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My Cocaine Museum



Synopsis

In this book, a make-believe cocaine museum becomes a vantage point from which to assess the lives of Afro-Colombian gold miners drawn into the dangerous world of cocaine production in the rain forest of Colombia's Pacific Coast. Although modeled on the famous Gold Museum in Colombia's central bank, the Banco de la República, Taussig's museum is also a parody aimed at the museum's failure to acknowledge the African slaves who mined the country's wealth for almost four hundred years. Combining natural history with political history in a filmic, montage style, Taussig deploys the show-and-tell modality of a museum to engage with the inner life of heat, rain, stone, and swamp, no less than with the life of gold and cocaine. This effort to find a poetry of words becoming things is brought to a head by the explosive qualities of those sublime fetishes of evil beauty, gold and cocaine. At its core, Taussig's museum is about the lure of forbidden things, charged substances that transgress moral codes, the distinctions we use to make sense of the world, and above all the conventional way we write stories.

Book Information

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, which is a technique he coyly conceals. The reader, whether of books or nature, passes into that which is being read. (29) [We travel to "2: the Drug Room"] Is this travel? It seems more like a physiological test. (191) Benjamin has his hashish, I have Malbec, but Taussig admits no cocaine. He does not inhale, yet his pages are sprinkled with the rambling stream-of-conscious and free-association rush of this fetishized powder and, reflexively, with himself. Perhaps, like abstemious Nietzsche, his only drugs are those of internal passion: observation and outrage. His

method, like his prose, reflects a paradoxical geography: were I a fish, I could swim up the coast from Mulattos a hundred miles to Buenaventura, a few thousand more miles, hugging the coast and I'd be home in San Buenaventura; were I a bird I could fly towards Polaris, like a missile until I descend mid-way between Baltimore and Philadelphia. How you travel determines where you wind up. Taussig, in undocumented fashion, crosses the map-imposed border of academic verification and asserts that "the United States [is] the most incarcerated society in the world" (273). With what authority does he assert this? Whether citing B. Traven or Kilgore Trout, Taussig lets his references and citations roam freely. Like a stone skipping across water, his documentation leaves ripples at seemingly sporadic intervals. Taussig does not provide (does not have faith in) maps; he prefers we swim or fly via the landscape of his words, instinctively, without thinking destination. But there is a destination; we will be guided to discover the placeness of place which JZ Smith denies. "This is a story about a prison island" (273). [We enter ¶1: the Prison Island Room] Is this the central room of the museum?

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