

American mythologies, Marshall Blonsky, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1992, 0195050622, 9780195050622, 517 pages. What's it like to witness the moments that define a culture? Marshall Blonsky spent four years on three continents as a fly on the wall-- albeit one with a doctorate in semiotics--watching the dreammakers of international culture construct the attitudes and lifestyles of the early 90s: Giorgio Armani, in his Milan studio, sketching a faux humble sack suit that will usher in the penitent 90s...Vanna White in gold lame, sitting in her private hair studio wondering if Ted Koppel is mocking her...Costa-Gavras, cradling his son in Paris, revealing a secret about TV commercials... Stephen King describing a ghost he saw while laying his wife's coat on a bed at a party...Peter Greenaway turning deconstruction into chic films for those of us with a case of culture-ache...Yevgeny Yevtushenko cooking lunch in Moscow, telling a hair-raising tale about the former Soviet Union. Logging the air miles from Tokyo, Hong Kong, London, Paris, Milan, Moscow, and Beverly Hills, Blonsky tells a mischievous, impudent tale of life and thought at the top of the cultural tower. When Russian TV star Vladimir Pozner calls him an agent (in whose service, he doesn't know) he touches on a device of this book. The author made himself a protean character, a soft-outlined creature now giving advice to "Nightline" producers, now pitching in on a porn shoot, now falling in behind Donald Trump on the dais of a Reagan banquet. He lived four years like an inquiring Rohrschach test, making his subjects show and tell "too much"--and thus give away the store. "He tricked me, seduced me," Merv Griffin said after the encounter. But the author is too mercurial to be merely a trickster. He is more a kind of Don Quixote travelling across our landscape of ugliness and deadly play, convening what is, in effect, a global town-meeting. TV anchors, artists, film directors, designers, photographers, writers, and editors: what they comprise is no less than a hidden order--a cultural power structure as important as the economic one. Whether grave, frivolous, boastful, or drunk, they enable us to grasp the logic of the ethical and cultural systems they are concocting to suit our new age of faxes and cellular phones, laptops and robots. They are creating a United States of Capitalism, an archipelago of privilege in a sea of misery. Who's in this archipelago? Who's out? American Mythologies decodes the unforeseen shifts in world power (including America's much debated "decline") while sketching in the coming shape of the world...

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