



The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious (Studies in Violence, Mimesis, & Culture)

By Nidesh Lawtoo

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The Phantom of the Ego is the first comparative study that shows how the modernist account of the unconscious anticipates contemporary discoveries about the importance of mimesis in the formation of subjectivity. Rather than beginning with Sigmund Freud as the father of modernism, Nidesh Lawtoo starts with Friedrich Nietzsche's antimetaphysical diagnostic of the ego, his realization that mimetic reflexes—from sympathy to hypnosis, to contagion, to crowd behavior—move the soul, and his insistence that psychology informs philosophical reflection. Through a transdisciplinary, comparative reading of landmark modernist authors like Nietzsche, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Georges Bataille, Lawtoo shows that, before being a timely empirical discovery, the “mimetic unconscious” emerged from an untimely current in literary and philosophical modernism. This book traces the psychological, ethical, political, and cultural implications of the realization that the modern ego is born out of the spirit of imitation; it is thus, strictly speaking, not an ego, but what Nietzsche calls, “a phantom of the ego.” *The Phantom of the Ego* opens up a Nietzschean back door to the unconscious that has mimesis rather than dreams as its *via regia*, and argues that the modernist account of the “mimetic unconscious” makes our understanding of the psyche new.

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About the Author

Nidesh Lawtoo is a SNSF Visiting Scholar at The Humanities Center, Johns Hopkins University.

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