



Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses

By Michael Taussig

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In his most ambitious and accomplished work to date, Michael Taussig undertakes a history of mimesis, the practice of imitation, and its relation to alterity, the opposition of Self and Other. Drawing upon such diverse sources as theories of Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer, research on the Cuna Indians, and theories of colonialism and postcolonialism, Taussig shows that the history of mimesis is deeply tied to colonialism, and more specifically, to the colonial trade's construction of "savages." With analysis that is vigorous, unorthodox, and often breathtaking, Taussig's cross-cultural discussion of mimesis deepens our understanding of the relationship between ethnography, racism and society.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Taussig's deeply informed anthropological readings present us with a contemporary cabinet of curiosities that informs the longstanding fascination with the primitive in the constitution of the modern, and shocks us, in the spirit of Benjamin, into reconsidering what we thought we had largely dismissed in our concerns with the politics of representation."

-George E. Marcus, Rice University

"In "Mimesis and Alterity" Taussig investigates the contacts between anthropologists and subjects and the world created therein . . . his accounts have the tactility one gets from a good storyteller."

-"Artforum

"This book can most profitably be read in conjunction with Taussig's provocative and often original earlier works (e.g. "The Devil and Commodity Fetishism) since these provide the details of the historical and cultural stage of mimetic performance."

-"Bulletin of Society for the Anthropology of Europe, October, 1993

From the Back Cover

In *Mimesis and Alterity* Taussig undertakes an eccentric history of the mimetic faculty. He moves easily from the nineteenth-century invention of mimetically capacious machines, such as the camera, backwards to the fable of colonial first contact's alleged mimetic prowess of primitives, and then forward to contemporary time, when the idea of alterity is increasingly unstable. Utilizing anthropological theory, Taussig blends Latin American ethnography and colonial history with the insights of Walter Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer. Vigorous and unorthodox, Taussig's understanding of mimesis in different cultures deepens our meaning of ethnography, racism and society.

About the Author

Michael Taussig is 1933 Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, USA, and is affiliated with the European Graduate School in Switzerland.

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