



Magical Criticism: The Recourse of Savage Philosophy

Christopher Bracken

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During the Enlightenment, Western scholars racialized ideas, deeming knowledge based on reality superior to that based on ideality. Scholars labeled inquiries into ideality, such as animism and soul-migration, “savage philosophy,” a clear indicator of the racism motivating the distinction between the real and the ideal. In their view, the savage philosopher mistakes connections between signs for connections between real objects and believes that discourse can have physical effects—in other words, they believe in magic.

Christopher Bracken’s *Magical Criticism* brings the unacknowledged history of this racialization to light and shows how, even as we have rejected ethnocentric notions of “the savage,” they remain active today in everything from attacks on postmodernism to Native American land disputes. Here Bracken reveals that many of the most influential Western thinkers dabbled in savage philosophy, from Marx, Nietzsche, and Proust, to Freud, C. S. Peirce, and Walter Benjamin. For Bracken, this recourse to savage philosophy presents an opportunity to reclaim a magical criticism that can explain the very real effects created by the discourse of historians, anthropologists, philosophers, the media, and governments.

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