

MICROHISTORY  
AND  
CINEMATIC  
EXPERIENCE:  
TWO OR THREE  
THINGS  
I KNOW ABOUT  
CARLO GINZBURG

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[...] you can look at a piece of a puzzle for three whole days, you can believe that you know all there is to know about its colouring and shape, and be no further on than when you started. The only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces, and in that sense the art of the jigsaw puzzle has something in common with the art of go. The pieces are readable, take on a sense, only when assembled; in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing – just an impossible question, an opaque challenge. But as soon as you have succeeded, after minutes of trial and error, or after a prodigious half-second flash of inspiration, in fitting it into one of its neighbours, the piece disappears, ceases to exist as a piece. The intense difficulty preceding this link-up – which the English word *puzzle* indicates so well – not only loses its *raison d'être*, it seems never to have had any reason, so obvious does the solution appear. The two pieces so miraculously conjoined are henceforth one, which in its turn will be a source of error, hesitation, dismay, and expectation.

– Georges Perec, 1978<sup>1</sup>

There comes a moment (though not always) in research when all the pieces begin to fall into place, as in a jig-saw puzzle. But unlike the jig-saw puzzle, where all the pieces are near at hand and only one figure can be assembled (and thus the correctness of each move be determined immediately), in research only some of the pieces are available, and theoretically more than one figure can be made from them. In fact, there is always the risk of using, more or less consciously, the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle as blocks in a construction game. For this reason, the fact that everything falls into place is an ambiguous sign: either one is completely right or completely wrong. When wrong, we mistake for objective verification the selection and solicitation (more or less deliberate) of the evidence, which is forced to confirm the presuppositions (more or less explicit) of the research itself. The dog thinks it is biting the bone and is instead biting its own tail.

– Carlo Ginzburg & Adriano Prosperi, 1975<sup>2</sup>

When speaking of ‘cinematic experience’, I take my cue from a recent study by the Canadian media scholar Jaimie Baron entitled *The Archive Effect*. Her interest, in brief, lies in the way in which audiovisual media in general and archival footage in particular have reconfigured our relation to the past, beginning at the invention of cinema, if not earlier, and continuing right up to our digital present.<sup>3</sup> In Baron’s interpretation, this development has had a profound impact on the prevailing ‘regime of historicity’, to employ François Hartog’s well-known term. Most immediately, it has contributed to broader changes in the conception of what constitutes a historical archive. “The notion of an archive as a particular place and of archival documents as material objects stored at a particular location,” Baron argues, “has ceased to reflect the complex apparatus that now constitutes our relation to the past through its photographic, filmic, audio, video, and digital traces.”<sup>4</sup> Even more profoundly, the growing pervasiveness of audiovisual media would seem to have affected our very sense of historical experience – the manner in which the past becomes present to us.

On the one hand, there is a widely shared sentiment that archival footage in some way brings us ‘closer’ to the past than any other historical source. “Indeed,” Baron writes, “the past seems to become not only knowable but also *perceptible* in these images. They offer us an *experience* of pastness, an experience that no written word can quite match.”<sup>5</sup> Archival footage, one might go so far as to claim, has somehow – in an emotional, but perhaps also ethical sense – received the same charge that religious icons or relics once possessed and that was gradually (and only partially) transmitted to historic monuments and other *lieux de mémoire* over the course of the long nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, this feeling of proximity or even intimacy is also suffused with a paradoxical sense of estrangement, as if the very ‘reality effect’ produced by archival footage inevitably gives rise to a corresponding, but opposed effect of irrealism. To a significant extent, this is probably due to the sheer indiscriminate nature of mechanically produced images, the fact that they capture everything in the camera’s sight without regard for its significance. For this reason, as Baron points out, audiovisual sources “pose many problems [...] that are absent – or at least easier to repress – in written documents.” Here, “issues of excess are even more prominent” in the sense that audiovisual sources seem “especially resistant to full comprehension or interpretation.”<sup>7</sup> And since this resistance, in its turn, only contributes to the feeling of closeness to which archival footage gives rise, we are right in suspecting that our appreciation of audiovisual experience and our apprehension of audiovisual excess are really two sides of the same coin, linked into the same hermeneutic feedback circuit.

In this regard, what Baron calls *the audiovisual experience of history* might actually provide a clue to the historical origins of the very condition of *presentism* which Hartog’s ‘regimes of historicity’ were intended to put into perspective: “the sense” – increasingly prominent in the aftermath of the two World Wars and

almost entirely predominant since the fall of the Berlin Wall – “that only the present exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now.”<sup>8</sup> Could this experience of an “omnipresent present” be related to the current excess – and continual excessiveness – of audiovisual media? And would such a conjecture lead us to conclude that presentism does indeed represent “a new experience of time and a new regime of historicity,” constituting “a substantial state” rather than just “a moment of stasis”?<sup>9</sup>

Tantalizing as it may be, I do not intend to pursue this speculative line of reasoning any further at the moment. Nor do I find Baron’s discussion convincing in all respects. To my mind, her argument recurrently suffers from a certain lack of semiotic subtlety, which in turn results in a rather predictable contradiction between images and words, micro and macro, ‘fragment’ and ‘grand narrative’, and so on. This tendency is further reinforced by her overarching emphasis on expression (rather than content) and reception (rather than conception) – in other words, on the private (rather than public) side of experience, *Erlebnis* as opposed to *Erfahrung*. Such a bias may be understood – and hence, in part, understandable – as a theoretical antidote to received notions of objectivity, for instance in the theory of documentary film, but it seems less useful from a wider, practical perspective.

Nevertheless, I do find Baron’s general idea of an ‘audiovisual experience of history’ useful. Taking this hypothesis as a point of departure, my own thesis could be summarized as follows: If the relation between past and present, history and archive, has indeed been reconfigured under the impact of audiovisual media, as Baron argues, then microhistory – at least as practiced by the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg (\* 1939) – can be considered an advance indication of that change; an early response on the methodological seismograph to an imminent tectonic shift in historiography’s own historic conditions of possibility. In order to flesh out this assertion, I will first have to touch on two especially salient themes in Ginzburg’s own historical and methodological reflections: The relation between history and literature on the one hand, and words and images on the other.

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Fifty years have passed since the original publication of Ginzburg’s first work, *I Benandanti* (English title: *The Night Battles*).<sup>10</sup> In the half century spanned by his long career, the relation between history and literature, factual and fictional narratives, has been the subject of intensive and extensive debates in the theory and methodology of history. Ginzburg himself has also intervened in these debates, albeit it from a somewhat oblique angle.<sup>11</sup> I do not intend to focus on this aspect of his work or take up a position in the larger discussion. Instead, I would like to draw attention to how the relation between history and literature comes

into play – not in the form of abstract considerations, but rather, as it were, *in concreto* – in Ginzburg’s historiographic practice.

Let us set out on a biographical note. Even disregarding the concurrent (and, to some extent still current) debates around so-called narrativism, the relation between history and literature should doubtless have been of some concern to Ginzburg as a historian by profession. His interest in the topic, however, has proven to go far beyond the scope of mere professional obligation; and on closer consideration, it seems to spring less from his unwavering commitment to fact than from an equally persistent fascination with fiction. Indeed, literature has occupied Ginzburg since well before he decided to pursue the historian’s *métier*.

Then again, Carlo Ginzburg had not been born into just any family: his father Leone Ginzburg taught Russian literature at the University of Turin, translating key works by writers such as Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy into Italian, and became a founding member of the fabled Einaudi publishing house – all before his untimely death in a Fascist prison infirmary in 1944 – while his mother Natalia (*née* Levi) went on to become one of the most acclaimed authors in postwar Italian literature as well as an influential editor with the same publisher. Thus, Ginzburg *films* moved in Rome’s highest literary circles long before he was admitted to the prestigious Scuola Normale di Pisa and commenced his professional training. “In the mid-1950s,” he would recall three decades later, “I was reading fiction; the idea that I might become a historian never crossed my mind.”<sup>12</sup>

Growing up in such an environment – “surrounded by books”, as he put it in a recent interview – Ginzburg not only became an avid reader, but also a would-be writer: “Predictably,” he observes, “as a teenager I toyed with the idea of writing fiction”, quickly adding: “But my silly project failed nearly immediately.”<sup>13</sup> Predictably, indeed. While it is easy to understand his instinctive desire to follow in his mother’s (and, to some extent, his father’s) footsteps, it is just as easy to imagine the psychological pressure that Ginzburg would experience as he, more or less consciously, compared his own literary attempts with the examples surrounding him on all sides. No wonder, then, that he eventually moved into a different field. However, it should come as no surprise that he took quite a bit with him for the journey. In fact, if there is one thing on which both fans and critics of his most celebrated work, *The Cheese and the Worms*, should be able to agree, it is this: In the end, it is not entirely clear whether history or literature actually won the day.<sup>14</sup>

And perhaps it was neither? After all, the dual categories of fact and fiction can only be considered rough approximations; as useful as they may be, there are cases to which they may be less readily applicable. One that immediately comes to mind is that of essayism, both in the sense of a particular literary genre and a general intellectual outlook.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, we recognize the intricate exercise of imagination, judgment and understanding that is enacted in a genuine essay precisely by the fact that it is difficult to grasp in such inflexible terms; provided

that the author has hit the mark, it will invariably read as both – and, at the same time, as neither. It would seem that the essayist is most at home in a turbulent, in-between territory where fact and fiction either clash violently or interweave in increasingly elaborate ways.<sup>16</sup>

Essayism also provides me with my first example of how the relation between history and literature comes into play in Ginzburg’s historiographic practice – as a kind of conjunction, one might say. Although his approach to the writing of history can hardly be considered experimental (at least not by literary standards), it is nevertheless animated by a kind of essayistic impulse. Furthermore, the same impulse would seem to be at work not only in those of his writings that can be considered essays in a strict sense, but also in his book-length works. To my mind, the best indication of this is that they all share the same loose-knit structure, signaled by one of the Italian historian’s most recognizable stylistic devices: his numbered sections.<sup>17</sup> Although it is only in more recent years that Ginzburg has come to devote himself “almost exclusively” to the genre, as he points out in the preface to the collection *No Island is an Island*, he has arguably been an essayist from the very beginning.<sup>18</sup>

I say ‘arguably’ since there are at least two objections that speak against such an interpretation, both of which concern themselves with the presumed characteristics of the essay as a genre. The first is so obvious that Ginzburg himself feels obliged to raise it. The essay, on this account, calls for a certain levity, a sense of elegance and effortlessness, that does not sit easily with the strictures of academic scholarship. Why, then, would the Italian historian’s writings – “these pages that have so little of the light-hearted about them and are weighed down by erudite observation” – deserve such a venerable mark of literary distinction? Needless to say, Ginzburg also offers an answer. To pin down his own approach more accurately, he proceeds to distinguish between two divergent traditions of essayism, one mostly anglophone – “inaugurated by Addison and Lamb” – and the other francophone or Continental, “progressing from Montaigne to Diderot and beyond.” Readers accustomed to the latter, he posits with a *clin d’oeil*, “will not be frightened by [foot]notes.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, if the history of the essay attests to anything, it is precisely to the fact that scholarship and literature have not always been conceived – nor practiced – as if they were worlds apart.<sup>20</sup>

At first sight, the second objection is not quite as easy to dismiss. Levity might not be a *differentia specifica* of the essay, but surely brevity qualifies as a distinguishing trait? If this is indeed the case, it is hardly reasonable to regard even Ginzburg’s book-length works as essays. Granted, the category of ‘book-length work’ is not very precise, so there are bound to be a few exceptions from the rule. As so often, *The Cheese and the Worms* is the most obvious example: with its mere 128 pages (not counting the preface), it admittedly reads more like an extended essay than a full-scale monograph, and the impression is accentuated further by the way that its account of Menocchio’s fate oscillates between historical narra-

tion and historiographical argumentation, even making the occasional foray into dialogue and epistolary novel.<sup>21</sup> To settle the argument, we should rather turn to Ginzburg's weightiest tome: *Ecstasies*, the Italian historian's definitive attempt to unravel the Witches' Sabbath as a historical phenomenon. How can a work of over three hundred pages possibly be characterized as an essay?

Ginzburg does not address the question explicitly, but has an answer in store for us nonetheless, this time in etymological form. The term 'essay', he reminds his reader with reference to the Swiss literary critic Jean Starobinski, is derived from *exagium*, the Low Latin word for a balance or a pair of scales. From the very outset, then, the genre implies "the need to submit ideas for verification," and at the same time, the insight that "[n]o verification can be considered definitive."<sup>22</sup> It is precisely this fundamental tension that, in turn, gives rise to the essay's peculiar and at times even perplexing form:

The tortuous, capricious, discontinuous progression of the essay appears to be incompatible with the rigor of the test. But perhaps this flexibility is precisely what succeeds in capturing configurations that tend to elude the grasp of the institutional disciplines.<sup>23</sup>

If we take this particular kind of flexibility – what Ginzburg, in his famous essay on "Clues" describes as a "flexible rigor" (*rigore elastico*) – not only as the hallmark of the genre, but also as a rule of thumb for how to apply the term, it is less difficult to see that even a full-scale monograph such as *Ecstasies* could reasonably be described as a kind of essay.<sup>24</sup> If this still seems too much of a stretch, it can clearly be compared with the so-called novel-essay, a self-consciously modern extension of the by-then classical genre.<sup>25</sup> In any case, what matters from this point of view is not the sheer span of the work – whether thematically, chronologically or even literally – but rather its principle of construction. To remain with the example of *Ecstasies*, we should pay less attention to the number of pages and more to the tripartite structure, held together – if only just barely – by the same system of numbered sections as in the author's shorter writings. Paradoxically, it is the broadly structuralist (or, in Ginzburg's terms, 'morphological') exercise of the central part that contributes most to the essayistic character of the whole.<sup>26</sup> In its entirety, it could be compared to one of Alexander Calder's hanging mobiles: separate elements brought together level after level in a stringent yet dynamic interplay – and everything suspended from one single point.

But perhaps that is taking the idea of equilibrium one step too far. The case of *Ecstasies* seems rather to demonstrate how the balancing act inherent to the essay – between 'rationalism' and 'irrationalism', to allude once more to Ginzburg's piece on "Clues" – is anything but an example of classical counterpoise.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary; under conditions far from the equilibrium, we occasionally need to go to extremes so as not to lose our footing. Instead of Calder's mobiles,

we might envisage the tightrope walker's distinctive pattern of movement, with its sudden shifts from an ever-precarious balance to a variety of drastic postures. But although the means may seem unconventional, the ends remain the same; hence the historian's sustained emphasis on 'the rigor of the test', and not only on its 'tortuous, capricious, discontinuous progression', as some of his critics would no doubt have preferred.<sup>28</sup>

For the same reason, the 'flexibility' propounded in the preface to *No Island is an Island* should not be taken as a wholesale rejection of disciplinary strictures, but rather as an injunction to maintain a certain measure of distance, which in turn allows for a certain degree of freedom from, as well as towards them. This becomes clear when Ginzburg compares academic inquiry to a chess game:

In the game of chess that is research the majestic literary rooks move implacably in a straight line; the essay as a genre instead moves like the knight in an unforeseeable manner, jumping from one discipline to another, from one textual entity from another.<sup>29</sup>

This passage says a lot, but the metaphor itself is even more telling. The rook and the knight may move in different patterns, but they both share the same board and play by the same basic set of rules (although, in the case of research, the rules themselves must obviously remain an open question). If there were no such thing as 'institutional disciplines', the essay would find no foothold, and hence be unable to enjoy its freedom of movement. In passing, we should also take note of the rather odd choice of words for describing the rooks: 'literary' – rather than, for instance, 'scientific'. It would seem to imply a kind of mirrored symmetry between the fields of literature and historiography, where major ('majestic') genres – say, epic poetry and narrative history – stand in direct correspondence to one another, while minor genres such as the essay might even overlap partly.

Thus, we return to the main line of my argument. If the essay represents a kind of conjunction between history and literature, fact and fiction, my second example could rather be described as a disjunction.<sup>30</sup> Parallel with his manifest turn to essayism, Ginzburg has devoted himself with remarkable persistence to tracking what his former colleague at the University of Bologna Gianna Pomata has evocatively described as a *querelle du roman et de l'histoire*, a conflict extending "from the seventeenth century down to Virginia Woolf."<sup>31</sup> The story, in other words, of consecutive and often highly productive challenges between history and literature that goes back to at least the early modern period, escalates with the joint development of modern historiography on the one hand and the realist novel on the other – say, with Jules Michelet (1798–1874) and Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), and persists well into the 20th century, if not all the way up to our own time.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, why not all the way up to our own time? Having reviewed – if



ever so briefly – two different, but equally distinctive ways in which the relation between history and literature comes into play in Ginzburg’s historiographic practice, I am now in a position to develop my initial thesis into a preliminary question. In the history of mutual challenges outlined by the Italian historian, which would be the literary counterpart of his own historical style – that is, of microhistory?<sup>33</sup>

The most obvious reply would direct our attention to the literary avant-gardes of the early 20th century. There is no doubt much to be said for such an interpretation, although perhaps less for Virginia Woolf than for Berthold Brecht or Marcel Proust.<sup>34</sup> From a biographical perspective, the fact that Natalia Ginzburg translated Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* – “a huge undertaking, crazy, because I didn’t know...” – seems especially significant.<sup>35</sup> As you will already have guessed, I have a somewhat different answer in mind. First, however, I must address the second theme in Ginzburg’s writings that I have singled out for discussion. We thereby pass from the specific relation between history and literature to another one – which, in more than one sense, includes it.

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Rendered in his usual pointillistic style, Ginzburg’s portrayal of the *querelle du roman et de l’histoire* is intricate enough in itself. The relation between words and images presents us with an even more complex picture, and this is no coincidence. Over the course of their long historical co-development, verbal and visual forms of communication have been gradually interwoven, resulting in a mutual implication even more difficult to disentangle than the ‘badly joined inlay’ of essayistic writing.<sup>36</sup>

On the one hand, there are words that do the work of images: metaphors provide unexpected points of view by stretching or even breaking away from habitual usage, descriptions convey impressions through their measured arrangement of nouns, adjectives, prepositions, and narratives set such momentary impressions in motion, predominantly with the help of verbs and adverbs.<sup>37</sup> This is one side of the mutual implication between the verbal and the visual – most eye-catching in so-called imaginative literature, but just as vital to historiography, as Ginzburg demonstrates in his discussion of the notion of ‘vividness’ (gr. *enargeia*, lat. *evidentia*) in classical rhetoric.<sup>38</sup> Here, fact and fiction, as well as poetry and prose, find their place within the bounds of literature in the broad, pre-modern sense of ‘letters’ (lat. *literæ*).

On the other hand is the converse implication of words into images – that is, images doing the work of words. Most, if not all, forms of visual communication are in fact patterned on a verbal or more generally, a discursive conception of the world. This is most obvious in the case of motifs, emblems or symbols, but equally true for many other examples (even, some would claim, for

non-representational art). As it happens, this is precisely the kinds of images to which Ginzburg has devoted his scholarly attention, from his early discussions of early modern emblematics – or, indeed, of the value of iconographic methods for historical research – to his most recently published book, where he applies Warburg’s concept of *Pathosformeln* to various forms of political propaganda.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, this interpenetration of words and images provides the foundation for the wide field of verbal and visual rhetoric in which Ginzburg seems to feel most at home, in theory as well as practice. Of course, this is not to say that it is a place of peace and harmony; it is in fact quite the opposite. If the relation between words and images seems more complex than that between literature and history, this is not only due to their mutual implication but also, and perhaps even above all, to what we, by analogy, might describe as their mutual exclusion. If, to some extent, both words and images are able to perform each others’ work, it is only because they have been assigned quite different tasks in the grand scheme of human culture. Most simply put: words signify, whereas images express.<sup>40</sup> Both media are pliant enough to serve the opposite end, but they are also sufficiently unyielding to sustain their inherent opposition even under the greatest of pressure.

Indeed, Ginzburg has been acutely aware of this fundamental antagonism from the very beginning. In his youthful study of the Warburg tradition, he observes that compared to a piece of writing “an image is inevitably more ambiguous, open to several interpretations.”<sup>41</sup> Precisely this ambiguity, however, is the first thing to be sacrificed in the confrontation between words and images: “rational discourse tends to harden and generalize the subtleties of pictorial language.”<sup>42</sup> All in all, if the mutual implication of words and images constitutes a stronger bond than the essayistic conjunction of fact and fiction, their mutual exclusion also creates a much greater tension. The *querelle du roman et de l’histoire* is a storm in a teacup compared with this millennial conflict.

But, come to think of it, let us remain with the essay for just a while longer. Against the background that I have just sketched out, the genre seems to provide (among many other things) a discursive space where the suppressed tension between words and images, reason and imagination, can be played out and, if not resolved entirely, then at least relieved. It might not provide a solution to the conflict, but it does propose a strategy that would allow images and words to enter into a productive exchange without the subjugation of one (almost invariably the former) to the other.<sup>43</sup> In short, the essay provides the ‘flexible rigor’ characterizing Ginzburg’s indicial paradigm with its most congenial form of expression.<sup>44</sup>

Here, we could perhaps speak of a ‘content of the form’ with regard to the essay, the genre in itself paradoxically providing us with an image of discursive thought – or, in Ginzburg’s case, with the specific exercise of discursive thought that constitutes the labor of the historian. Indeed, in *Giochi di pazienza* – an extended essay, co-authored with Adriano Prosperi and never translated, that could

well be regarded as a practical manifesto for his approach – this is precisely what Ginzburg tried to provide: *un'immagine del lavoro dello storico*.<sup>45</sup> Turning to the title page, we discover a quote from Balzac in which his indicial paradigm would already seem to be present in its entirety, albeit in condensed form.<sup>46</sup>

As in the case of history and literature, there is a biographical background to Ginzburg's fascination with images where, in a similar way, the boundary between the personal and the professional is gradated. Parallel to his literary ambitions, the young Ginzburg had painterly aspirations which proved to be somewhat more sustained – and, in hindsight, “perhaps more serious” – than his foray into fiction.<sup>47</sup> (As an aside, the Italian historian should not be confused with his almost-namesake, the Argentinian artist Carlos (sic) Ginzburg (\* 1946), who was loosely affiliated with the Italian *arte povera* current at the beginning of his career.<sup>48</sup>) In the end, however, this too came to nothing. In his own recollection:

I was seventeen when I realised that I would have been a mediocre painter — as well as, probably, an awful novelist. But retrospectively I think that those two early failures shaped my later work as a historian. I enjoy writing; I am fond of narrative experiments; I have been working for twenty years on the competitive relationship between fiction and history. And I have been dealing with images of different kind — from Piero della Francesca's frescoes to Lord Kitchener's famous recruiting poster for the First World War.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, just as Ginzburg was somehow able recast his childhood obsession with literature into a professional dedication to history, his artistic aspirations developed into a long-term interest in the theory and history of art (enriched, no doubt, by his marriage to a museum curator).<sup>50</sup> As a result, throughout the length of his career we can trace a more or less direct engagement with the pictorial which has resulted in one book-length study and well over a dozen essays – not counting the numerous references in works principally dedicated to other subjects.<sup>51</sup> Among the sorts of images that figure in his writings, we find carvings<sup>52</sup>, drawings<sup>53</sup>, paintings<sup>54</sup>, mosaics<sup>55</sup>, sculptures and reliefs<sup>56</sup>, architectural motifs<sup>57</sup>, illuminations<sup>58</sup> and prints<sup>59</sup>. The last two categories are intimately related to literature in the broader sense of the word; in one essay, Ginzburg actually goes so far as to quote – *in extenso*, as it were – merely typographic details.<sup>60</sup>

If this rough inventory of pictorial forms of expression attests to anything, it is above all to the fact that Ginzburg has primarily devoted his research to the early modern period. As the image enters the age of mechanical reproduction, the record becomes more uneven and, at the same time, more equivocal. Although photographs do figure in a few of the Italian historian's most recent essays,<sup>61</sup> they are not always cited as representations, but rather for what they represent – and in one instance, we are even exposed to a threefold mediation: a photograph of

a maquette for a building.<sup>62</sup> All the same, there are examples. Now, what about film? By pursuing the historical development of visual media as documented in Ginzburg's writings to its (chrono)logical conclusion, we have reached the point where, at long last, the two lines of my inquiry converge on a preliminary answer to the question of microhistory's literary counterpart.

Unfortunately, the answer is that the question was misphrased. In fact, if there is a single point that I would like to make, it is precisely that *the counterpart of microhistory is no longer literary* – at least not in the strict sense of the word. Wiping the slate clean, we should rather start looking for it in that specific field of cultural expression where fact and fiction, words and images, are juxtaposed in an altogether particular way: the field of cinema.

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Cinema, then, provides me with my third theme – if, indeed, it can be sufficiently disentangled from the themes that we have already explored to be regarded as a theme of its own. Hence the hesitation in my title: *two or three* things I know about Carlo Ginzburg.<sup>63</sup>

As in our previous two cases, we could spend considerable time sifting through the Italian historian's writings – his afterword to the Italian edition of Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre*, his engagement with Siegfried Kracauer's posthumous theory of history or the German newspaper feature in which he dissects his own “unhappy affair” with cinema – in search of both clues and confessions.<sup>64</sup> And here as well, there is a biographical background to consider. Coming of age in the 1950s, Ginzburg found himself surrounded not only by books, but also by films. In fact, the distinction between books and films would even seem a little artificial, considering that cinema – specifically, Cesare Zavattini's influential style of script-writing – was an immediate point of departure for Ginzburg's early ambitions in the field of literature.<sup>65</sup> Fast-forwarding to his professional career, there have also been more or less advanced plans for screen adaptations of his own writings, *The Cheese and the Worms* in particular – but that is another story.<sup>66</sup>

Instead, let us cut a corner and give the word to Ginzburg himself. In a recent interview with fellow historian Mauro Boarelli, he makes two closely related observations – one general and one personal – immediately relevant to the case at hand. The general observation concerns cinema as a form of expression and its place in the development of contemporary cultural existence. “Cinema”, Ginzburg declares,

has shaped the mode of entering into relation with reality of a major part of humanity throughout the twentieth century and up to this day. I come to think of one of the books that have been decisive for me, Michael Baxan-

dall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, where the author speaks of common social experiences in a very wide sense. Cinema too is a common social experience.<sup>67</sup>

If this statement lends implicit credence to the notion of a cinematic counterpart to microhistory, Ginzburg's personal observation would seem to confirm it explicitly. Here, he describes cinema as "an essential point of reference from the moment that I started writing."<sup>68</sup>

Taken together, these two remarks allows us to take another step along our line of inquiry by restating my preliminary answer as a definitive question: what is the cinematic counterpart of microhistory? If cinema did indeed provide Ginzburg with "an essential point of reference", then what specific form of cinema can be said to correspond most closely to his own microhistorical approach, taking us at once further into and beyond the long-standing quarrel between history and literature? Of course, the answer depends almost entirely on what we make of microhistory in the first place. To simplify greatly, we can distinguish between three different takes on the term – or perhaps I should say: three different takes of microhistory as a current in historiography? – This slight change of phrase would turn what follows into a description reminiscent of the style of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*.<sup>69</sup>

The first and without a doubt most widespread take on microhistory hinges on what we might call 'the principle of the close-up'. From this perspective, the microhistorical approach comes across as a kind of hyper-empiricism that, against the 'grand narratives' of modern ideologies and their allies among the social-scientific disciplines, would side with the 'little people' and their everyday stories. A particular title from the history of Italian cinema is sometimes invoked to illustrate this principle: Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up* from 1966, which was loosely based on a short story by Julio Cortázar.<sup>70</sup> It is this occasional analogy from the field of cinema, rather than the sheer pervasiveness of the interpretation, that entitles it to a passing mention – despite sustained objections from Ginzburg and other original proponents of microhistory.<sup>71</sup>

From a methodological point of view, the overriding difficulty with the principle of the close-up can be readily summarized. In a nutshell: just how close is close enough? Indeed, why stop at the everyday – conceived as the level of the individual as a consciously acting agent – when we could just as well proceed, with the philosophers, from the individual to the dividual or, with the artists, from the ordinary to the infra-ordinary?<sup>72</sup> Then again, perhaps the everyday was already one step too far to begin with? If we return, for the sake of argument, to one of Ginzburg's early attempts at calibrating his microhistorical optic, we find that he actually stops just short of the individual, focusing instead on the *name* – that is, on the singular point where individual and 'system' seem to be mutually articulated.<sup>73</sup>

By shifting back and forth in this fashion, we have already demonstrated how the principle of the close-up relies on another and more generally applicable principle, in practice if not in theory. If we are able to get closer to something in the first place, it is only because we are already capable of varying our point of view. This, then, is the postulate from which our second take on microhistory departs. In the words of Jacques Revel: "It is the principle of variation that is important, not the choice of any particular scale."<sup>74</sup> Revel, one of the most eloquent spokesmen for microhistory in France, has condensed this fundamental insight into the evocative image of the *jeu d'échelles* (known in English as the 'game of snakes and ladders').

Speaking of evocative images, this particular aspect of the microhistorical approach is brought out by another and – at first glance, at least – rather more plausible proposal for a cinematic counterpart to microhistory recently suggested by the British historian John Brewer. On his reading, Ginzburg and his fellow microhistorians "take their views first and foremost from the Italian neo-realist movement of the immediate post-Second World War era." He even goes so far as to argue – in part, no doubt, for rhetorical effect – that Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* from 1946 was "one of the first works of Italian microhistory."<sup>75</sup>

There is much to say for Brewer's interpretation in and of itself, and Ginzburg's reaction lends it further credence. "As far as I am concerned," the Italian historian states in a recent interview, "I think he was not far from truth."<sup>76</sup> In an even more recent interview, he returns once again to the thesis of his British colleague, describing Italian cinema as "a foundational experience", and films such as Rossellini's *Paisà* as "fundamental moments of my life as a cinema-goer."<sup>77</sup> In the poetics of neorealism, Ginzburg sees both intimacy and distance at work, but only singles out the relationship between them as truly essential: "This coexistence, this idea of a view from afar that is the other side of the view from up close, are elements that can also be found in the microhistorical project. I recognize myself more in this than in the metaphor of the blow-up."<sup>78</sup>

In fact, it is precisely this double viewpoint that Ginzburg highlights in his most focused reflection on the topic of cinema to date: an essay from the mid-90s, all the more vivid for its brevity, in which Rossellini's *Paisà* once again features as a crucial reference. In this and other films, the Italian historian seems most to admire the very capacity of the medium "to represent in one and the same moment [...] simultaneity as well as physical and moral distance" by zooming in and out, but also through the juxtaposition of otherwise unrelated scenes in the same image.<sup>79</sup> The latter effect is achieved by way of the deep focus that, while by no means invented by Italian cinematographers, became a signature of neorealism.<sup>80</sup>

Here, then, is a counterpart to microhistory that even Ginzburg himself would seem to embrace whole-heartedly. It is not based on the principle of the close-up, but rather on a principle of variation which is not only more general, but which can also be realized by a variety of means. As a consequence, the sci-

entific stakes are also considerably higher: to stand a decent chance in Revel's *jeu d'échelles*, the historian would have to master not only the nooks and crannies of an empirical material, but also a dizzying panorama of philosophical and social-scientific concepts and theories; in Ginzburg's own words, not only the humanist's meticulous technique of "handweaving", but also a variety of "power looms" in different makes and models.<sup>81</sup> A daunting task, to say the least.

Case closed? Not quite. Indeed, just as with our previous take, the principle of variation could hardly be put into practice if another principle was not already at work. In order to alternate between different viewpoints, we must first be able to bring them together – whether in time, as in the case of zooming, or in space, as in the juxtaposition of fore- and background. Hence, our third version of microhistory springs from a principle that has been firmly established in film theory since the pioneering efforts of Sergei Eisenstein: the principle of montage.

As it happens, this is the aspect that Ginzburg foregrounds when he speaks of cinema as a foundational experience: "cinema, *and above all montage*, were an essential point of reference from the moment that I started writing."<sup>82</sup> The recollection that follows is worth quoting at length:

I read Eisenstein's *The Film Sense* when I was ten years old; I didn't understand anything of it, but it made a huge impression. I was imagining films that I had not yet seen. There's that extraordinary passage where Eisenstein transcribes, as if it were a screenplay, the page from Leonardo[']s notebooks] about the deluge, which is a description of an imaginary painting, never realized. If literature can be reread in the light of cinema, then history can also be written as if it were a sequence organized through montage, in which there is foreground, background and so on.<sup>83</sup>

The lines of inquiry that we have followed this far – history and literature, word and image, even cinema – all converge in this brief passage, which would also seem to confirm that Revel's *jeu d'échelles* is only one particular instantiation of the even more general principle of montage. Furthermore, it demonstrates how this principle is in no way restricted to sequential juxtaposition, but also includes what Eisenstein called "potential montage" or "conflict within the shot" – as, for instance, in the examples cited by Ginzburg.<sup>84</sup>

Now, if history can indeed be 'organized through montage', then how does this principle of organization come to expression in the historian's writings? Here, we must return to a detail that we have already touched on à propos the characteristically loose-knit structure of Ginzburg's essays. "Ever since I started writing history," he goes on to explain, "I have made use of graphical devices to create montage effects, especially the numbered paragraphs."<sup>85</sup> It would seem that the Italian historian's most eye-catching stylistic signature element is actually modeled on cinematic technique.

In fact, although Ginzburg took his inspiration from elsewhere, the very idea of using numbered paragraphs rather than some other, equivalent device has a direct parallel in Eisenstein.<sup>86</sup> What I have in mind is Eisenstein's essay on "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today" from 1944, later included as a chapter in *Film Form*, the other important collection that – along with *The Film Sense* – introduced the Russian director's ideas to a Western audience. Here, Eisenstein makes the point – less evident in the 1940s than it is today – that cinema is "based on an enormous cultured past" and above all on literature, an antecedent that, in his estimation, "has contributed so much to this apparently unprecedented art."<sup>87</sup> Symptomatically, he demonstrates this thesis by way of a case study, relating the novels of Charles Dickens to the films of D. W. Griffith. In the course of his argument, Eisenstein lays bare nothing less than a "basic montage structure, whose rudiment in Dickens' work was developed into the elements of film composition in Griffith's work" – and, one might add, eventually redeveloped into the principles of his own Soviet cinema.<sup>88</sup>

So where does this leave us? From our perspective, Eisenstein's narrative already seems to bridge the gap between Ginzburg's patient charting of the *querelle du roman et de l'histoire* and the more or less radical departures of the so-called 'seventh art'. More specifically, literature contributes to the nascent form of cinema what the Russian director qualifies as "an embodied viewpoint on phenomena" – a description that resonates profoundly with the notion of microhistory as a *scienza del vissuto*, a 'science of lived experience'.<sup>89</sup>

"[P]owerful, splendid" – this is how Ginzburg, in what is now a somewhat different context, describes Eisenstein's essay.<sup>90</sup> What he seems not to recall on that particular occasion is how Eisenstein actually goes about demonstrating the affinity between Dickens and Griffiths, the novelist and the filmmaker. Zooming in on the example of *Oliver Twist*, he proceeds by reproducing the opening scene of chapter twenty-one, but in an altogether particular form. "For demonstration purposes", Eisenstein explains in a footnote, "I have broken this beginning of the chapter into smaller pieces than did its author; the numbering is, of course, also mine."<sup>91</sup> Although Eisenstein does take his typographic analysis of certain passages – enumerations, for instance – even further, the result (see the following spread) is surprisingly reminiscent of a page from one of Ginzburg's essays.

As always, much more can be said about Eisenstein's comparison between Dickens and Griffith, as well as about my own comparison of Eisenstein and Ginzburg. Here, I will limit myself to a single observation: The extent to which Eisenstein's discussion of the difference between American and Soviet conceptions of the close-up – "or as we speak of it, the 'large scale'" – anticipates the debate surrounding the American and European (especially French) reception of microhistory is striking.<sup>92</sup> In Griffith's films, "close-ups create atmosphere, outline traits of the characters, alternate in dialogues of the leading characters, and close-ups of the chaser and the chased speed up the tempo of the chase." In other



How many such "cinematic" surprises must be hiding in Dickens's pages!

However, let us turn to the basic montage structure, whose rudiment in Dickens's work was developed into the elements of film composition in Griffith's work. Lifting a corner of the veil over these riches, these hitherto unused experiences, let us look into *Oliver Twist*. Open it at the twenty-first chapter. Let's read its beginning:

*Chapter XXI\**

1. It was a cheerless morning when they got into the street; blowing and raining hard; and the clouds looking dull and stormy.

The night had been very wet: for large pools of water had collected in the road; and the kennels were overflowing.

There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky; but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom of the scene: the sombre light only serving to pale that which the street lamps afforded, without shedding any warmer or brighter tints upon the wet housetops, and dreary streets.

There appeared to be nobody stirring in that quarter of the town; for the windows of the houses were all closely shut; and the streets through which they passed, were noiseless and empty.

2. By the time they had turned into the Bethnal Green Road, the day had fairly begun to break. Many of the lamps were already extinguished;

a few country waggons were slowly toiling on, towards London; and now and then, a stage-coach, covered with mud, rattled briskly by:

the driver bestowing, as he passed, an admonitory lash upon the heavy waggoner who, by keeping on the wrong side of the road, had endangered his arriving at the office, a quarter of a minute after his time.

The public-houses, with gas-lights burning inside, were already open.

By degrees, other shops began to be unclosed; and a few scattered people were met with.

\* For demonstration purposes I have broken this beginning of the chapter into smaller pieces than did its author; the numbering is, of course, also mine.

Then, came straggling groups of labourers going to their work; then, men and women with fish-baskets on their heads; donkey-carts laden with vegetables; chaise-carts filled with live-stock or whole carcasses of meat; milk-women with pails; and an unbroken concourse of people, trudging out with various supplies to the eastern suburbs of the town.

3. As they approached the City, the noise and traffic gradually increased;

and when they threaded the streets between Shoreditch and Smithfield, it had swelled into a roar of sound and bustle.

It was as light as it was likely to be, till night came on again; and the busy morning of half the London population had begun. . . .

4. It was market-morning.

The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; and a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle,

and mingling with the fog,

which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. . . .

Countrymen,

butchers,

drovers,

hawkers,

boys,

thieves,

idlers,

and vagabonds of every low grade,

were mingled together in a dense mass;

5. the whistling of drovers,

the barking of dogs,

the bellowing and plunging of oxen,

the bleating of sheep,

the grunting and squeaking of pigs;

the cries of hawkers,

the shouts, oaths and quarrelling on all sides;

the ringing of bells

and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house;

words, they serve to augment the ‘reality effect’, promote audience identification, create a pleasant variety and, in general, add to the action. “But,” Eisenstein objects, “Griffith at all times remains on a level of *representation and objectivity* and nowhere does he try through the *juxtaposition* of shots to shape *import and image*.” On the whole, then, American cinema is a stranger to Soviet-style “montage construction.”<sup>93</sup> The same could clearly not be said about Italian microhistory – but perhaps about some of its American adaptations?<sup>94</sup>

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Returning to the principle of the close-up, my discussion would seem to have come full circle. In fact, we need to take one further step before we can venture a definitive answer to the question of microhistory’s cinematic counterpart. Let me begin by revisiting an important point. As we have already seen, the principle of montage should not be reduced to a matter of merely sequential juxtaposition – neither in Eisenstein’s case, nor in Ginzburg’s. On the contrary, it is at work in many different ways: not only between shots, but also between different scenes in a single shot – as well as, crucially, between the image track and the sound track; the visual and the aural aspects of cinema. This last variation on our theme is commonly denoted as *horizontal montage*, a term that goes back to the French film critic André Bazin.

Among his many credentials, Bazin is remembered for having introduced Italian neorealism to a French audience – in his quite idiosyncratic interpretation, one might add.<sup>95</sup> The notion of horizontal montage, however, is formulated in quite another connection. More specifically, it is in a review of Chris Marker’s *Lettre de Sibirie* from 1958 that Bazin first speaks of “an absolutely new notion of montage that I will call ‘horizontal,’” which he contrasts with a sequential (“traditional”) application of the same principle. “Here,” he goes on to explain, “a given image doesn’t refer to the one that preceded it or the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to what is said.”<sup>96</sup>

As it turns out, Bazin’s notion was not nearly as novel as he would have us believe. While the term was new, the same basic concept had already been worked out in Eisenstein’s writings – though quite confusingly to a present-day reader, it was referred to as ‘vertical’ rather than ‘horizontal.’<sup>97</sup> It is introduced in a chapter from *The Film Sense* entitled “Synchronization of Senses”; incidentally, the chapter features the discussion of Leonardo’s deluge which Ginzburg, in his turn, praises as an ‘extraordinary passage.’<sup>98</sup> And in the ‘powerful, splendid’ essay on Dickens and Griffith, it is even presented as the culmination of all Soviet cinematic efforts. In its vertical variety, as Eisenstein puts it, the principle of montage “removes its last contradictions by abolishing dualist contradictions and mechanical parallelism between the realms of sound and sight.”<sup>99</sup>

A kind of fulfillment, then, but nevertheless the same fundamental idea. In

fact, Eisenstein even underscores that “the transition from silent montage to sound-picture, or audio-visual montage, changes nothing *in principle*.”<sup>100</sup> At the same time, he is eager to point out that when defined in this way, the montage principle “seems considerably broader than an understanding of narrowly cinematographic montage; thus understood, it carries much to fertilize and enrich our understanding of art methods in general.”<sup>101</sup> Perhaps even the art of historiography? Ginzburg for one clearly thinks so.

On closer inspection, however, Bazin’s ‘horizontal’ montage does actually differ from Eisenstein’s ‘vertical’ one in at least one respect: here, sound explicitly takes precedence over sight, word over image, the filmmaker’s commentary over the filmic document. As Bazin puts it, horizontal montage is “forged from ear to eye” rather than the other way around.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, Eisenstein does not institute any such hierarchy between the aural and the visual, but rather highlights their organic unity. Whether or not this shift in emphasis is sufficient for qualifying it as a different principle is a question that we can safely leave for film theorists to ponder. In any case, it would not seem too slight to take note of here.

On the contrary, it might be precisely this slight shift in emphasis that, at long last, would allow us to provide the question of microhistory’s cinematic counterpart with something resembling a definitive answer. In fact, without noticing, we have already stumbled over it. From the point of view that we have gradually reached in the course of my argument, the most promising candidate for a counterpart to microhistory seems to be the so-called essay film: a genre of personal documentary that, again, goes back to Eisenstein and a few of his contemporaries – Dziga Vertov and Esfir Shub, among others – but which was really only developed in the postwar period by filmmakers such as Alexander Kluge in Germany, Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italy, Alain Resnais in France – and, most famously, by Chris Marker, a one-time assistant to Resnais and the subject of Bazin’s review.

Indeed, in order to test my hypothesis – experimentally, as it were – I will propose a paraphrase of a passage from precisely that review. To begin with, here is André Bazin on Chris Marker:

Generally, even in politically engaged documentaries or those with a specific point to make, the image (which is to say, the uniquely cinematic element) effectively constitutes the primary material of the film. The orientation of the work is expressed through the choices made by the filmmaker in the montage, with the commentary completing the organization of the sense thus conferred on the document. With Marker it works quite differently. I would say that the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate means of expression is language, and that the image only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this verbal intelligence. The usual process is reversed.<sup>103</sup>



And here is my comparison by paraphrase (alterations are italicized):

Generally, even in politically engaged *historical accounts* or those with a specific point to make, the *source* (which is to say, the uniquely *historical* element) effectively constitutes the primary material of the *account*. The orientation of the work is expressed through the choices made by the *historian* in the *juxtaposition of sources*, with the commentary completing the organization of the sense thus conferred on the document. With *Ginzburg* it works quite differently. I would say that the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate means of expression is *rhetoric*, and that the *source* only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this *rhetorical* intelligence. The usual process is reversed.

It is precisely such a reversal that would seem to result from that “cognitive wager” which, on Ginzburg’s own account, provided the common point of departure for Italian microhistory: “a definitive awareness that all phases through which research unfolds are constructed and not given: the identification of the object and its importance; the elaboration of the categories through which it is analyzed; the criteria of proof; the stylistic and narrative forms by which the results are transmitted to the reader.”<sup>104</sup> The profound insight, in other words, that nothing can be taken for granted, least of all the sources; this is of course precisely why they require such meticulous scrutiny. In fact, the only resource still immediately available to such a generalized historiographic constructivism is the historian’s own resourcefulness itself.

If indeed both the essay film and microhistory are characterized by a kind of reversal, then what does it entail? To complete his portrait of Chris Marker, Bazin emphasizes how the filmmaker “does not restrict himself to using documentary images filmed on the spot, but uses any kind of filmic material that might help his case.”<sup>105</sup> This is directly comparable to the “redefinition of the notion of context” in microhistory, highlighted by Jacques Revel, the historian who has done most to introduce the Italian approach to French scholars.<sup>106</sup> According to Revel, what really sets microhistory apart from other, comparable perspectives is its dogged refusal to take any notion of historical context for granted – “in other words, a refusal to accept that a unified, homogenous context exists within which and in relation to which social actors make their choices.” Such an unwillingness should be understood as, on the one hand, “a reminder of the multiplicity of the social experiences and representations, in part contradictory and in any case ambiguous, in terms of which human beings construct the world and their actions” and, on the other hand, “an invitation to reverse the historian’s usual approach, which is to situate and interpret his text in relation to a global context.”<sup>107</sup>

At this point, we should begin to appreciate how the three competing principles of microhistory that we have just reviewed – close-up, zoom and montage,

in order of appearance – can converge after all. Lacking a ready-made context, the historian is obliged to construct it as much as possible from scratch: hence the primacy of montage. Refusal, though, is not equal to denial. Though such building blocks may be of little use in historiography, they still contribute decisively to the ‘lived experience’ which the historian seeks to understand: hence the indispensability of zooming, of Revel’s *jeux d’échelles*. In the last instance, however, such an understanding can only start out from – and, indeed, must always return to – the detail, the singularity, the specific case: hence the significance of the close-up, on condition that the principle is not misunderstood. As the French literary theorist Nicolas Geneix has noted in the case of Marker: “It is not a question of seeing the object at a larger scale, but rather of seeing *something else* by way of it.”<sup>108</sup>

The essay film, then, as exemplified by the works of Chris Marker, would be the best equivalent of Ginzburg’s microhistory in the field of cinema. To my mind, this suggestion becomes all the more intriguing once we discover that Ginzburg himself is not really acquainted with the genre at all. In other words, this is not a question of influence – as in Brewer’s juxtaposition of microhistory with neorealism – but rather of drawing similar conclusions, in different but nevertheless comparable fields, from the same point of departure; a case of genuinely parallel developments rather than a more or less conscious emulation.<sup>109</sup> To my mind, this seems to fit better with the narrative framework established by the *querelle du roman et de l’histoire* than either of the two analogies that I have already reviewed. If nothing else, it serves to reintroduce an element of tension, perhaps even of conflict, into what might otherwise have ended up as an overly harmonious story.

On the other hand, it might still be possible – to some extent, at least – to reconcile my own hypothesis with that of Brewer. To this end, let me conclude by attending briefly to the relation between Italian neorealism and the essay film. Zooming out, as it were, from Brewer’s proposal, what my account brings into view is both the roots of Italian neorealism in Soviet cinema (in spite of Bazin’s influential contrast between them) and its further redevelopment in the French New Wave, especially of the Left Bank variety.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, if neorealism made its audience aware of the camera, as Brewer underscores, such a narrative strategy had already been deployed by Soviet filmmakers – most emblematically in Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* – and was only taken to its logical conclusion in the essay film.<sup>111</sup> Pasolini, for one, claimed that neorealism had been reinvented by Jean-Luc Godard, another influential representative of the genre.<sup>112</sup>

Did Ginzburg also reinvent neorealism? After all, any genuine reinvention is characterized by continuity and change, fidelity and betrayal in almost equal amounts. Far from presenting us with a simple negation of tradition, what it actually entails is its paradoxical fulfillment. As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it in one of his most suggestive essays: “not a survival, which

is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory.<sup>113</sup> From this point of view, it hardly seems a coincidence that Ginzburg alludes to one of Godard's more essayistic moments, the 1967 feature *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, in the title of his retrospective account of microhistory.<sup>114</sup> Apparently, he is not entirely unacquainted with the genre after all.

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In the preceding pages, I have tried to demonstrate how Baron's idea of an audiovisual experience of history can shed light on certain aspects of Ginzburg's style of historiography – and, inversely, how Ginzburg's case can reinforce Baron's hypothesis by providing it with a greater degree of historical specificity. If the ever-growing pervasiveness of audiovisual media has indeed affected the way in which the past becomes present to us, then microhistory – at least in Ginzburg's version – can be considered an example of how this impact occurred in theory, so to speak, before it came about in practice. It goes without saying that all of this amounts to nothing more than a limited and altogether specific development: Ginzburg's early encounters with cinema, both on screen and in Eisenstein's writings, present us with as many refractions of a particular phase in the development of contemporary image culture. For this reason, I have chosen to speak of 'cinematic' rather than 'audiovisual' experience.

Then again, if our own encounter with microhistory has taught us anything, it is that one particular case can sometimes come to bear wider significance than its apparent limitations would seem to dictate. As the development of audiovisual media has progressed into our digital present, the parallel between microhistory and the essay film has taken on new meanings. Digitization – and, more specifically, the wide availability of digital video editing – has brought a renaissance for the essay film, this time on a global scale.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, it confronts academic historiography with the far from unprecedented, but nevertheless new challenge of utilizing visual documents, not only as sources of information, but also as actual elements in the construction of a historical argument. In this fashion, the advent of digital technology would also seem to have opened a new chapter in Ginzburg's *querelle du roman et de l'histoire* – with his own brand of microhistory as an especially promising point of departure.

This essay has benefited from the generous comments of Carlo Ginzburg. Any remaining errors are my own responsibility.

1. Georges Perec, *La vie mode d'emploi. Romans* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), 15–6. Translated by David Bellos as *Life: A User's Manual* (London: Vintage, 2008), preamble (n.p.).
2. Carlo Ginzburg and Adriano Prosperi, *Giochi di pazienza. Un seminario sul "Beneficio di Cristo"* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 84. Translated by Pellegrino d'Acerno and Robert Connolly in Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 1987), 1.
3. If not earlier, since the invention of photography can be regarded as a first stage of the same overarching development. The term 'audiovisual media' should therefore be read as shorthand for any visual or audiovisual representation with a significant indexical component. In practice, then, the period under discussion more or less coincides with Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction'.
4. Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect. Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 7.
5. Baron, *The Archive Effect*, 1.
6. A thesis most famously expounded by André Bazin: see "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) and cf. Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified. Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), ch. 1.
7. Baron, *The Archive Effect*, 3–4.
8. François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xv.
9. Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, xviii. As passing references to "the glare of the TV cameras" (104), "the live soundbite" (113), "our media age" (114) and "the media boom" (124) indicate, Hartog himself sees the connection – without, it seems, making much of it. His allusions to "information superhighways" (114) and "computer technologies" (202) are even more interesting, because they implicitly raise the question of what kind of historiography would be adapted to the digital age.
10. Carlo Ginzburg, *I Benandanti. Stregoneria e culti agrari tra Cinquecento e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966). Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi as *The Night Battles. Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
11. See e.g. Carlo Ginzburg, "Just One Witness", "The Extermination of the Jews and the Principle of

- Reality", in *Threads and Traces. True, False, Fictive* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). First published in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Oblique, since Ginzburg's methodological reflections have typically been centered on argumentation rather than narration: See e.g. Carlo Ginzburg's *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).
12. Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), vii.
  13. Carlo Ginzburg and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg", *The Hindu*, November 21 (2007), n.p. Available on <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/a-conversation-with-carlo-ginzburg/article1952547.ece> (accessed 2015–10–23).
  14. See e.g. Ginzburg's comments on his preferred readership in Carlo Ginzburg, Keith Luria and Romulo Gandolfo, "Carlo Ginzburg: An Interview", *Radical History Review* 35 (1986), 95, 100.
  15. Regarding the latter, see e.g. Thomas Harrison, *Essayism. Conrad, Musil and Pirandello* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
  16. An in-between territory constituted by what Ginzburg, in a comment on Vico's *Scienza nuova*, describes as "the contiguity between *factum* and *fictum* – in the double sense of *ingere*, 'to forge'." See Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory and World History", in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 6, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400-1800 CE*; part 2, *Patterns of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 454. Note that Ginzburg speaks of a contiguity rather than a continuity – a crucial difference from his epistemological standpoint.
  17. The numbered sections is a device of which Ginzburg already made use in the mid-60s in essays such as "From Warburg to Gombrich" (later included in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*), as well as a book-length study such as *The Night Battles*. He has subsequently applied it with great consistency; most often, the first paragraph of each section commences with Arabic numerals, sometimes separate headings in Roman numerals are employed, and occasionally – e.g. in "Making it Strange" and "Myth", both in *Wooden Eyes* – a combination of the two systems is used, nested in a hierarchical fashion. In one version or another, it features in *The Cheese and the Worms* (here, the sections are supplied with somewhat descriptive headings in the



table of contents, but these are absent from the actual text); in *The Night Battles* and *Ecstasies*, below chapter level; in *The Judge and the Historian*, and in all of the collections – including the introductions, provided they are extensive enough. It does not always figure in the original context of publication for the individual essays – e.g. “Montaigne, Cannibals, and Grottoes” in *Threads and Traces* – but this is probably because it has been suppressed by meticulous journal editors. For some reason or another, the device does not figure in *The Enigma of Piero* (which has ordinary chapter headings and two empty lines – typographically significant – as section markers) or in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, except for “From Warburg to Gombrich” and “Clues”. In both these cases, according to Ginzburg (personal communication), its absence is due to decisions on behalf of the editors. (For the sake of readability, shortened references are provided in this footnote, even for works that have not previously cited.)

18. Carlo Ginzburg, *No Island is an Island. Four Glances at English Literature in a World Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), xii.

19. Ginzburg, *No Island*, xii. For further leads to the same genealogy in Ginzburg’s writings, see e.g. “Montaigne, Cannibals, and Grottoes”, in *Threads and Traces*; “The Old World and the New Seen from Nowhere”, in *No Island*, 12–13.

20. Cf. my argument about literature in the wide sense, p. 48 above.

21. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London: Routledge, 1980), sections 26 (dialogue), 44 and 54 (epistolary novel).

22. Ginzburg, *No Island*, xii.

23. Ginzburg, *No Island*, xiii.

24. Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm”, in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, 124.

25. For an overview, see Stefano Ercolino, *The Novel-Essay, 1884–1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

26. See Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11–2, and cf. the subtitle of the Italian edition of *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*: Carlo Ginzburg, *Miti, emblemi, spie. Morfologia e storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986).

27. Ginzburg, “Clues”, 96.

28. Besides *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*, see e.g. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian. Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentieth Century Miscarriage of Justice* (London: Verso, 1999). For a particularly

qualified example of criticism, see Florike Egmond and Peter Mason, *The Mammoth and the Mouse. Microhistory and Morphology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), esp. 204–5. Symptomatically, Egmond and Mason take their inspiration from Derrida as much as from Ginzburg – a rather unexpected combination, considering that the latter once dismissed the former’s work as “trash” (*spazzatura*): see Ginzburg, Luria and Gandolfo, “Carlo Ginzburg: An Interview”, 100 and cf. Tony Molho, “Carlo Ginzburg: Reflections on the Intellectual Cosmos of a 20th-Century Historian”, *History of European Ideas* 30 (2004), 139.

29. Ginzburg, *No Island*, xiii.
30. As any reader familiar with the theory of logical connectives will no doubt realize, I employ the terms conjunction and disjunction – as well as, further on, implication and exclusion (i.e. exclusive disjunction) – only in a loose sense.
31. Gianna Pomata, “Telling the Truth about Micro-History: A Memoir (and a few reflections)”, *Netværk for historieteori & historiografi*, working paper no. 3 (2000), 33. Incidentally, Mona Ozouf has used the same expression in a review of Graham Robb’s *Une histoire de Paris par ceux qui l’ont fait*: see “Mais où est passée la Bastille?”, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 7 (2010). Available on <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20101012.BIB5765/mais-ou-est-passee-la-bastille.html> (accessed 2015–10–23).
32. This theme could no doubt be traced throughout Ginzburg’s entire oeuvre, but seems to have come to the surface only in the course of the 90s. The most relevant waypoints are: “Aristotle and History, Once More” and “Reflections on a Blank” in *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*; “A Search for Origins: Rereading *Tristram Shandy*” in *No Island is an Island*; “Description and Citation”, “Paris, 1647: A Dialogue on Fiction and History”, “The Bitter Truth: Stendhal’s Challenge to Historians”, “Details, Early Plans, Microanalysis: Thoughts on a Book by Siegfried Krauer” and “Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know About It” in *Threads and Traces*. Considering the proximity of history and anthropology in Ginzburg’s work, “Tusitala and His Polish Reader” in *No Island Is an Island* should also be of some interest in this connection. (Most of these essays have previously been published as stand-alone pieces.)

The examples of Michelet and Balzac are borrowed from Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, which Ginzburg quotes approvingly (see “The Bitter Truth”, 138). Cf. the interview, p. ..., where Auerbach is singled out (along with Bloch and Warburg) as a continuous source of inspiration. For a more recent take

on the same topic, see e.g. Paule Petitier, “1830 ou les métamorphoses du centre (Michelet, Balzac, Hugo)”, *Romantisme* 123 (2004) – where Victor Hugo, an author whom (to my knowledge) Ginzburg has not discussed, is added to the mix.

33. Regarding microhistory as a ‘community of style’, see the preface, p. 14 above.
34. Which is not to say that Woolf’s example should be entirely disregarded: see e.g. “The Bitter Truth”, 139. Concerning Brecht, see e.g. Carlo Ginzburg, “Some Queries Addressed to Myself”, in *Carlo Ginzburg. 2010 Balzan Prize for European History* (Milano: Fondazione Internazionale Balzan, 2011), 9–10. As for Proust, see e.g. Carlo Ginzburg, “‘L’étranger qui n’est pas de la maison’”, in Antoine Compagnon (ed.), *Lire et relire Proust* (Nantes: Éditions nouvelles Cécile Defaut, 2014). This essay is based on a lecture from the previous year, available online: <http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/antoine-compagnon/seminar-2013-03-19-17h30.htm> (accessed 2015–10–26). The influence of both authors is tacitly combined in Carlo Ginzburg, “Making it Strange: The Prehistory of a Literary Device”, in *Wooden Eyes. Nine Reflections on Distance* (London: Verso, 2002), an essay that eloquently omits Brecht while devoting all the more attention to Proust. In addition, Ginzburg’s own re-reading of Proust has recently been developed in a most persuasive way by the literary critic Mariolina Bertini: see “Carlo Ginzburg lettore di Proust”, <http://www.federiconovaro.eu/proust-bertini> (accessed 2015–10–26).
35. Natalia Ginzburg, *It’s Hard to Talk about Yourself* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 66.
36. An allusion to Montaigne, who described Ginzburg’s essays as a *marqueterie mal jointe*; as discussed by Ginzburg in “Montaigne, Cannibals, and Grottoes”, in *Threads and Traces*, 45.
37. Leaving aside even more complex cases, e.g. the genre of ekphrasis.
38. Ginzburg, “Description and Citation”. As hinted at in the essay’s title, the role of description in historiography was complicated with the introduction of modern practices of citation and the new conceptions of evidence accompanying them. This development, however, should not be seen as effacing description, but merely counterbalancing its potentially deceptive vividness. Again, Ginzburg’s own writings are a case in point.
39. See “From Aby Warburg to E. H. Gombrich: A Problem of Method” and “The High and the Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, both in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, as well as Paure, reverenza, terrore. Cinque saggi di iconografia

politica (Milano: Adelphi, 2015). Though the latter has yet to be published in English, all but one of the five essays are already available in translation as stand-alone pieces (see note 51 below).

40. My use of these particular terms is inspired by Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, *The Phenomenology of Knowledge* (London: Yale University Press, 1996). More precisely: *writing* signifies, whilst spoken language mainly fulfils the intermediate task of what Cassirer calls representation (*Darstellung*).
41. Ginzburg, “From Warburg to Gombich”, 32.
42. Ginzburg, “From Warburg to Gombich”, 31. Here, Ginzburg appends a footnote (179n64) referring directly to “Cassirer’s thoughts on the ‘absence of semantics’ in figurative art.” My own reference to the philosopher, then, might not be quite as misplaced as it might first seem.
43. Cf. Ginzburg, “From Warburg to Gombich”, 29–30.
44. Ginzburg, “Clues”, 124.
45. Ginzburg & Prosperi, *Giochi di pazienza*, back cover.
46. Ginzburg & Prosperi, *Giochi di pazienza*, [1]. In the translation by Katharine Prescott Wormeley, the quote – from Balzac’s 1833 novel *Ferragus* – reads as follows: “[...] and it is by supposing everything and selecting the most probable of their conjectures that judges, spies, lovers, and observers get at the truth they are looking for.” Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus, Chief of the Dévorants* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895), 43. Available on <https://archive.org/details/ferragus00wormgoog> (accessed 2015–10–26).
47. Ginzburg and Subrahmanyam, “A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg”, n.p.
48. According to Fernando Davis, “Las poéticas de la deriva en Carlos Ginzburg”, [https://www.academia.edu/10132715/Las\\_poéticas\\_de\\_la\\_deriva\\_en\\_Carlos\\_Ginzburg](https://www.academia.edu/10132715/Las_poéticas_de_la_deriva_en_Carlos_Ginzburg) (accessed 2015–10–26), [1]n1. The parallel between the two is no less suggestive for being altogether fortuitous: after all, could microhistory not be described as a sort of *arte povera* in the field of historiography? What I have in mind here is, to begin with, Ginzburg’s characterization of his approach as “a return to handweaving in the age of power looms” (*The Cheese and the Worms*, xx) – no doubt an allusion to the “unequal exchange” he indicated in the landmark essay co-authored with Carlo Poni (see the preface, p. 16 above) – but also the enigmatic epigraph to “Clues” that he borrowed from the American artist Jasper Johns (see “Microhistory Goes Public”, p. 252 below). The connections between Johns and *arte povera* are reciprocal; for instance, Michelangelo Pistoletto’s *Oggetti in meno*, a landmark installation from the mid-60s, featured a larger-than-life photograph of Johns,

- who, in his turn, was a buyer of Pistoletto's earliest works. See the entry for Pistoletto in Ian Chilvers and John Graves-Smith, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199239665.001.0001/acref-9780199239665-e-2131> (accessed 2015–10–26). In fact, the very same passage that caught Ginzburg's eye might also have provided the inspiration for Pistoletto's title ("minus objects"); it had already featured in a text written by John Cage in 1964 for an exhibition of Johns' work at the Jewish Museum in New York; see John Cage, "Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas", in *A Year from Monday* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, [1967]), 75.
49. Ginzburg and Subrahmanyam, "A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg", n.p.
50. Luisa Ciammitti, until recently director of the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Ferrara.
51. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Enigma of Piero* (London: Verso, 1985) and the following essays: "The High and the Low" and "Titian, Ovid, and Sixteenth-Century Codes for Erotic Illustration" in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*; "Description and Citation" and "Montaigne, Cannibals, and Grottoes" in *Threads and Traces*; "Representation: the Word, the Idea, the Thing"; "Ecce: On the Scriptural Roots of Christian Devotional Imagery"; "Idols and Likenesses: A Passage in Origen and its Vicissitudes" and "Distance and Perspective: Two Metaphors" in *Wooden Eyes*; as well as "The Sword and the Lightbulb: A Reading of Guernica", in Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Salas (eds.), *Disturbing Remains. Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2001); "'Your Country Needs You': A Case Study in Political Iconography", *History Workshop Journal* 52 (2001); "Memory and Distance: Learning from a Gilded Silver Vase (Antwerp, c. 1530)", *Dio-genes* 51 (2004); "Fear Reverence Terror: Reading Hobbes Today", *EUI Max Weber Lectures* 5 (2008), [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8711/MWP\\_LS\\_2008\\_05.pdf?sequence=1](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8711/MWP_LS_2008_05.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed 2015–10–26); and "Detail", *Art Bulletin* 94:4 (2012). Of the stand-alone pieces, all but the last are included – along with an essay on Jacques-Louis David not yet been published in English – in the new collection on political iconography (see note 39 above). The images in the English edition of *The Cheese and the Worms*, in contrast, have been added by the publisher (see the note on p. [iv]).
52. *Ecstasies*, fig. 1.
53. "The Sword and the Lightbulb", figs. 8–9, 13–16, 18, 20, 22–25, 29, 34–35, 39, 42–3; "Your Country Needs You", fig. 14.
54. *Ecstasies*, fig. 19; *Threads and Traces*, figs. 1, 10; *No Island*, figs. 1.3, 1.5; *Wooden Eyes*, figs. 1–2, 4–5, 8, 13, 15–16, 19; "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It", *Critical Inquiry* 20:1 (1993), figs. 2–3 (two paintings by Umberto Boccioni that, for whatever reason, do not figure in the *Threads and Traces* version); "The Sword and the Lightbulb", figs. 1, 10, 17, 19, 21, 26–28, 30–33, 36–38, 41; "Your Country Needs You" figs. 8, 10–13, 15 – and, as pictured by others, "The Sword and the Lightbulb" figs. 45–8.
55. *Ecstasies*, fig. 4; *Wooden Eyes*, fig. 12.
56. *Ecstasies*, figs. 2–3, 7–11, 13–16; *Wooden Eyes*, figs. 6–7, 9–11; "The Sword and the Lightbulb", figs. 6–7; 40; "Detail", figs. 1–2; "Memory and Distance", figs. 1–5 (in the case of fig. 2, the 'cited' is actually the significant *absence* of the picture in question) – and, as pictured by others, *Wooden Eyes*, figs. 23–26.
57. *Threads and Traces*, fig. 4; *Wooden Eyes*, figs. 17–18, and, as pictured by others, *Wooden Eyes*, figs. 20–22; "The Sword and the Lightbulb", figs. 2–4.
58. *Threads and Traces*, fig. 9; "The Sword and the Lightbulb", fig. 44.
59. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, figs. 1–8; *Ecstasies*, figs. 5–6, 12, 18; *The Night Battles*, figs. 1–4; *No Island*, figs. 1.1, 1.4; *Threads and Traces*, figs. 2–3, 5–8; *Wooden Eyes*, figs. 3, 14; "The Sword and the Lightbulb", fig. 12; "Your Country Needs You", figs. 1, 3–7, 9, 16–21; "Fear Reverence Terror", figs. 1–4.
60. *No Island*, figs. 3.1–3.8 (cf. fig. 4.1).
61. "The Sword and the Lightbulb", figs. 2–5; "Your Country Needs You", fig. 2.
62. "The Sword and the Lightbulb", fig. 5.
63. The title is also an allusion to Ginzburg's essay "Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know About It" – which, in turn, is an allusion to one of Jean-Luc Godard's best known films (see note 114 below).
64. See "Proofs and Possibilities: Postscript to Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*" and "Details, Early Plans, Microanalysis", both in *Threads and Traces*; and "Das Leben, das teilnahmslos weitergeht", in Wolfram Schütte (ed.), *Bilder vom Kino. Literarische Kabinettstücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996). The conversation between Ginzburg and his old friend Adriano Sofri, published in the German edition of *Miti emblematiche* is also of interest here: see "Geschichte und Geschichten. Über Archive, Marlene Dietrich und die Lust an der Geschichte", in Carlo Ginzburg, *Spurensicherungen. Über verborgene Geschichte, Kunst und soziales Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983)
65. Ginzburg and Subrahmanyam, "A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg", n.p.; Carlo Ginzburg and Marco Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", *Lo straniero* 154 (2013), <http://lostraniero.net/storia-e-microstoria> (accessed 2015–10–26), n.p.
66. In fact, *The Night Battles*, Ginzburg's first major work, was already considered for adaptation by none other than Pier Paolo Pasolini, a friend of Natalia Ginzburg. This must have taken place in the period between the book's publication in 1966 and 1971, when Pasolini's attention had already turned to Boccaccio's Decameron (see p. 282 below).
- The aborted project with Werner Herzog (p. 281), in turn, probably transpired towards the end of Ginzburg's tenure at UCLA in 2006; a quick search on the Wayback Machine (see [https://web.archive.org/web/\\*/www.cheeseandworms.com](https://web.archive.org/web/*/www.cheeseandworms.com)) indicates that the film's website was online from at least mid-2007 to late 2011, a period in which Herzog released more than one new film each year. The producer, Jeffrey Abelson of Parallax Productions, started out in the mid-80s with music videos (for instance, Phil Collins' 1984 hit "Against All Odds (Take a Look at Me Now)", according to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Against\\_All\\_Odds\\_\(Take\\_a\\_Look\\_at\\_Me\\_Now\)#Music\\_video](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Against_All_Odds_(Take_a_Look_at_Me_Now)#Music_video)) – before gradually moving into feature films (documentaries included) and apparently ending up as a political activist of sorts (see <http://www.songofacitizen.com>). This track record unarguably resonates with Abelson's approach to Ginzburg's book, which can be gleaned from its would-be tagline: "One man standing up to oppressive authority, fighting the system with the power of imagination." The entire episode is an extreme example of the American reception of microhistory discussed below (p. 55–6).
67. Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p. (my translation).
68. Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p. (my translation).
69. Or else in the style of Arsenio Frugoni, one of Ginzburg's teachers at the Scuola Normale: see *Threads and Traces*, 1, 68–9, 210 and p. 156–7 below.
70. The analogy with *Blow-up* was first proposed by the French historian Jacques Revel: see "Micro-analyse et construction du social", in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 36. The English translation – "Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social", in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, *Histories. French Constructions of the Past* (New York: New Press, 1995) – is only an excerpt and does not feature the reference to Antonioni. Cf. "Un exercice de désorientation: *Blow-up*", an interview with Revel in Antoine de Baecque and Christian Delage (eds.), *De l'histoire au cinéma* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1998), as well as the comments in Antoine de Baecque, *Camera Historica. The Century in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 13. Szijártó claims that Antonioni's film is "repeatedly evoked in connection with microhistory" – although he does not point to any specific examples beyond that of Revel: see Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 25n6. As for Ginzburg himself, he regards the comparison with some scepticism: "Mi pare che l'osservazione di Revel abbia un valore più metaforico che genetico [...]" (Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p.).
71. In Ginzburg's case, a recent restatement can be found in Carlo Ginzburg, "Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today", *Cromohs* 18 (2013), 109. Available for download on <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/Cromohs-14122> (accessed 2015–10–26). The same point was made by his colleague Giovanni Levi in "On Microhistory", in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 99–100. The fact that what I call 'the principle of the close-up' has persisted even in the face of such repeated objections probably has something to do with what Francesca Trivellato has described as the "selective transatlantic migration" of microhistory: see "Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory", *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33:1 (2015), 8.
72. An allusion in turn to Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", *October* 59 (1992) and Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?", in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 1997).
73. Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange in the Historiographic Marketplace", in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
74. Revel, "Microanalysis", 496. This was actually the message that Revel's comparison with Antonioni was intended to convey in the first place: "Plus qu'une échelle, c'est à nouveau la variation d'échelle qui paraît ici fondamentale." (Revel, "Micro-analyse", 36) To my mind, the main advantage of Revel's approach is that it allows us to conceptualize not only the particular transition from 'small' to 'large', but *all* kinds of scales – for instance, in the pace of narration. Taking his classic essay on "Clues" as an example, Ginzburg has qualified its drastic leap from the 'horizontal' context of Morelli, Freud and

- Holmes to the 'vertical' context of Neolithic hunters in precisely such terms, ascribing it explicitly to "le forme littéraire de l'essai" and implicitly – by describing it as "un flash-back brutal" – to cinema. See Carlo Ginzburg, "Réflexions sur une hypothèse vingt-cinq ans après", in Denis Thouard (ed.), *L'interprétation des indices. Enquête sur le paradigme indiciaire avec Carlo Ginzburg* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Septentrion, 2007), 37–8.
75. John Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life", *Cultural and Social History* 7:1 (2010), 15.
76. Ginzburg and Subrahmanyam, "A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg", n.p. As this interview dates from 2007, Brewer's argument must have been familiar to Ginzburg before its was published in its final version – but the circumstances are not clear. "I met him a few times at UCLA, but to my best recollection we never talked about our respective research projects." (Ginzburg, personal communication)
77. Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p. (my translation).
78. Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p. (my translation).
79. Ginzburg, "Das Leben, das teilnahmslos weitergeht", 55 (my translation).
80. Ginzburg's own example of the technique is actually American: Jules Dassin's film noir classic *The Naked City* from 1948, inspired by Weegee's visual dissection of New York in a photographic collection of the same title.
81. An allusion to Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xx.
82. See note 68 above (my emphasis).
83. Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p. (my translation). On second thought, Ginzburg (personal communication) believes that he might have been eleven rather than ten. In fact, both options are possible: *Tecnica del cinema*, the Italian translation of Eisenstein's *The Film Sense*, was published by Einaudi in 1950, the year in which Ginzburg turned eleven. For convenience, I will refer to the English edition: Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948). The passage on Leonardo is in the chapter "Synchronization of the Senses" (p. 61).
84. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form. Essays in Film Theory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1949), 38 (cf. 236).
85. Ginzburg and Boarelli, "Storia e microstoria", n.p. (my translation).
86. When questioned specifically about his sources of inspiration, Ginzburg (personal communication) spontaneously recalls the names of two Italian scholars: the philologist Giorgio Pasquali and the economist Luigi Einaudi, father of the publisher of the same name.
87. Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today", in *Film Form*, 233.
88. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 214.
89. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 233 (emphasis omitted). Cf. the preface, p. 16 above.
90. See the interview, p. 191 below and cf. the passing reference to Eisenstein's essay in "Details, Early Plans, Microanalysis", 187.
91. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 214n (emphasis mine).
92. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 237.
93. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 240. Eisenstein considers *Intolerance* a partial exception, but ultimately a flawed one (see pp. 240–3).
94. Cf. e.g. Trivellato, "Microstoria", 5–8.
95. For a selection of his writings on the topic, see *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*, edited by Bert Cardullo (New York: Continuum, 2011).
96. André Bazin, "Letter from Siberia", *Film Comment* 39:4 (2003), 44. While this particular review is most frequently cited, it is not the first time that Bazin directs attention to Marker's highly distinctive style of montage: cf. Sarah Cooper, "Montage, Militancy, Metaphysics: Chris Marker and André Bazin", *Image & Narrative* 11:1 (2010), [4–6]. Available on <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.php/imagenarrative/article/view/63> (accessed 2015–10–26).
97. This odd terminological discrepancy would seem to go back to the different system of coordinates implicitly invoked by the two authors: the horizontal direction of Western writing systems – literary as well as musical – in Eisenstein's case (cf. *The Film Sense*, 123), the vertical direction of the film strip through the projector in Bazin's. Regarding the prevalence of the latter's term, see Jennifer Stob, "Cut and Spark: Chris Marker, André Bazin and the Metaphors of Horizontal Montage", *Studies in French Cinema* 12:1 (2012), 36.
98. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 61.
99. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 254.
100. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 61.
101. Eisenstein, "Dickens", 254.
102. Bazin, "Letter from Siberia", 44.
103. Bazin, "Letter from Siberia", 44.
104. Ginzburg, "Microhistory", 212.
105. Bazin, "Letter from Siberia", 45.
106. Cf. the preface, p. 15 above.
107. Revel, "Microanalysis", 500–1.
108. Nicolas Geneix, "Micrologie de Chris Marker", *Image & Narrative* 10:3 (2009), 29 (my translation). Available on <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.php/imagenarrative/article/view/34> (accessed 2015–10–26). As the title indicates, Geneix takes his cue from Adorno's notion of micrology, an inspiration that is explicit in Ginzburg's case: see e.g. "Microhistory", 208 (with reference to Adorno, Kracauer and Simmel). His way of contrasting Adorno's perspective with that of Walter Benjamin would seem to speak against Tony Molho's interpretation of Ginzburg: see "Reflections", 144–8.
109. In Ginzburg's terms (see p. 70 above), my thesis is neither 'metaphoric' (interpretive) nor 'genetic' (explanatory), but rather genuinely *comparative* – which, of course, implies a little bit of interpretation as well as explanation. Therefore, it is only strengthened by the relative autonomy of the two lines of development.
110. For the relation between Russian and Italian film, see Masha Salazkina, "Soviet-Italian Cinematic Exchanges, 1920s–1950s. From early Soviet film theory to neorealism", in Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar, *Global Neorealism. The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
111. Brewer, "Microhistory", 102.
112. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *I dialoghi* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1992), 512. Cited in Brancaloneo, "The Interventions of Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker into Contemporary Visual Art", *Vertigo Magazine* 30 (2012). Available on [https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo\\_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/the-interventions-of-jean-luc-godard-and-chris-marker](https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/the-interventions-of-jean-luc-godard-and-chris-marker) (accessed 2015–10–26).
113. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence", in *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 59.
114. Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It" – an allusion (cf. the interview, p. 292) to Godard's *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*. Then again, it may also be read as a tacit reference to Lepetit, "L'histoire quantitative: deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle" (1989). Translated as "Quantitative History: Another Approach" in Revel & Hunt (eds.), *Histories*.
115. See e.g. T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image. The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).