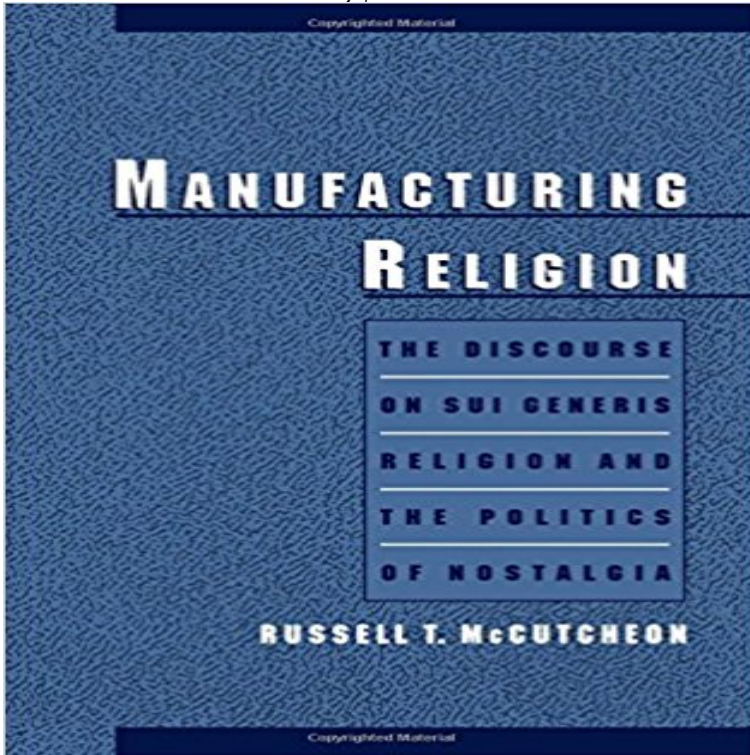


Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia



In this new book, author Russell McCutcheon offers a powerful critique of traditional scholarship on religion, focusing on multiple interrelated targets. Most prominent among these are the History of Religions as a discipline; Mircea Eliade, one of the founders of the modern discipline; recent scholarship on Eliade's life and politics; contemporary textbooks on world religions; and the oft-repeated bromide that religion is a sui generis phenomenon. McCutcheon skillfully analyzes the ideological basis for and service of the sui generis argument, demonstrating that it has been used to constitute the fields object of study in a form that is ahistoric, apolitical, fetishized, and sacrosanct. As such, he charges, it has helped to create departments, jobs, and publication outlets for those who are comfortable with such a suspect construction, while establishing a disciplinary ethos of astounding theoretical naivete and a body of scholarship to match. Surveying the textbooks available for introductory courses in comparative religion, the author finds that they uniformly adopt the sui generis line and all that comes with it. As a result, he argues, they are not just uncritical (which helps keep them popular among the audiences for which they are intended, but badly deserve), but actively inhibit the emergence of critical perspectives and capacities. And on the geo-political scale, he contends, the study of religion as an ahistorical category participates in a larger system of political domination and economic and cultural imperialism.

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