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**Anthropology as storytelling:
fetishism and terror in Michael Taussig's early works**

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Abstract: *Among anthropologists inspired by Walter Benjamin and the early Frankfurt School, Michael Taussig is notable. For Taussig, Benjamin is like a muse, a source of inspiration to ponder over his extended fieldwork in South America. This article outlines a possible reading path through Taussig's early works, a path specifically influenced by Benjamin's insights into topics such as fetishism, violence, and storytelling. In particular, it examines the way Taussig approaches two issues: the Marxian question of commodity fetishism, and the question of writing against terror. The analysis of commodity and State fetishism leads Taussig to reject the symptomatic reading offered by thinkers such as Marx and Freud. The issue of violence or terror drives him to reflect on the politics of representation. In line with Benjamin's reflections on the role of the storyteller in bourgeois society, Taussig intertwines these two lines of thought and interprets anthropology as a form of storytelling. This article highlights some of the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind this provocative idea. It argues that despite the radical nature of its premises, Taussig defends a weak conception of criticism.*

Keywords: *Postmodern Anthropology, Walter Benjamin, Storytelling, Violence, Fetishism, Truth.*

Introduction

In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986), George Marcus and Michael Fischer emphasise the influence of the early Frankfurt School on cultural anthropologists' attempts to elaborate critical analysis. In this light, the main merit of thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin is that they offer a demystifying perspective that challenges the fundamentals of capitalist society. Further, their insights often translate in an essayistic style that has become a source of inspiration for many postmodern anthropologists, undermining the most established academic writing style and rethinking the links between poetics and politics.¹

Among anthropologists inspired by Walter Benjamin and the early Frankfurt School, Michael Taussig stands out. For this anthropologist, Benjamin is like a muse, a source of inspiration that has guided him throughout his extended fieldwork in South America. The ability to convey these experiences in written form is one of Taussig's central concerns, bordering on obsession. His writing experiments subscribe to the idea that ethnographers should abandon all pretence of innocence and consider their texts as forms of fictions rather than representations of allegedly objective realities. Re-interpreting one of Benjamin's most influential essays for postmodern anthropologists – *The Storyteller* (1936) – Taussig considers anthropology to be a form of storytelling that critically analyses the consolidated certainties of everyday life and the institutions and founding myths that sustain every society.

This short essay aims to outline a possible reading path through the complex, fragmented and elusive mixture of reflections and themes that Taussig tackled primarily in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. It is in this period that this anthropologist develop his own critical anthropological perspective. The essay focuses on two recurring issues in Taussig's works: the Marxian question of commodity fetishism, and the question of (writing

against) violence or terror. Following this path, this essay highlights some of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that drive Taussig to consider anthropology as a form of storytelling.

Getting with the fetish

In order to frame the theoretical path developed by Taussig on the issue of fetishism, it is useful to begin with his first book, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980). In some respects this is the most conventional work published during his long and prolific career. Yet, in 1980 its publication was a pioneering attempt to combine the political-economic approach based on Marx's works with the symbolic-interpretative perspective that had been in vogue in American anthropology since the 1970s.²

One of the primary goals of this book is to show how all societies tend to present the categories of space, time, causation and human relations as "natural things", and not as historical and social products. In this perspective, the task of a critical anthropological analysis is to show the "social" that produces the "natural" in order to «liberate ourselves from the fetish and phantom objectivity with which society obscure itself.»³ To this end, Taussig makes the long journey that anthropologists often make, visiting distant lands in order to find the needed distance to de-familiarise the familiar.⁴ Thus, he examines two different Latin American contexts: on one hand, the Colombian sugar cane plantations, where in the early 1970s, descendants of African slaves worked on contract, and on the other hand, the Bolivian tin mines studied by June Nash at approximately the same period.⁵ These two cases share some similarities. For example, both plantation workers and tin miners were paid according to their production. However, what makes this comparison worthy of interest is the fact that both categories of workers entered into pacts with the devil to be more productive

and increase their earnings without any added effort. In the case of the plantations, pacts were secret, and the money earned in this way was supposedly never productive: it ended up being squandered on luxuries or invested in unsuccessful assets. Similarly, land where peasants established pacts with the devil became infertile. Thus, by referring to pacts with the devil, peasant communities explained the success, as well as the fall from grace of some individuals. In the case of tin miners, the figure of the devil appeared in a ritualised context in which workers not only ask to become richer, but also to be protected from the dangers that frequently occurred underground. It is worth noting that in the latter case, the devil was often represented in the guise of an American *gringo*, complete with a brimmed hat and cigar.⁶

Beyond the details of Taussig's analysis, the central hypothesis of this book is that the devil «is a stunningly apt symbol of the alienation experienced by peasants as they enter the ranks of the proletariat»,⁷ the social class that, as defined by Marx, is dispossessed of the means of production and is forced to sell its labour power like any other commodity. Because rural life is dominated, instead, by the logic of reciprocity and gifts, these plantation and tin mine workers face one of the fundamental contradictions of capital: that which exists between use value and exchange value. In this light, the image of the devil cannot be considered to be an anachronistic relic of the past, tied to a superstitious mentality, but rather as an oblique form of critique directed at exploitative forms of capitalism and its inherent contradictions. In other words, these South American workers show – using the metaphorical language of religion – the “unnaturalness” of the practices that our commodified society accept as “natural”, to the point where they are taken for granted. In this sense, commodity fetishism as discussed by

Marx in Book I of *The Capital* finds “literal expression”, so to speak, in the imagination of these workers.⁸

It is against the background of this analysis that, in a dense and complex essay titled *Maleficium: State Fetishism* (1993), Taussig resumes his analysis of the Marxian notion of commodity fetishism to examine the question of the cultural formation of the modern State.⁹ In *Maleficium*, the underlying theoretical ambition is to place critical thinkers as Adorno and Benjamin into dialogue with radical and provocative intellectuals such as Jean Genet and George Bataille. The starting point of this essay on fetishism is represented by the opposing attitudes that the State takes in regards to its subjects: on the one hand, sacred and almost erotic attraction – here, the attempt to unify the Marxist and Freudian perspectives on fetishism is evident, something Benjamin had already tried to do – and, on the other hand, repulsion and disgust.

Taussig is fully aware of not being the first anthropologist to have highlighted the fetishistic side of the modern State. The British anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown, father of structural-functionalism, had already addressed the question of the State in terms of a philosophical fiction.¹⁰ He had observed that at the theoretical level the State is represented as an entity above and beyond individuals – such as to appear to have its own will. From Radcliffe-Brown’s point of view, however, “being real” is limited to the power of action of the individuals and social structures of which they are a part. As a result, power can only act through *real* individuals such as “kings, judges and policemen” and not through the State – which is a fiction.

The idea that the State is a fiction has also been proposed by the sociologist Philip Abrams, but in less radical terms.¹¹ For Abrams, too, the State cannot be treated as a thing and therefore it cannot be a «material object» of study.¹² This does not mean, however, that one should not take seriously the idea of the State

as a social and ideological project that legitimises the illegitimate. In this view, the State is a mask for practical politics and not the underlying reality of these same practices.¹³ In tune with Abrams, Taussig recognises the impalpability and “fictionality” of the State, the actual political power that it has, for example, to arm itself, to deport or imprison *real* people, or convince others to kill and to be ready to die for it as heroes – in short, to act as an instrument of domination as silent and obvious as it is effective. Unlike Abrams, however, Taussig does not share the “epistemology of appearance” – or, to put it another way, the depth-metaphysics¹⁴ – implicit in the metaphor of the State as a mask. This metaphor assumes that behind the veil of appearance hides a secret, deeper truth. Contrary to this, for Taussig, the State is «a meticulously shielded emptiness and magnificent deceit in whose making all members of the society (...) conspire».¹⁵ Obviously, the various members of a society conspire to constitute the State in different ways. It is primarily the collective fantasies of the excluded, of those who are at the margins of the State, or those who have not been initiated into this “empty secret”, giving it sacredness and power, defining the specific shape to the “S” in “State”: «not the basic truths, not the Being or the ideologies of the center»¹⁶. The question then is how to channel the power of the fantasies, produced at the margins and directed to an imagined centre, in critical and revolutionary practices. In this regard, Taussig takes some of the suggestions offered in Benjamin’s essay on surrealism (1929).¹⁷ In *Surrealism*, Benjamin credits the surrealists with having shaken the bourgeoisie consciousness by pointing out the mythical character of modernity. At the same time, he accuses them of being prisoners of its phantasmagorias – hence, the need for the surrealists to shock themselves and wake up from their dreaming. Similarly, Taussig invites theorists of commodity fetishism not to resist or to admonish it.

If anything, the question is to how recognise it and, possibly, to submit to it. Hence, the exhortation: «Get with it! Get in touch with the fetish!». ¹⁸ It is worth stressing once again that the underlying assumption of this exhortation is that there is not a mechanical way out of the fetishism; there is not a hidden truth to be brought to the surface which neutralises the fetish. Nevertheless, as the author of *Maleficium* recognises, critical thinking has the task of «defetishising», ¹⁹ or to use James Martel's expression, of being «anti-fetishistic». ²⁰ What Taussig suggests is to overthrow the power of fetishism against the power itself, being aware of the fact that: «the fetish absorbs into itself that which it represents, leaving no traces of the represented» ²¹. However, beyond exhortations, Taussig's proposal is not particularly clear or convincing. Martin Jay, for instance, sees it as a vacuous apotropaim that would have left Adorno perplexed. ²²

A possible defetishising strategy is put forward more clearly in another work: *The Magic of the State* (1997) – a work that Taussig himself has declared as «the most “fictional” of my writings». ²³ Here, the fieldwork is located in an unspecified “European Elsewhere”. As it is described, this place bears resemblance to a region of South America which roughly corresponds to Venezuela. In this essay-fiction, the anthropologist changes the names of places and people, inventing characters not only to protect the confidentiality of his interlocutors, but also to produce in the reader an estrangement effect that evokes the rhetorical strategies adopted by Bertolt Brecht in his works. Once again, the goal is to show the fetishist or fictional character of the nation-state. The idea pursued here is that in order to deal with these types of «terribly real» fictions ²⁴ – to highlight, in other words, their arbitrary nature and, at the same time, their ability to produce material effects – it is necessary to be on the same level as the fictions

of the dominants, turning their own strategies of reification and sacralisation of the constituted dis-order against them.

Culture of terror and healing

In Taussig, the notion of fetishism is closely intertwined with those of violence or terror. In an interview with John Cline, the anthropologist acknowledges that he became interested in this specific subject in the mid-1980s while working on the draft of his second book, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (1987). This book brings to mind Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophical masterpiece *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), written during the Second World War when they were both in exile in the United States. Against the backdrop of the European experience of the horrors of Nazism and Fascism, a crucial question guides the analysis of the two philosophers: how is it possible that a society that has achieved such an extraordinary degree of production power «instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism»?²⁵ The two scholars highlight the limits of Marxism's critique of capitalist society. Indeed, it appears inadequate when it come to their question, and does not give a clear explanation as to why Marx and Engels's prophesied revolution has not yet taken place. One of the core theses of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that the logic of domination transcends the pure logic of the economy; in fact, the first precedes and survives beyond the latter, and therefore cannot be secondary. For Horkheimer and Adorno, analysing this logic means exploring the contradictions inherent in the Enlightenment's idea of Reason and examining the very idea of "progress", beginning with its own mythical and magical aspects, its "irrational rationalism."

As the authors of *Dialectic Enlightenment* are interested in exploring the «subterranean history» that runs beneath the known history of Europe,²⁶ in the same way, *Shamanism*,

Colonialism and the Wild West is largely an underground colonial history of the Amazon region of Putumayo. Taussig's attention is captured by this particular South American region because the descendants of black slaves living in the Valley of Cauca in Colombia often refer to the shamans of Putumayo as the most powerful healers. Thus, Taussig embarks on a long journey which brings him into Amazon rainforest, a journey that becomes also an initiation into the local healing systems and the ritual use of yagé, the hallucinogenic beverage used by shamans to stimulate visions.

A central thesis of Taussig's book is that in the repertoire of the shamanic imaginary and visions native to the region, traces of a colonial holocaust emerge. From an historical point of view, this holocaust is well-documented. In 1907, Walter Hardenburg was among the first to document the violence in Putumayo against local population, particularly, the Huitotos. Hardenburg was an American engineer who spent a period of time imprisoned by men employed by Julio César Arana's rubber company. He told of what he saw during his imprisonment in a series of journalistic accounts. Hardenburg was able to witness first-hand the senseless violence in Putumayo: tortures, rapes and gratuitous killings.

When Hardenburg's words reached the British public, they created such an outcry that the British Government decided to send one of its representative on the site. The task was entrusted to Sir Roger Casement, who had already carried out a similar survey in the Belgian Congo in the early twentieth century, denouncing the barbarity of the European colonisers. The result of Casement's prolonged exploration of the Amazon forest (1910-1911) was a report that confirmed what until then had seemed, for the most part, to be rumours: mutilated and tortured

bodies; executions and systematic abuses against young and old members of indigenous communities.

As Taussig notes, Casement's report offered a rigid political-economic reading of these events. According to the British government representative, the rubber company had to face a problem of an economic nature: how to make profits with a limited number of labourers and low-quality rubber. In this light, the use of violence was instrumental in subjugating the indigenous labour and increasing productivity. For Taussig, this analysis is unsatisfactory because it does not explain the unprecedented level of violence reached in Putumayo. Indeed, Casement attributes an "illusory rationality" to the market that makes sense of what, in reality, escapes to any effort of rationalisation. To what end did the company massacre defenceless people to the point of almost exterminating the local population? Rationalising the logic behind these atrocities means concealing the underlying reasons that have turned violence from a means to an end in itself. In Putumayo, the men of the company reached such a level of brutality and destructiveness that the very possibility for the reproduction of the indigenous workforce was jeopardised. Casement's analysis does not explain why the company, acting for profit, in fact, created the conditions for the destruction of its essential source of profits: the indigenous labour force.

Taussig suggests engaging, rather than simply penetrating, the veil of the logic of profit in order to turn the hallucinatory quality of violence against itself.²⁷ Taking into account the fantasies and the imaginary of the oppressors, the author of *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, argues that the "culture of terror" created by the men of the company acted not only on their primary victims, the Huitotos, but also on the oppressors themselves. In this regard, Taussig uses the

expressions «epistemic murk» and «epistemic confusion» to describe what lies between what is true and what is false, between the real and the fictitious. Analysing the existing historical documents, it emerges that the men of the company were obsessed with death, and therefore they lived in fear. Surprisingly, they were terrified by the Huitotos. They thought that their victims were primitive and violent “savages”, capable of abhorrent practices such as cannibalism. As stated by Romulo Parades, a Peruvian judge in charge of investigating the facts regarding Putumayo:

*Their imagination [of the station managers where the rub was extracted] was diseased [...] and they saw everywhere attacks by Indians, conspiracies, uprisings, treachery etc. and in order to save themselves from these fancied perils [...] they killed, and killed without compassion.*²⁸

According to Taussig, this diseased imagination was partially triggered by the corps of indigenous guards employed by the company, the so called “muchachos” of Barbadian origins, whose purpose was to enforce the orders of the managers and to punish transgressors. These guards played an important symbolic role in feeding oppressors’ fears by confirming the truthfulness of the rumours about Huitotos, and in so doing, objectifying their paranoiac fantasies. Thus, these “savage Indians” of the Putumayo acted as a sort of “colonial mirror” onto which the men of the company projected their own barbarism. In the world of fear that they themselves had created, the only way to survive was to imitate the terror seen through this mirror. To use Taussig’s words: «the terror and tortures they devised mirrored the horror of the savagery they both feared and fictionalized.»²⁹

Unsurprisingly, Taussig rejects those sociological theses that interpret shamanic healing rituals only to be symbolic attempts to restore psychic order and social unity. For the author of

Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man, contemporary shamanic practices are efforts to simultaneously create and undo (with the sufferers) what he defines as the «space of death». Paradoxically, it is from this space «where the social imagination has populated its metamorphizing images of evil»,³⁰ filled with anguished images and stories of terror, that shamans derive their healing power. This space is fraught with contradictions that open up the possibility of transmuting the death in life, the evil in salvation. Thus, the magic power of today's shamanic healing rituals includes the memory, full of hope of salvation, of the “wild” men of the Putumayo. It is worth emphasising that these sad figures and images are the result of complex process of co-creation in which the colonisers, missionaries, and local population each played a part. In not entirely predictable ways, Huitotos have now become what Benjamin would consider “dialectical images”, that is, «picture puzzles which shock by way of their enigmatic form and thereby set thinking in motion».³¹ As images of the space of death, Huitotos are capable of simultaneously representing and transforming misfortune in the power of healing, the evil in the good. Significantly, Taussig explicitly refers to the dream-world of popular imagination evoked by Benjamin. It is in this reality of images and myths that the battle for preparing a truly revolutionary act is played. This reminds us that for Benjamin, too, in opposition to orthodox Marxism, myth and fantasy were battlefields that could not be left to reactionaries or fascists.³²

Some thoughts at the margins

Taussig considers anthropology to be a way of telling stories, a form of critical analysis that is aware of the role of language and consider the author to be a producer of realities. In line with Benjamin's reflections on the role of the storyteller in bourgeois society, Taussig argues that most anthropologists tend to reduce

their stories to information explaining the unknown with the known and the strange with the familiar. In other words, from his point of view, they are unable to face the fear of what is elusive and rationally untameable. On the contrary, postmodern anthropologists have the merit of recognising this fear and experimenting with narrative strategies «to leaving weirdness weird».³³

In the texts examined in this short essay, some epistemological and ontological assumptions emerge supporting this view. The analysis of commodity and State fetishism leads Taussig to reject the symptomatic reading offered by Marx and Freud. In this respect, his position is closer to those thinkers that for the most part share an aversion to the “depth”, particularly, Nietzsche, but also Adorno and Benjamin to a certain degree. The issue of violence or terror drives Taussig to reflect on the politics of representation, and on how to deal with these phenomena without reproducing them in the very act of writing, because «violence is such a phenomenon that writing about it can make it worse».³⁴

These two lines of thought converge on the idea that the anthropologist’s task is not to discover allegedly hidden truths, or to explain “facts”. For Taussig, the truth is always a mediated truth.³⁵ Further, he is not specifically interested whether something called “truth” corresponds with the real. In *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* he states unequivocally that «my subject is not the truth of being but the social being of truth, not whether facts are real but what the politics of their interpretation and representation are».³⁶ Recently, Taussig has provocatively compared his works to fairy tales and has claimed that he is first a writer and then an anthropologist.³⁷ The result is that Taussig has continued to write books that are stimulating from a literary point of view. Readers are fascinated by the narrative style and

the erudite thoughts contained in his stories, but they are often unsatisfied, sometimes even becoming “irritated” when they seek explanatory interpretations.³⁸ Often, readers have to assemble heterogeneous and allusive fragments by themselves. These materials, as they are presented, do not always offer enough *information* to dissect the contexts and gaining an understanding of the perspective of the social actors in question. At times, it seems that Benjamin is taken too literally, or out of the context, particularly when the Berliner thinker states that narrating consists largely of keeping «a story free from explanation as one reproduces it» so that the reader is free «to interpret things the way he understands them».³⁹ The problem, however, is that “things” do not always speak for themselves.⁴⁰ In addition, not all interpretations can be considered on the same level.

In relation to this, the medical anthropologist Paul Farmer – who has worked as a physician in some of the poorest regions of the world in direct contact with those who directly experience the effects of poverty, endemic diseases and global social injustice – reminds us that «some versions [of truth] must have more points of contact with external reality and actual events than others».⁴¹ In a certain way, those most vulnerable to structural violence themselves demand unequivocal positions. Looking for something that may be called “truth of facts” does not necessarily mean being naively positivist, as some postmodernists affirm in a somehow hasty and confused way.⁴² Rather, it means seeking a more solid foundation for strong critical thinking that is capable of combining understanding with compassion and solidarity with the most vulnerable.⁴³ On the contrary, despite the radical nature of its premises, Taussig defends a weak conception of criticism that inevitably has weak effects. In this view, storytelling is only likely to become a rhetorical art of challenging the dominant

discourses – but the effectiveness remains to be seen. Rather, the issue is to establish ethical relationships with others differently positioned⁴⁴ and at the same time, to radically question the world in order to *change* it.⁴⁵

Note

1 See: G.E. Marcus and M.M.J. Fischer (eds.), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1986.

2 See: *ibid.*, it. trans., p. 165.

3 M. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1980, p. 5.

4 See: C. Kluckhohn, *Mirror for man*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1949.

5 On this subject Nash published in the 1970s, but his monograph on Bolivian miners, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (Columbia University Press, New York), was published only in 1993. Taussig re-elaborates some of Nash's ethnographic material in the third part of his book after taking into account the plantation workers of the Cauca Valley.

6 The similarity with senior executives of mining companies does not go unnoticed.

7 M. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, cit., p. xi.

8 See: A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 54.

9 See: M. Taussig, *Maleficium: State Fetishism*, in E. Apter and William Pietz (eds.), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY and London, 1993, p. 218. This essay is also collected in M. Taussig, *The Nervous System* (Routledge, New York and London, 1992, pp. 111-140).

10 See: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Preface to African Political Systems*, in M. Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard, (eds.), *African Political Systems*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1940, p. xxiii, cit. in Taussig's *Maleficium*.

11 See: P. Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State", in «Journal of Historical Sociology», n. 1, vol. 1, 1988.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

14 See: N. Castree, "Commodity fetishism, geographical imaginations and imaginative geographies", in «Environment and Planning A», n. 33, 2001.

15 M. Taussig, *Maleficium*, cit., p. 240.

16 *Ibid.*

17 See: W. Benjamin, *Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia*, in Id. *Reflections*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1978.

18 M. Taussig, *Maleficium*, cit., p. 229.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

20 J. Martel, "Anti-fetishism: Notes on the thought of Walter Benjamin", in «Critical Legal Thinking», 22/03/2013, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/04/22/anti-fetishism-notes-on-the-thought-of-walter-benjamin/>, accessed on 22 October 2016.

21 M. Taussig, *Maleficium*, cit., p. 246.

22 M. Jay, "Unsympathetic magic", in «Visual Anthropology Review», n. 2, vol. 9, 1993, p. 81.

23 D. Levi-Strauss and Michael Taussig, "The magic of the state: An interview with Michael Taussig", in «Cabinet», n. 18, 2005, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/18/strauss.php>, accessed on 24 October 2016.

- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 M. Horkheimer and Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002, p. xiv.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- 27 M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987, p. 10.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 369.
- 32 See: M. Taussig, “History as sorcery”, in «Representations», n. 7, 1984, p. 89.
- 33 M. Taussig, “The Diary as Witness: An Anthropologist Writes What he Must”, in «The Chronicle Review», 19/12/2003, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Diary-as-Witness-an/11035>, accessed on 15 October 2016.
- 34 J. Cline and M. Taussig, “I swear I saw this: John Cline interviews Michael Taussig”, in «Los Angeles Review of Books», 03/01/2013, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/i-swear-i-read-this-john-cline-interviews-michael-taussig>, accessed on 27 October 2016.
- 35 See: M. Taussig, “The Diary as Witness”, in «The Chronicle Review», cit.
- 36 M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, cit., p. xiii.
- 37 See: J. Cline and M. Taussig, “I swear I saw this”, in «Los Angeles Review of Books», cit.

38 See: S. Nugent, “Taussig Michael. Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing”, in «Man», n. 2, vol. 32, 1988, p. 402.

39 W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 1968, p. 89.

40 See: N. Polier and W. Roseberry, “Tristes Tropes: Post-Modern Anthropologists Encounter the Other and Discover Themselves”, in «Economy and Society», n. 2, vol. 18, p. 251.

41 P. Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2005, p. 69.

42 See: N. Polier and W. Roseberry, “Tristes Tropes”, cit.

43 According to Paul Farmer, the concept of truth is both the premise of the possibility of knowing with compassion and solidarity, and bearing witness to those forms of violence and misery that afflict the most the vulnerable. Farmer aims to call into question the myths and propaganda of the oppressors (see: *Pathologies of Power*, cit., pp. 269-70).

44 E. Cameron, “New geographies of story and storytelling”, in «Progress in Human Geography», n. 5, vol. 36, 2012, p. 583.

45 On the idea of “storytelling for social change” it worth mentioning geographer feminists such J.K. Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008), and S. Razack, “Story-Telling for Social Change” (in «Gender and Education», n. 1, vol. 5, 1993). R Maggio offers a useful review on anthropology and storytelling in “The Anthropology of Storytelling and the Storytelling of Anthropology” (in «Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology», n. 2, vol. 5, 2014).

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