

PREFACE
TOWARDS A
COMMUNITY
OF STYLE

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Tristo è lo discepolo che non avanza il suo maestro
("Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master")
– Leonardo da Vinci, ca 1493¹

"Was this still history? I would say so [...] but labels are of little importance."
– Carlo Ginzburg, 2007²

The book that you have just started reading is perhaps best described as the outcome of an experiment in practical epistemology. Like most other experiments in the long history of scientific inquiry, it started out as little more than a hunch.

Over three days in late February of 2012, the School of Photography (now part of the Valand Academy) at the University of Gothenburg hosted a seminar about artistic research under the heading *Writing with Practice*. It was the fifth of a total of seven similar events organized within the framework of the project *Changing Identities and Contexts in the Arts* (CICA), a collaboration funded by the European Commission's department for Education and Culture that also included two other research institutions, as well as four art institutions in Gothenburg, Helsinki and Leeds.³ Among the participants at this particular installment was the artist and writer Magnus Bårtås, professor at the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, who took the seminar as an opportunity to develop some aspects of his recently completed dissertation in fine arts.⁴ As for myself, I had been invited to provide some comments on his presentation.⁵

Although I came to the seminar as an outsider, I was not entirely unprepared for the task. To begin with, my own dissertation – even more recently completed – dealt with what should reasonably be described as a chapter from the prehistory of artistic research.⁶ In addition, I had already followed the local debates in and around that rapidly developing field for a number of years and even made some minor contributions to it.⁷ For this particular occasion, I had

taken the time to read up on not only Magnus' thesis, but also some of his previously published work.⁸ With all of this in the back of my head, I arrived at the intuition that, as I put it at the time,

Magnus Bårtås isn't just any kind of storyteller. He is an historian – or, to be even more precise, a *contemporary audiovisual microhistorian*. An ugly duckling if I ever saw one.⁹

A contemporary audiovisual – *what* did he just say? To be honest, I was far from certain myself: at the time, my notion of microhistory was vague at best. Still, what little I knew, in juxtaposition with what I had just learnt about Magnus' work, seemed to make some strange kind of sense. Nor was I the only one to think so, judging from the reactions of the audience (among whom were, in fact, some of the contributors to the present volume).¹⁰ I was not sure why – indeed, I am still far from sure – but the idea did seem to have 'struck a note', as the saying goes. That was at least the way Magnus would describe it when he got back to me by e-mail a few weeks later:

I appreciated our talk in Gothenburg [...] *It really struck a note* when you brought up the term microhistory and then sketched a little genealogy. For a while now, I've been thinking about an application for funding from the Swedish Research Council for a project that would include different people: artists and theoreticians. It will build to some extent on my dissertation and be based in the field of film. But I am also fairly open as far as results and forms are concerned [...] Now that I've started outlining the project, the word microhistories has come to the surface and I'm even thinking of naming the project just that: Microhistories (in the plural).¹¹

As you will already suspect, it was with growing excitement that I read these lines and the rough draft that followed. The goal of the project, Magnus explained, would be to bring together practitioners from the visual arts, literature and history for a collaborative exploration of whether and how the notion of microhistory as it has been developed in academic historiography could be fruitfully applied in an artistic setting and, in particular, to the so-called essay film or video essay.¹² Drawing on my remarks at the seminar in Gothenburg, he had arrived at his own, tentative definition of the key term: "a concept for how certain historians highlight marginalized phenomena and stories, using them prismatically to reach an understanding of a larger situation." Taking this idea as its point of departure, the project would investigate the narrative practice that makes such a prismatic understanding possible and how that practice relates to other literary genres – for whatever reason, Magnus mentioned the parable as an example – as well as to hybrid forms such as the video essay. Would I by any chance be inter-

ested in contributing to such a joint effort?

Of course I would. The only thing I did not agree with was the initial, run-of-the-mill distinction between 'artists' on the one hand and 'theoreticians' on the other: these categories, it seemed to me, were quite problematic in themselves and, in any case, did not really correspond to what would actually take place within the project as Magnus himself had described it. In hindsight, I am not sure when I first told him about these concerns (surprisingly, there is no mention of the issue in our correspondence), but I do remember that I had no trouble making him see things my way. The project, then, would not be conceived as a meeting between 'practice' and 'theory' – as is all too often the case in the discourse that surrounds artistic research – but rather between different practices, each with its own particular way of 'theorizing' things. The fact that it was mainly situated at the intersection of art and history – rather than, say, philosophy or social theory – made such an approach seem even more plausible. This is at least what received wisdom tells us: that history is as much of an art as it is a science.¹³ After all, that has to count for something.

Such, in brief, was the basic setup for our epistemological experiment. Apparently, it was convincing enough for the Swedish Research Council to give us the green light. And as to whether the outcome is also convincing? That is really up to you to decide.

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However, the question still remains. Even if the project started out on nothing but a vague intuition, it must reasonably have resulted in something a little more tangible. A mere hunch might be acceptable as a point of departure – although, in fact, even that is a matter for academic dispute – but it hardly qualifies as a conclusion. What, then, is microhistory?

Well, what does it sound like? A word – twelve letters, five syllables, two elements: a prefix derived from *mikros*, the Greek word for 'small', and a suffix derived from another Greek word which is best translated simply as 'inquiry', 'observation' or 'account'. Microhistory, that is to say, is an inquiry into anything small – a question of, in the words of the American historian Edward Muir, "observing trifles".¹⁴ If nothing else, this is the most straightforward answer I can come up with. It is also accurate in at least one sense: microhistory, whatever it may be, has often been dismissed as little more than a scholarly obsession with the minute and minuscule (hence the irony in Muir's title choice). Starting from very little, we have already learnt something – although nothing much.

If the most straightforward answer to the question of microhistory is "a word", the most common answer is probably "a concept". A word, that is to say, with a quite specific meaning, more or less clearly defined by its place in a particular context – which is, in our case, mainly an academic one. The important thing

to note, however, is really the ‘more or less’. True enough, we can think of examples – not least from the promised land of pure mathematics – that are almost entirely well-defined, but the typical concept would seem to fall far short of such lofty standards. Most are quite ambiguous and some – such as ‘truth’, ‘justice’, ‘democracy’ or, by all means, ‘art’ and ‘science’ – are disputed almost by definition.

As a concept, microhistory arguably belongs somewhere between both of these extremes: undeniably, it is not entirely clear-cut – unlike, say, the so-called Dedekind cut, a set-theoretical procedure for defining the real numbers, named after the German mathematician Richard Dedekind (1831–1916) – but nor can it be regarded as irredeemably contested. This is not to deny that opinions as to its meaning differ considerably, but among those who would have a say in the matter (professional historians, mostly), the majority would seem to agree on at least some basic features. From this average perspective, microhistory could be defined as a certain way of performing historical research. It is not really a school, and perhaps not even a method in the strict sense, but at least a kind of overarching perspective – not to settle, as one of the perspective’s leading proponents once did, for a “community of style”¹⁵ – that attends to small details rather than the big picture, thrives on deviations rather than the rule, sides with ‘the little people’ rather than ‘the system’, departs from concrete experiences rather than abstract ideas, works with sharp analyses rather than sweeping syntheses, and last but not least, results in captivating narratives rather than (supposedly) comprehensive explanations.

Such a run-through would, no doubt, seem to take us a lot closer to the answer – but we are not quite there yet. One of the unfortunate things about concepts is that they tend to come two by two, in dichotomies: if nothing else, the implied one between the concept itself and the term by which it is denoted. Indeed, my attempt at an ‘average’ definition of microhistory has just provided us with a number of examples. At first, such dichotomies may well come across as useful – they are good for cleaving, as the etymology of the term (*dichotomia*, ‘a cutting in half’) already indicates – but once the hackwork is over and done with, they often turn out to be much too blunt a tool. Worse yet, if we hold on too tightly, they often start working against us. Before we can really get to grips with microhistory, it would seem that we need to distance ourselves even further from it – even to the point, perhaps, of almost leaving it behind?

If the most common answer to our question is probably “a concept”, the most reasonable answer – at least to my mind – would rather be “an event”. Most reasonable, if nothing else, because it does not exclude the two previous answers, but rather sets them off in a sort of dynamic interplay with each other. Come to think of it, such an approach would even seem to follow from the microhistorical perspective itself.¹⁶

Considered as an event, then, microhistory becomes a matter of neither of letters and syllables, nor of definitions and dichotomies – at least not in the first

instance. Rather, it takes us back to a certain time and place, to particular scenes and situations: Italy in the mid-1970s, the city and university of Bologna, the journal *Quaderni storici*, the Einaudi publishing house. This provides us with a setting for the word as well as the concept, a background against which both stand out all the more clearly. As it turns out, the concept came first, the word only later: to begin with, the talk was about “micro-analysis” (*micro-analisi*) and, in hindsight, no one would seem to recall precisely when, where and why *microstoria* won the day.¹⁷ Fast-forward to the early 1980s and its triumph was already indisputable – chiefly owing, no doubt, to the spectacular (and, I presume, almost entirely unexpected) success of *Il formaggio e i vermi*, Carlo Ginzburg’s extended essay about the unorthodox worldview of a 16th century miller. Within five years of its original publication in 1976, the book had already been translated into German, English, French and Spanish. Many more versions would follow as microhistory became one of Italy’s main exports in a rapidly globalizing academic market.

From this brief account, one thing is already quite obvious: the ‘event’ of microhistory cannot be isolated – at least not in any meaningful way – from the heterogeneous set of processes in which it has been caught up from the very beginning. For the same reason, its original setting stands in an inescapable relation to other settings, its time and place to other times and places. Among these, the French historiographical scene takes pride of place, if only because it provided the Italian microhistorians with both an important source of intellectual imports – Bloch, Febvre, Braudel *et cie* – and a primary export market. In other words, the so-called Annales school, the dominating ‘community of style’ in French historiography for a large part of the 20th century, acted as both consignor and consignee: it was not only the obvious point of departure for Ginzburg and his colleagues, but also their main audience outside of Italy, not least as a target of criticism.¹⁸ In fact, as Ginzburg himself has demonstrated, if anyone should be credited with coining the word microhistory, it is actually Fernand Braudel, the grand old man of the Annales school in the first couple of decades after 1945.¹⁹ The Italian approach has subsequently been developed in dialogue with French historians such as Roger Chartier, Bernard Lepetit and, last but not least, Jacques Revel.²⁰

What neither party to this academic contract of carriage had probably predicted²¹ was that microhistory – the word as well as the concept – would find an even more profitable market on the other side of the Atlantic, where it became an attractive piece of contraband in the ‘theory wars’ of the late 80s and early 90s. Whereas the French reception, quite in keeping with the established outlook of the Annales school, had been mostly oriented towards social and economic history, its American counterpart was rather inclined to cultural and intellectual history.²² It is the latter brand of microhistory that, in due course, crossed the Atlantic in the opposite direction: to stay with the same metaphor, it was only

after having been processed through US university campuses that microhistory was eventually re-exported, especially to segments of the European market where it had not yet made lasting inroads. Sweden, a country where the academic discussion has become more dependent on American conditions than we would perhaps care to admit, is a case in point. Although there was an earlier, independent reception, not least thanks to the efforts of the leftist journal *Häften för kritiska studier*, the major breakthrough came only later – if, indeed, it has come at all – and then, I suspect, mainly with American rather than French or Italian models in mind.²³

But, by all means, we should not lose ourselves in mere trivialities. Instead, let us take a step back and try to survey the international trajectory of microhistory from a somewhat greater distance. From such a perspective, what comes into view are not only the doings of a small group of Italian historians, nor the contributions of their forerunners and followers, but the whole expanse of modern historiography as it has taken shape in the force field between art and science, idiographic and nomothetic ideals of knowledge.

If we do not need to situate microhistory in this epistemic panorama, it is only because it situated itself there, and quite consciously at that. In the tug of war between an older, humanist or historicist tradition in historiography and the new, social-scientific approach represented by the Annales school (among many others), what microhistory attempted was clearly not a compromise, but nevertheless a kind of balancing act. As far as I can understand, this was really the fundamental impulse behind the microhistorical current – the one that allowed it to gather, if only for a brief time, diverging and even contradictory interests and tendencies under a single banner.²⁴ Such, at least, is the main thrust of the paradoxical definition of history in general and microhistory in particular proposed in 1979 by Ginzburg and his colleague Carlo Poni: history as a *scienza del vissuto*, a science of ‘lived experience’ (“undoubtedly an ambiguous expression”). A definition that, in the authors’ own words, “seeks to comprehend the reasoning of both the supporters and the enemies of the integration of history with the social sciences, and for this, no doubt, it will not be pleasing to either side.”²⁵

As it turned out, their prediction was altogether accurate, and for a fairly obvious reason. In spite of the explicit ambition of striking a balance between the competing demands of modern historiography, microhistory displayed a decisive inclination towards the idiographic end of the spectrum from the very beginning. Others can judge whether this was the result of a genuine theoretical preference, a kind of recoil from the perceived influence of an Annales-style *histoire totale*, the expression of lingering political allegiances – while Ginzburg and Poni gestured rather vaguely towards a “non-elitist perspective”; their reference to the British New Left historian E. P. Thompson is all the more telling – or, perhaps most likely, a combination of all of the above.²⁶ This much seems clear: as the current gained momentum throughout the 80s, this original inclination

(the word *clinamen* comes to mind) would soon throw microhistory off balance, as it were, causing some scholars – in part, perhaps, as a result of the combined attraction exerted by postmodern ‘theory’ and the new cultural history – to veer in an idiographic (‘micro’) direction, now conceived in contradiction to the nomothetic (‘macro’). Others, on the contrary, would veer back towards the ‘macro’ by emphasizing the complementarity of the two perspectives; whether this was due to a recoil from the opposite swerve, the enduring prestige of the Annales tradition, the changing political climate or a combination is, again, difficult to say. Either way, at some point, the vital tension was lost.

By the early 90s, this rivalry between what came to be described as the cultural and social camps of microhistory was officially acknowledged.²⁷ It led, in its turn, to more or less symbolic attempts at bridging the gap and, in due time, to some of the key figures in the field – Ginzburg among them – denouncing what was increasingly perceived as just another label.²⁸ And with that, the case of microhistory could well seem to be closed.

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It goes without saying that such a conclusion would leave the present project in quite a quandary. Why bother, one might ask, to take up the term again when even Ginzburg himself has more or less relinquished it?²⁹

On the contrary; that is precisely the point.

In asking about not what microhistory *is*, but rather what it *has become* – or, indeed, what has become *of it* – we have achieved something quite remarkable without even noticing. We have created, in an altogether practical fashion, a sort of distance between ourselves and our chosen topic, and that distance also leaves room for an independent stance towards it. After zooming out from the historical development of microhistory as a current in modern historiography, we are now in a position to zoom in again, but this time on the present rather than the past. To be more precise, we are now at liberty to recover the fundamental impulse behind microhistory by situating it in a contemporary academic landscape and, even more specifically, in what I have described elsewhere as the “expanded field” of historiography – with artistic research as a wild card in the scientific *gioco di pazienza*.³⁰ This, at least, has been the cognitive wager of our epistemological experiment: if we take the possibility of artistic research seriously, we must also acknowledge its ramifications (*de jure*, if not – or, at least, not yet – *de facto*) for neighboring academic disciplines, in the first place within the humanities and social sciences.³¹ By shifting the overall balance – if ever so slightly – towards the idiographic end of the transdisciplinary spectrum, artistic research contributes to a leveling of the academic playing field that, in principle, should render the precarious balancing act attempted by microhistory a little easier to maintain. And sometimes, a little goes a long way.

For instance, perhaps this slightest of shifts is what will finally allow us to leave behind the fruitless debates about micro versus macro, the detail versus the big picture – or indeed, art versus science. On my interpretation, the decisive contrast was never really with macrohistory anyway, but rather with what Ginzburg, in conversation with the Norwegian literary critic Trygve Riiser Gundersen, described as *middle history*:

[T]he kind of history that uncritically accepts the explanatory levels we deem ‘natural’ in a given context – a nation, an epoch, a period of time, and the like. I wanted to show, if I could, that the scope of study never can be taken for granted. The scale we employ always determines what answers it is possible to arrive at in each case, be it at the micro- or the macro-level.³²

The quote, which belongs in a discussion of *Ecstasies*, is from the early 2000s – but the same intention was arguably present from the very beginning. On Ginzburg’s own account, the common point of departure for Italian microhistory was actually twofold: on the one hand, “a definite awareness that all the phases through which research unfolds are *constructed* and not *given*”, and on the other, “an explicit rejection of the skeptical implications (postmodern, if you will) so largely present in European and American historiography of the 1980s and 1990s.”³³ It is precisely this Janus-faced quality that the notion of (micro-)history as a *scienza del vissuto* would seem to capture so very accurately: a practice that unabashedly aspires to the proud name of science and, in the very same breath, lays claim to an insight – a limited one, but nevertheless – into the unfathomable depths of human experience.³⁴

What seems really significant about Ginzburg’s criticism is that it is leveled, not at one particular approach or another, but at *any* kind of historiography that takes its methodological presuppositions for granted. Microhistory, too, could hence end up as ‘middle history’ – and, we may safely assume, it often has – for the simple reason that, as Ginzburg himself bluntly put it on another occasion, “bad microhistory is bad history.”³⁵ Over against this bad middle – the compromise, the golden mean, the *juste milieu* – the Italian historian implicitly posits another one: not halfway in-between, nor just slightly off center, but operating instead in a wholly different domain; one that is perhaps irrational but certainly not unreasonable.³⁶ As Italo Calvino has taught us, “the poet of vagueness can only be the poet of exactitude” (*il poeta del vago può essere solo il poeta della precisione*).³⁷

Or, to turn the argument on its head, Fernand Braudel was also a micro-historian when he utilized the notion of the *longue durée* as a sort of conceptual crowbar for breaking up the reigning consensus of history as essentially *événe-mentielle*. Who else was it that encouraged his disciples to attend ever more closely to the complexity of historical time? In the words of one of those disciples, the French historian François Hartog, Braudel transformed history into “a dialectic

of *durées*, in which structures, levels, and registers were carefully differentiated, each with its own temporality.”³⁸ The *jeux d’échelles* of microhistory is scarcely conceivable without such a prior differentiation – and, symptomatically, as his own *gros plan* perspective devolved into the new ‘middle history’, Braudel himself moved on. In Ginzburg’s assessment, “he was too intelligent, too impatient to content himself with repeating what had now become for many, because of his own authority, an accepted truth.”³⁹ In the same way, incidentally, as Ginzburg himself would move on, first from the reigning consensus of the *Annales* and then from microhistory, as it too ran the risk of turning into something like a school.

With the *Microhistories* project, we would like to move on in much the same way, taking the spirit of microhistory – if not always its letter – as our Ariadne’s thread. By inviting artistic research into its ‘community of style’, we hope to resuscitate the vital tension that microhistory seems to have lost as a result of its own unexpected success. “A life chosen at random,” Ginzburg claims, “can make concretely visible the attempt to unify the world, as well as some of its implications.”⁴⁰ If he is right, art – and, by implication, artistic research – should obviously have an important role to play in such an undertaking. To signal this fresh departure, it even occurred to me (*pace* Ginzburg’s insistence on their triviality) to propose a slightly modified label as a designation for our approach: μ -history. Luckily, common sense made me decide against it. The question is rather to what extent that approach has allowed us – and, even more importantly, will allow us – to free up the methodological resources of microhistory in order to deploy them, in a partly different setting, to contemporary problems. As we approach these problems, I hope that we will be able to maintain – in spite of everything – that vital tension that Ginzburg discovered for himself in the works of Raymond Queneau, “between the warmth of the narrator’s intimate glance and the coldness of the scientist’s detached observation.”⁴¹

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In the bibliometric era, research projects are increasingly expected to display not only a rigorous methodology, but also an efficient ‘design’ – to the point where your hard-earned findings (or ‘output’) must almost be disclosed to the funding body in advance of their actual discovery. In contrast, as we have already seen, this project started out as little more than a vague intuition. Hopefully, what follows will contribute to making that intuition both clearer and more distinct without entirely surrendering its intuitive quality to the demands of discourse. No doubt, we still have quite some way to go before arriving at our envisaged ‘community of style’ – but, if nothing else, at least this anthology is a beginning. Let us see how far it will take us.

Gothenburg, February 12, 2016

1. As quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, "Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today", *Cromohs* 18 (2013), 110. Available for download on <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/Cromohs-14122> (accessed 2015–10–26). Apparently, Ginzburg is quoting from memory; cf. the slightly different wording ("quel" instead of "lo") in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by Jean Paul Richter (New York: Dover, 1970), I, 205.
2. 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, my translation.
3. Cf. the introductory remarks by Jan Kaila and Kimmo Sarje in Mika Hannula, Jan Kaila, Roger Palmer & Kimmo Sarje (ed.), *Artists as Researchers – A New Paradigm for Art Education in Europe* (Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts, 2013).
4. Magnus Bårtås, *You Told Me – Work Stories and Video Essays / Verkberättelser och videoessäer*, Art-Monitor avhandling #19 (Göteborg: Nämnden för konstnärligt utvecklingsarbete vid Konstnärliga fakulteten, Göteborgs universitet, 2010).
5. His presentation, as well as my comments, were subsequently published in the project anthology: Magnus Bårtås, "Work Stories Revisited" and Andrej Slávik, "Who Told Me – and Why? Two or Three Things I Have Reason to Believe about Magnus Bårtås", both in Hannula, Kaila, Palmer & Sarje (ed.), *Artists as Researchers*.
6. Andrej Slávik, *X. Tre etyder över ett tema av Iannis Xenakis (1922–2001)* (Göteborg: Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria och religion, Göteborgs universitet, 2011), published in a revised edition as *X. Tre etyder över ett tema av Iannis Xenakis (1922–2001)*, LIR skrifter #3 (Göteborg: Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria och religion, Göteborgs universitet, 2013). Regarding Xenakis' work as an early form of artistic research, see esp. p. 77 and cf. Iannis Xenakis, *Arts/Sciences: Alloys. The Thesis Defense of Iannis Xenakis* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1985).
7. See e.g. "The Poetics of History, or Hatching an Ugly Duckling: Research in Mode $\sqrt{2}$ ", *ArtMonitor* 8 (2010); "Film, historia: konfrontationer", *ArtMonitor* 9 (2010).
8. E.g. Magnus Bårtås & Fredrik Ekman, *Innanför cirkeln. En resa bland yezidier, damanhurianer och swedenborgare* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget DN, 2005).
9. Slávik, "Who Told Me – and Why?", 120. The last sentence is an allusion to Slávik, "The Poetics of History".
10. Besides Magnus and myself, the seminar was also attended by Mika Hannula (who was part of the organizing team), Behzad Khosravi Noori and Michelle Teran. Behzad gives his point of view on the same event on p. 160 below.
11. Magnus Bårtås, private communication (March 10, 2012), my translation and emphasis.
12. Cf. the epilogue.
13. Indeed, this discussion is as old as modern historiography itself, if not older. For a recent (and conveniently brief) discussion, see Henk Wesseling, "History: Science or Art?", *European Review* 6:3 (1998).
14. Edward Muir, "Introduction: Observing Trifles", in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
15. Edoardo Grendi, "Repenser la micro-histoire?", in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), my translation. Grendi's original essay was published in *Quaderni storici* 86 (1994), a source that I have unfortunately not been able to access.
16. Cf. Francesca Trivellato, "Microstoria/microhistoire/microhistory", *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33:1 (2015), 122–3.
17. See Edoardo Grendi, "Micro-analisi e storia sociale", *Quaderni storici* 35 (1977) and cf. Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It", in *Threads and Traces. True, False, Fictive* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 197.
18. Cf. e.g. Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange in the Historiographic Marketplace", in Muir & Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory*. As the title of Ginzburg and Poni's essay makes evident, the market metaphor was already employed by the actors themselves: it is an emic, not an etic, category.
19. Ginzburg, "Microhistory", 195–6.
20. Regarding the contribution of latter, see Trivellato, "Microstoria". A useful overview is provided by Tomasz Wi licz, "The 'Annales' School and the Challenge of the Late 20th Century. Criticisms and Tentative Reforms", *Acta Poloniae Historica* 92 (2005).
21. True enough, one of the main contenders to Braudel's throne spoke already in 1968 of a *défi américain*, but at that point, judging from his argument, the challenge was conceived as technical rather than theoretical: see Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "The Historian and the Computer", in Jacques Revel & Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Histories. French Constructions of the Past* (New York: New Press, 1995), 332.
22. Trivellato, "Microhistory", 126–9.
23. In fact, it would seem as if the label is still struggling for recognition in a Swedish context; as late as in 2014, the annual meeting of the Swedish Historical Society took microhistory as one of its main themes, the subject of no less than five individual sessions – to the bewilderment of quite a few of the participants, who felt that this hardly qualified as the proverbial Next Big Thing. For instance, the economic historian Ylva Hasselberg objected that quite a number of Swedish scholars had already been doing more or less the same thing, only under different names (cultural history, the history of mentalities etc.), since the early 90s. Although I see no reason to doubt her assessment, the question remains of just what should count as 'the same thing': judging from the ensuing discussion, what both Hasselberg and her rivals had in mind was really the same, vaguely delimited perspective 'from below'. In any case, it must clearly be regarded as a milestone that the leading Swedish publisher of higher education textbooks recently put out an introduction to microhistory for undergraduates: see Anna Götlind & Helena Kåks, *Mikrohistoria. En introduktion för uppsatsskrivande studenter* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2014).
24. In one of his more recent recollections, Ginzburg writes of "the impulse that generated microhistory" – but what that 'impulse' actually consisted of is not entirely obvious from his argument. See Carlo Ginzburg, "Some Queries Addressed to Myself", in *Carlo Ginzburg. 2010 Balzan Prize for European history* (Milano: Fondazione Internazionale Balzan, 2011). Available for download on <http://www.balzan.org/upload/EstrattoGinzburgENG.pdf>.
25. Ginzburg & Poni, "The Name and the Game", 8, my emphasis.
26. Ginzburg & Poni, "The Name and the Game", 7.
27. See Simona Cerutti, "Microhistory: Social Relations Versus Cultural Models?", in Anna-Maija Castrén, Markku Lonkila & Matti Peltonen, *Between Sociology and History. Essays on Microhistory, Collective Action, and Nation-Building* (Helsinki: SKS / Finnish Literature Society, 2004). For a different take on the same theme, see François Dosse, *Empire of Meaning. The Humanization of the Social Sciences* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 230–1.
28. Cerutti's essay was itself such an attempt – and the same goes for the conclusion of Carlo Ginzburg, "Latitude, Slaves, and Bible: An Experiment in Microhistory", *Critical Inquiry* 31:3 (2005), 682–3 (cf. Trivellato, "Microstoria", 125). As for the tendency to denounce the term, the first epigraph to this preface is one example. In addition, see e.g. Ginzburg, "Latitude, Slaves, and Bible", 665 ("One might call this approach microhistory, but labels are ultimately irrelevant.") and cf. the parallel but inverted statement in Ginzburg, "Some Queries Addressed to Myself", 13 ("Labels do not interest me, but the impulse that generated microhistory does.").
29. I say 'more or less' since, in practice, it has obviously proved difficult to disengage from, as evidenced by recent titles such as e.g. Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory and World History", in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam & 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).
30. Andrej Slávik, "What is History and Why Do I Write It? Afterthoughts on the Contemporary Past", in Claes Caldenby, Julia Tedroff, Andrej Slávik & Martin Farran-Lee (eds.), *Architecture, Photography and the Contemporary Past* (Stockholm: Art and Theory, 2014), 171. The expression *gioco di pazienza* is an thinly veiled allusion to what should probably be regarded as the original – and, as of yet untranslated – microhistorical manifesto: Carlo Ginzburg & Adriano Prosperi, *Giochi di pazienza. Un seminario sul Beneficio di Cristo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975).
31. The phrase 'cognitive wager' is another allusion, this time to a key passage in Ginzburg, "Microhistory", 212.
32. Carlo Ginzburg & Trygve Riiser Gundersen, "On the Dark Side of History", *Eurozine* (2003), 7. First published in Norwegian in *Samtiden* 2 (2003). Available for download on <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2003-07-11-ginzburg-en.html>.
33. Ginzburg, "Microhistory", 212.
34. Cf. Ginzburg, "Latitude, Slaves, and Bible", 683. In this, I would argue, also lies the tenuous, yet crucial connection between microhistory – at least in Ginzburg's version – and the discipline of aesthetics as it developed from Baumgarten and up to (but not including) Hegel. From a bird's-eye view, both would seem to belong to what used to be called a 'lower gnoseology' (*gnoseologia inferior*). See Niklaus Largier, "The Plasticity of the Soul: Mystical Darkness, Touch, and Aesthetic Experience", *MLN* 125:3 (2010) and cf. the concluding – but, from my perspective, far from conclusive – discussion of 'low intuition' in Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm", in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 125.

35. Ginzburg, "Our Words and Theirs", 110.
36. Here, I take the liberty of paraphrasing myself and, more specifically, my own notion of 'research in mode $\sqrt{2}$ ': see Slávik, "The Poetics of History", 109.
37. Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milano: Garzanti, 1988), 61. Translated by Patrick Creagh as *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 60.
38. François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 14.
39. Ginzburg, "Microhistory", 195. The Italian economic historian Francesco Boldizzoni makes the same point in more general terms: "In short, the history of the movement does not coincide with that of the paradigm. The former existed before the latter and survives it." Francesco Boldizzoni, *The Poverty of Clio. Resurrecting Economic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 136 – where the passing reference to Ginzburg's work is hardly incidental.
40. Ginzburg, "Latitude, Slaves, and Bible", 682.
41. Ginzburg, "Microhistory", 198.