2), as described to Ginsberg              | 82             |
| 3.2 Brion Gysin, untitled calligraphic illustration (1962)        | 109            |



## *Acknowledgements*

Thanks to Robert Macfarlane, for being a guide and friend throughout the research and writing of this book. I am also grateful to Ray Ryan, Ross Posnock and the staff at Cambridge University Press for their support, and to Kasia Boddy and Stephen J. Burn for crucial suggestions and corrections. Without the support of Mark Ford I would never have commenced my doctoral work.

My research was made possible by generous grants from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, Emmanuel College, the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge and the Gerard Evans fund. Thanks are also due to Alex Houen, Michael Hrebniak, Tom LeClair and Steven Moore for their guidance, and to Rebecca Jewett and the staff of the Ohio State University Rare Books & Manuscripts Library for their invaluable aid. And special thanks to William T. Vollmann for his generosity. Thanks to old friends and new, in Cambridge, London, Exeter, New York and San Francisco, for keeping me going. As ever, love to my family, and thanks for everything.