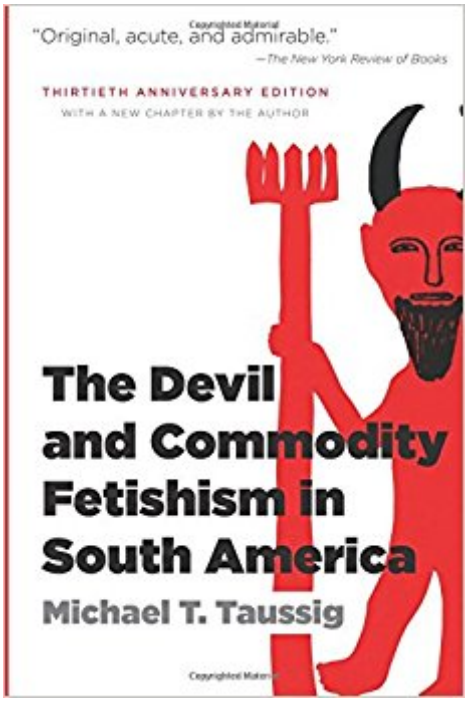
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The Devil And Commodity Fetishism In South America



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Synopsis

In this classic book, Michael Taussig explores the social significance of the devil in the folklore of contemporary plantation workers and miners in South America. Grounding his analysis in Marxist theory, Taussig finds that the fetishization of evil, in the image of the devil, mediates the conflict between precapitalist and capitalist modes of objectifying the human condition. He links traditional narratives of the devil-pact, in which the soul is bartered for illusory or transitory power, with the way in which production in capitalist economies causes workers to become alienated from the commodities they produce. A new chapter for this anniversary edition features a discussion of Walter Benjamin and Georges Bataille that extends Taussig's ideas about the devil-pact metaphor.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Taussig succeeds brilliantly in his central purpose: to help us to see the challenge as being to defetishize, to control our culture and its poetic products, and not be controlled by them.--LabourFortunately for the reader, the author is not only a sophisticated practicing anthropologist--and incidentally a medical man--but also a person of wide and cosmopolitan literary culture. . . . The interest of this exercise extends far beyond two backward corners of South America. How human beings make intellectual sense of the world in which they live, and which they no longer even partially control, is a question which concerns all of us. What they do with the 'social constructions (and deceptions) of reality' is equally significant. For men strive not only to understand but to change the world.--E. J. Hobsbawm, New York Review of BooksOriginal, acute, and admirable.--The New York Review of Books[Taussig] gives us superb ethnography, a Marxist

critique of world capitalism, a lesson in analogical and dialectical techniques (some of them bordering on the mystical), and argues convincingly that humanist interpretation can be as empirically 'hard' as scientific measurement. . . . [He] develops a set of painstaking techniques that allow us to 'read' the text of Caucana beliefs by means of an elaborate iconography derived from analogic reasoning and grounded in Marxist theory. Such a text is not to be 'understood' as a peasant or folk recourse to 'limited good' or 'folk Catholocism,' but rather as revelatory of real social relationships that are disguised in more advanced capitalist societies by the process of ideological mystification that Marx called 'the fetishism of commodities.'--Norman E. Whitten Jr., American Anthropologist

Michael T. Taussig is professor of anthropology at Columbia University. He is author of ten books, including What Color Is the Sacred? and Walter Benjamin's Grave.

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