POTLATCH

Issue # 5
Fall 2022
US $ 10

A Journal of the Potlatch Lab at Pratt Institute School of Architecture



ISBN 978-1-7923-9725-7

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POTLATCH

Published by
Pratt Institute School of Architecture
61 St James Pl,
Brooklyn, NY 11238

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ISBN 978-1-7923-9725-7

Fall 2022, Issue 5

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Potlatch Editors
Yehuda E. Safran
Savinien Caracostea

Copy Editor
Alex Artaud

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Printed in September 2022 by Cornell Print Services,
Ithaca, NY

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Potlatch 5

Special thanks to Elise Jaffe &
Jeffrey Brown for their generous
support of Potlatch issue 5.

An Interview with Carlo Ginzburg

Yehuda Safran & Daniel Sherer

March 6, 2022

Introduction

Over the course of a career spanning more than six decades, Carlo Ginzburg has explored regions of experience, dimensions of culture and aspects of intellectual life and the visual arts situated beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries. In so doing he has reshaped history, both in its practice and in its epistemic premises, often working from small details. His is an achievement that is not confined to any one area of inquiry, but extends to many; for this reason, along with several others, it may be seen as exceptional. This is in keeping with a figure whose perennial interest in the dialectic of norm and exception extends to the discovery of such "normal exceptions" as the sixteenth-century heretic, the Friulian miller Menocchio Scandella, the protagonist of *Il formaggio e i vermi* (1976); *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980) who held that the cosmos originated in putrefaction, rather than in the act of divine creation recounted in Genesis. Like Menocchio's unbridled will to knowledge, Ginzburg's curiosity ranges widely across different scales. In a way that is inimitably his own, Ginzburg has focused on multiple intersections between disparate phenomena and adjacent fields, disclosing unforeseen links between them. Alert to the shifting relations between the morphological and historical dimensions of his objects of study, he brings together the microhistorical approach for which he is famous and more extensive historiographical panoramas by integrating his reading of clues within larger perspectives.

If a good example of this integration can be seen in his reconstruction of a deep context for pre-Christian folk beliefs in peasant cultures across Europe (elaborated in series of works from *I Benandanti*, 1966, *The Night Battles*, 1983, through *Il Formaggio e i vermi*, 1976, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 1980, *to Storia Notturna*, 1990, *Ecstasies: A Deciphering of the Witches' Sabbath*, 1991, and his more recent investigation of Thiess, the old Livonian werewolf, 2019), a powerful instance of his detail-oriented approach is evident in a chapter of *Nondimanco: Machiavelli, Pascal* (2021), *Nevertheless: Machiavelli, Pascal* (2022). In this study Ginzburg focused on a previously overlooked convergence between sixteenth-century Florentine political thought and the visual arts of that era when tracing the Machiavellian implications of a sculptural detail in Michelangelo's Medici Chapel. This is the small box carved with the features of both a lion and a fox held by Lorenzo de' Medici —attributes of the ideal prince that Machiavelli outlined in *The Prince*. The dedication of this book to the same Medici prince, Ginzburg argues, makes it highly likely that Michelangelo relied upon his friend Machiavelli for his "chimeric" iconography of the lion/fox in order to suggest that the deceased prince was both as valiant (and violent) as a lion and as wily (and stealthy) as a fox.

In addition to making new discoveries of this kind —unveilings which make it possible for us to look at old works in new ways —Ginzburg casts unexpected light on specific historical problems (like that of heresy, in its relations with pre-Christian folk beliefs, the scholarly examination of which, with reference to sixteenth-century Europe, he can be said to have revolutionized.) Ultimately, one could argue that his work is concerned with redefining the limits and nature of the historian's task. Moving from the idea that the close scrutiny of traces and signs is a fundamental principle of human understanding, he has shown that a heightened sensitivity to morphological differences and similarities across a wide variety of contexts both antedates and helped shape the practice of history. This becomes most apparent in his approach to what he calls evidential paradigms, a concept first laid out in his seminal essay, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (1985). Here his emphasis on the methods by which the historian, the doctor, the detective and the psychoanalyst read clues, in the most varied forms assumed by details, symptoms, and slips of the tongue, lends support to new interpretations of part/whole relationships both in narrative and epistemic senses.

If one wished to draw a map of Ginzburg's intellectual endeavors to date, one may conveniently start with this concept of an evidential paradigm, as it provides a powerful lens through which the most disparate objects of inquiry can be viewed. When dealing with this concept, one can readily delineate the conventional boundaries that his work has straddled or overcome. To be sure, this cartography of an intellect at work could be outlined in a great number of ways. At the very least, with reference to his work, one would be obliged to point to the numerous and fertile exchanges between history and anthropology on the one hand, and those between art history and the sciences, generally if somewhat roughly identified as both human and exact, on the other. Yet it is precisely in trying to trace the boundaries of such a restless, probing mind that Ginzburg's intellectual trajectory shows how artificial such disciplinary boundaries actually are. This theme is linked to a particular feature of his way of doing history, which presupposes a willingness to take hermeneutic risks and an equally strong countertendency that requires the careful coordination of external and internal evidence.

In this respect it is pertinent to recall that what is most daring in his approach—a will to knowledge that in any case is always subject to a high degree of philological control—entails a healthy disregard for what Aby Warburg called the *Grenzwächter*, the border guards who erect arbitrary barriers between the various sectors of inquiry. Today, given the endless proliferation of pleas for interdisciplinarity, it might at first seem that Warburg's dream of overcoming intellectual barriers is on the verge of being realized. Yet this is clearly not the case, as the superficial motivations and bad faith that mark these pleas for the most part have only strengthened the pre-existing divisions between fields. The actual significance of Ginzburg's more radical trespassing —which, like Warburg's, is also an act of finding hitherto unexplored links between diverse domains of knowledge —becomes particularly apparent when examining the transformations that have occurred within the historical field from the 1960s to the present. This is because the transformations themselves have been spurred on by Ginzburg's openness to problems from other fields, and in particular, by his way of formulating questions that presuppose what he called "interdisciplinarity from within" ("Interdisciplinarity: Vetoes and Compatibilities," *Art Bulletin* 77, 1995, 534-37).

One of Ginzburg's central inspirations, Marc Bloch, once asked in his *Métier d'historien* (written between 1941 and 1942, but only published in 1949 after his death) why history is studied. One of his answers, his first one in fact, was that it was pleasurable to do so. Ginzburg shows Bloch to be right in a completely

unforeseen way: by means of the historiographical equivalent of what in film is called a close up, a focus on a tiny, overlooked details, forgotten individuals, or lesser-known aspects of well-known works of art, Ginzburg reveals the delight hidden in the most tenaciously pursued paths of research. In so doing he opens up new perspectives on questions once thought to be settled. This, arguably, is intimately related to the fact that he is a master storyteller with an eye for the unanticipated. As often as not, the narratives that Ginzburg recounts are unsettling, both in their substance and their wider implications, revealing the instability of the ground beneath the historian's feet. Yet instead of using this uncertainty as a plea for relativism, for anything goes, he argues that it makes new ways of obtaining reliable evidence all the more essential, underscoring in the process an indispensable dimension of the historian's task.

Given the importance of Ginzburg's multifaceted contribution, it is hardly surprising that it has been the subject of intense scholarly scrutiny. The interview throws considerable light on the reasons behind this interest, which, in addition to its radically innovative character, has much to do with the way his work manages to move in many different intellectual directions without losing its internal coherence. This holds true whether he is dealing with 16th century heretics, the prehistory of Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie*, or making strange (with retrospective and prospective glances at literary devices that do precisely that, albeit in radically different ways, in Tolstoy and Proust), the decisive importance of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism for his own approach, the development of the *Annalistes* from Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre through Fernand Braudel, the impact of late medieval scholastic casuistry on Machiavelli's political thought, the pertinence of psychoanalysis for history, the development of the Warburg tradition of art and cultural history from Aby Warburg himself, Fritz Saxl and Erwin Panofsky to E. H. Gombrich and Michael Baxandall, tensions between the verbal and the visual, with particular reference to Roberto Longhi's attempt to establish an equivalence between the order of words and the order of images, just to name some of the topics touched upon and at times more thoroughly examined in our conversation with this most stimulating of historians.

In his case, art history is understood in its broadest sense as a discipline opening onto a cultural history of images, while not excluding, but emphatically embracing, a more traditional, tightly focused connoisseurship emphasizing the artist's individual style—a concept Ginzburg has given renewed critical cogency starting from his essay on clues. In that text the methods of detection pioneered by Giovanni Morelli and the approaches

of Sigmund Freud and Sherlock Holmes are compared, revealing a deep consonance between modes of perception situated at the crux of diverse domains of knowledge. Concentrating on this crux, which is also a zone of encounter between diachrony and synchrony, Ginzburg's production over the course of a half century has not only changed the practice of history on the level of a renewed methodological reflection but also has expanded the spectrum of questions the historian can ask of the available evidence.

If it goes without saying that Ginzburg's name is inseparable from the trajectory of microhistory from the 1960s to the present, one which stands in contrast to macrohistorical developments both old and new (prominent among which is global or "connected" history), it can be plausibly maintained that Ginzburg's reframing of methods, ideas and models of scholarship in terms of such binary oppositions is a result of his multiple interactions with structuralism. In this regard it is almost superfluous to recall the fact that for the chief protagonist of the latter, Claude Lévi-Strauss, all socio-cultural formations, and myths above all, can be divided according to basic categories of thought, most famously, the raw and the cooked. Ginzburg goes even further and distinguishes between the *emic* and the *etic*, opposed concepts which refer to intra- and extra-cultural perspectives, in accordance with the theories of the American linguist Kenneth L. Pike, extrapolating from this highly original re-elaboration of the basic linguistic distinction between phonemic and phonetic. Another distinction that belongs to this class of binary oppositions is the one Ginzburg draws between slow and fast reading, the former being inspired by Nietzsche's characterization of philology as opposed to the more superficial kinds of textual appropriation which unfortunately have compromised and endangered our current ethical and political life, as Ginzburg points out in recent discussion with Franco Moretti.

Readers familiar with previous interviews with Ginzburg will notice that much new ground is covered in this one, including unexpected observations on his interactions, both personal and intellectual, with Manfredo Tafuri, whose *Armonia e i conflitti: La Chiesa di S. Francesco della Vigna nella Venezia del '500* (1983) (co-authored with Antonio Foscari) appeared in the Einaudi series Ginzburg edited, *Microstorie*; remarks on his father Leone's friendship with Benedetto Croce and, in light of Leone's work on Ariosto, the development of his philological vocation; reflections on the films of Sergei Eisenstein (whose method of montage had a major impact on Ginzburg's approach to the writing of history), Ingmar Bergman, Vittorio de Sica, Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Werner Herzog

(whose plan to make a film based on *The Cheese and the Worms* was never realized); the reception of his work in France among the second and third generation *Annalistes*; an explication of his critical stance towards the work and the figure of Michel Foucault, in light of his first-hand encounter with the self-styled archeologist of knowledge; and assessments of his developing views on structuralism, ethnography, and their respective and complex relationships with his vision of history.

From the preceding one can infer that Ginzburg stands out from the mass of contemporary historians not only due to the depth and breadth of his knowledge, but also to the unique power of his historical narratives. All of these qualities of his work are closely tied to one of his fundamental insights: namely, that when dealing with the challenges raised by narrative, utilizing the concrete specificity of evidence as the *sine qua non* of historical understanding, one comes up against one of the constitutive features of the historical discipline: one that is clearly distinct from, yet also indispensable to the means of representation available to it, both as an intrinsic foundation and as raw material to be shaped by narration itself. For his part, Ginzburg is acutely aware that one cannot solve the problems presented by historical narrative through the unreflecting deployment of received historiographical categories and periodizations (e.g., Early Modern, Modern, Postmodern: terms so deeply marked by an excess of signification that they end up signifying very little at all, or at least nothing precise). In this respect his approach exhibits unmistakable affinities with radical empiricism insofar as he rejects in equal measure the extremes of an (allegedly) sophisticated skepticism and a self-evidently naïve positivism.



This characterization seems justified insofar as Ginzburg is critical of the sweeping claims often made for modes of theoretical abstraction, particularly when these claims and modes are detached from any firm basis in historical evidence. At the same time he is alert to the cognitive power of a few well-chosen conceptual frameworks (emic/etic, synchrony/diachrony, slow vs. fast reading, etc.) when seeking to interpret the evidence at hand. In his view these frameworks are more than just serviceable: they are, in fact, enough to transform the clues under scrutiny into keys to a realm where cultural codes provide an essential mediation. What they mediate are the questions asked by the historian and the answers they elicit. Here it is understood that asking the right questions can transform a mass of inert facts into an intelligible body of evidence—the bedrock upon which persuasive, or potentially persuasive historical arguments are based. This way of proceeding, Ginzburg openly admits, far from being a given, both in the case of *res gestae* (the events or

facts that actually occurred) and of *historia rerum gestarum* (the narration and reconstruction of these events and facts) is in fact highly artificial. This is why he openly welcomed the criticism of Franco Venturi, who when confronted by the growing recognition of the contribution of microhistory, affirmed, "I prefer my history without additives." The additives, for Ginzburg, are a positive trait of this kind of history, enabling him, through their artifice, to see what other historians have missed.

Our conversation with Ginzburg took place on March 6, 2022. When we conceived of our plan to interview him our expectations were high. Without exaggeration we can say that they were surpassed. His responses were engaging, surprising, unforeseen, and always fascinating: true to form he looked at familiar historical problems and cultural phenomena from unexpected angles while presenting unfamiliar themes in a compelling way.

As the interview unfolded, multiple dimensions of personal memory illuminated the reciprocal articulation of morphological and historical reading that Ginzburg has explored throughout his career. Beneath the surface of the exchange one can sense the historian's restless gaze as it considers different objects of investigation and thematic ensembles in turn, capturing the significance of their individuality by placing them in wider relationships. These opened onto horizons of thought that combined a proximity and a distance from the present and its concerns with a deeper perspective: horizons which are those of history in its relations with the non-historical.

We can conclude by saying that, precisely because of its richness and the many directions of thought the interview simultaneously engages, a single fact stands out from its discursive texture: namely, that Ginzburg is one of the most apt persons to interview for *Potlatch*, a journal devoted to the trajectories, uses and meanings of the gift and gift-giving across cultures and disciplines, as he himself is one of the most gifted historians in the present and has given us an invaluable gift of his time, his words and his insights, for which we are as delighted as we are grateful.

Yehuda Safran, Pratt Institute School of Architecture and Daniel Sherer, Princeton University School of Architecture.

We extend our warmest thanks to Alex Artaud for his careful transcription of the recorded conversation and for numerous suggestions that improved the text, to Lucio Biasiori for welcome editorial advice, and to Irene Guida for tracking down an important publication mentioned in the interview.



CG: I read your remarks and questions, and I must say I now feel like a *benandante* in front of the inquisitors. But do you know why? Because I think you are going to be disappointed because I will not be able to live up to the inquisitors' expectations!

YS+DS: That will not be the case! Ha, I doubt that! (Laughter)

YS: You may not remember, but the last time we met, Carlo, was in the foyer of the New York Public Library, right before a speech that the minister of foreign affairs from Paris was giving, at least five years ago.

CG: Oh, I see! I remember now. (laughs)

YS: I was there with my friend and colleague Stanley Hoffmann from Harvard, who introduced us, and it was at that point that I told you that I was a student of Richard Wollheim, with whom I had studied at University College London in the 1970s.

Now I will say a few words about our journal, *Potlatch*. Why *Potlatch*? I used to teach at the Graduate School of Architecture at Columbia University. There, I directed a research group under that name which was devoted to the theme of the gift in art and architecture—something that is inspired in part by the writings of Georges Bataille, and by the fact that Le Corbusier was very much affected by reading Bataille's *La Part maudite* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1949) on his first trip to Chandigarh. I was also inspired, of course, by Marcel Mauss (*Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*. Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1925, published first in the *Année Sociologique* n s., 1, 1923-1924, 30-86). When I started to teach at Pratt Institute, as I now do, the journal was re-established there.

I know of no better way to introduce our journal than to return to the meaning of the potlatch, one taken over from the indigenous languages of the Pacific Northwest. As you are well aware, this term refers, broadly speaking, to a diversified body of practices of exchange that exist all over the world at different times. The basic idea underlying all of these practices is that the community has to give a gift. Also, in the Jewish tradition, there is the important place occupied by the gift-giving act. So much so that it is much appreciated when it happens anonymously.

This is the context. So far, we have published four issues, the last containing an interview with Vincent Scully, who was perhaps the most important architectural historian and critic of his time in the USA.[1]

That's the introduction, so you know where we are leading you. Now, we invite you to respond to any of the questions we sent you.

DS: We will start with a question about two overlapping methods of inquiry: ethnohistory and microhistory. Is it fair to say that in the first decade of your activity as a historian, ethnohistory (which we take to be, somewhat schematically, a conjunction of history and anthropology) and microhistory were inseparable? For some historians, in fact, these two sub-branches of history might even seem to be two sides of the same coin. What is your response to this way of framing the genesis of microhistory, in your experience of it?

CG: Well, first of all let me say that I am not very much interested in labels. Quite the opposite. There was a convergence of different paths leading to "microhistory", and the same could be said about "ethnohistory". It's not so much the convergence of the two labels which seems to me interesting. Certainly, as you rightly pointed out, the frame in which those approaches emerged was a dialogue between anthropology and history, which was very important in the humanities and in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s. I think that this dialogue is not taking place in the same way anymore. It was very fruitful at that moment, but now it seems to me a marginal phenomenon.

I must say that I was certainly interested in anthropology, and as you pointed out in the written version of the questions you sent me, my points of reference were quite different: Ernesto De Martino and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In both cases, I was interested in their diverse approaches, which diverged considerably from historical approaches. It was like learning from the enemy, a motto I am very much fond of. In other words, I think their dialogue is interesting when it implies distance and even a clash. My idea of dialogue has been deeply affected by Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his book, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) which I read a long time ago.

In any case, I came across Bakhtin's work when it first appeared in Italian translation in the late 1960s, and this idea of a dialogic genre, or dialogic text, which implies not a dialogue in the sense of a peaceful conversation but a clash—that was something that impressed me greatly. Then, I was confronted with dialogic texts, such as the transcripts of the inquisitorial trials, in which most certainly there was a clash, including the use of torture and the use of psychological and cultural pressures. So for a long time I have been fascinated with the idea of a dialogic text.

I am thinking of a book of mine, *History, Rhetoric, Proof* (Jerusalem/ Brandeis: Historical Society of Israel, 1999) which is based on some lectures I gave a long time ago in

Jerusalem. In one of those lectures, titled "Alien Voices", I tried to recover a dialogic dimension in a text the French Jesuit Charles Le Gobien published in 1700, *Histoire des Îles Marianes*. A speech, a harangue, is given by a leader of a native revolt, Hurao. I started to work on that harangue on the assumption that it was absolutely fictional (although a website some years back someone cited it as a real harangue). In any case, I was trying to reconstruct how this Jesuit concocted that fiction. One of the texts was a famous page by Tacitus's *Agricola* in which the leader of a revolt speaks against the invaders, the Romans. But then, in that text by Le Gobien, there is a footnote. In the harangue, Hurao supposedly says, "Those Europeans brought us illnesses. We were living very peaceful lives." Then there is a footnote in which the Jesuit says, "But this is absurd!" So, there is a disjunction, and even this text, which is a monologic text, includes a dialogical dimension. I advanced a general statement that no texts can be fully controlled, that every text implies a blind spot. Maybe somebody can disprove it, but I am really committed to this kind of approach.

DS: Sigmund Freud said that the dream always has a blind spot, an umbilicus—a point which eludes interpretation.

CG: Exactly.

DS: So, perhaps there is a relationship to psychoanalysis behind this blind spot?

CG: Absolutely. In fact, I have certainly been affected by Freud's approach from the very beginning of my work. One of the notions that I came across, and am fond of, is the notion of cryptomemory, which I have been using for some time. Recently I discovered that Freud used the word "cryptomnesia" in a letter to a friend (Y. Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*. New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1993). My use of the word "cryptomemory" was itself a case of cryptomemory, mediated by Yerushalmi's book, which I had read many years before.

Cryptomemory is a layer that is hidden under our consciousness and which acts upon it. This why I said in one text ("Medals and Shells. On Morphology and History, Once Again," *Critical Inquiry* 45,2.2, 2019, 380-395) that we are acted upon even when we think that we are acting. In our analysis of texts, and even in the analysis of behavior of other people (including ourselves), that unconscious layer should be looked at. Something unsaid, which can be grasped by reading between the lines. This leads me back to one of my other major inspirers, namely Leo Strauss and his text, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952. Reissued Chicago: University

of Chicago Press, 1988). The idea of reading between the lines, not only in the case where there is actual persecution but, more generally (and here we are back to the idea of blind spots), whenever we are acted upon by something we are unable to control.

Sorry! I think that my answer was pretty tortuous but, in a sense, I can go back to the idea you suggested, which is the idea of the dialogue between anthropology and history at that moment.

What was so inspiring about the dialogue with anthropology is the idea of cultural distance. The idea, that is, of not taking culture for granted. This is something that can be so easy when we are dealing with our culture.

DS: Did you ever meet Claude Lévi-Strauss?

CG: I met him once. As I have said on several occasions, for me he played the role of the devil's advocate. I had been fascinated by this idea of the devil's advocate. A figure, an institution (we could say) created by the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 17th century in order to establish rules related to the canonization trials. The devil's advocate was supposed to ask aggressive questions. For many years, Claude Lévi-Strauss has been my devil's advocate, especially because he wrote so many aggressive pieces about the limits of history as a discipline. I was fascinated by this, and by his approach, which was deliberately ahistorical.

Now, we have returned to the idea of learning from the enemy—an enemy I was learning from.

YS: This is connected to another of your interests, because Lévi-Strauss was extremely affected by, and very close to, the linguist Roman Jakobson. Only a couple of years ago, I was reading the life-long correspondence between them that began in 1942 just as Lévi-Strauss returned to Paris and Jakobson was getting established at Harvard. For me, Jakobson represents another pole of your thinking, which has to do with Russian Formalism, of course. And they, Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson, were ahistorical, focused on liberating linguistics from its historical shackles and making it into a formal discipline. That's the whole essence of it. You seem to be attracted to both.

DS: Unless I am mistaken, Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson first met in New York City in the early 1940's.

YS: Jakobson gave a series of lectures called *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA/ London: MIT Press, 1976) and Lévi-Strauss wrote an introduction to a later edition of the book right before he died. He wrote that he was deeply affected by these lectures, which inspired him to establish structural anthropology.

DS: They wrote *Les Chats* de Baudelaire together. (R. Jakobson and C. Lévi-Strauss, "*Les Chats* de Baudelaire," *L' Homme* 2. 1, 1962, 5-21).

CG: Yes, I read that, but I need to look for that series of lectures and that introduction.

I was lucky enough to attend a lecture that Jakobson gave in Rome. The lecture, which was later published, was on Dante's sonnet, *"Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare"*. I remember Italo Calvino was sitting in the first row. Jakobson was magnificent. He had a histrionic quality that was absolutely fascinating.

Before I return to Lévi-Strauss, there is something I should mention: there was a passage written by Jakobson that I quoted about the dialogical element in language. In a sentence like "quoth I", and whenever there is a connection with the past, the ego, Jakobson remarked, is being split. I think this is absolutely fascinating because, in a way, Jakobson was reworking the dichotomy posited by Ferdinand de Saussure between synchrony and diachrony. So, even in synchrony, there is a diachronic element. This was my interpretation. And again, diachrony also implies a split, a disjunction, a dialogue. Actually, I read that Jakobson tried to meet Bakhtin when he came back for the first time to the Soviet Union but was unable to do so. I was imagining what the subject of that conversation could have been.

YS: I think that Bakhtin's work, or better, Bakhtin's approach had an almost religious dimension. I read in Bakhtin that within the dialogical there is a third-person reference. In other words, if two people can understand each other, it implies that a third person could have known it, in some sense. It has the smell of something almost religious, or something theological.

CG: I was invited to Jerusalem to give one of the Martin Buber lectures. I must say that I was not so much taken by Buber, but I started by focusing on another dialogic approach, namely that of Bakhtin. The topic of my lecture was "The Jew as Devil's Advocate in 18th century England." In a series of texts fictional Jews were supposed to ask aggressive questions or to make aggressive remarks concerning Jesus's miracles and Jesus's resurrection. It has been published. (Carlo Ginzburg, "Inner Dialogues. The Jew as Devil's Advocate in 18th Century England," in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities*, The Martin Buber Memorial Lectures, English series, 8. 8, 2015, second printing.)

In any case, to return to Lévi-Strauss. Yes. I had been working on my book, which has been published in Italian as *Storia notturna: Una decifrazione del sabba* (Torino:

Einaudi, 1989) and in English as *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witch's Sabbath.* Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004). So, the book was still unpublished, I had been working on it for fifteen years, and I was in Paris and succeeded in meeting Lévi-Strauss. I had a vivid recollection, not of our conversation because the conversation was rather irrelevant. But, I was impressed by his physical appearance and the physical context, meaning the room, his office. The office was very small. Empty. There were only three objects, besides the table: a Japanese mask, red and black; then, a black-and-white portrait of Merleau-Ponty; and then a third picture, which was a detail of the *same* portrait of Merleau-Ponty. (Laughter) A kind of close-up, if you will. I was completely fascinated!

YS: Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty were classmates early on their respective academic careers. (Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty studied together at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly in 1930: see Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal of the New School for Social Research* 7. 2, Winter 1978, 179-188).

DS: Do you know the late text of Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon*? The one dealing with Japanese culture, and more specifically with his fascination with masks, with Kabuki, and Noh theater which began already in his childhood and accompanied him during his entire life. His reading of Japan is amazing. (C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon*. Cambridge/London: Harvard U. Press, 2013).

YS: He inherited his fascination with Japan from his father, who was a painter. Coming just after the Impressionists, Japanese pictures were terribly important. Already in his childhood, this interest stands out: he collected Japanese prints and masks.

DS: He refers to that in the text. He said that he collected *Ukiyo-e* prints.

YS: It's quite remarkable. The book is full of praise for everything Japanese, and not one word of distance or critical perspective at all!

DS: He speaks of the Japanese tea ceremony as a "Cartesianism of the senses."

CG: (Ginzburg pauses, then smiling to Yehuda) So, there is, you said "no distance"?

YS: None at all.

CG: Ha! Interesting...

DS: Another question that follows in a sense from one of our previous ones. How would you characterize the aims of your current work, which has as its privileged focus paradigmatic figures of learned culture like Machiavelli and Pascal? Can this be said to mark a departure from your earlier work, which did not deal with protagonists of high or learned culture at all, but which focussed on marginal figures like Menocchio?

Einaudi, 1989) and in English as *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witch's Sabbath.* Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004). So, the book was still unpublished, I had been working on it for fifteen years, and I was in Paris and succeeded in meeting Lévi-Strauss. I had a vivid recollection, not of our conversation because the conversation was rather irrelevant. But, I was impressed by his physical appearance and the physical context, meaning the room, his office. The office was very small. Empty. There were only three objects, besides the table: a Japanese mask, red and black; then, a black-and-white portrait of Merleau-Ponty; and then a third picture, which was a detail of the *same* portrait of Merleau-Ponty. (Laughter) A kind of close-up, if you will. I was completely fascinated!

YS: Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty were classmates early on their respective academic careers. (Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty studied together at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly in 1930: see Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal of the New School for Social Research* 7. 2, Winter 1978, 179-188).

DS: Do you know the late text of Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon?* The one dealing with Japanese culture, and more specifically with his fascination with masks, with Kabuki, and Noh theater which began already in his childhood and accompanied him during his entire life. His reading of Japan is amazing. (C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon.* Cambridge/London: Harvard U. Press, 2013).

YS: He inherited his fascination with Japan from his father, who was a painter. Coming just after the Impressionists, Japanese pictures were terribly important. Already in his childhood, this interest stands out: he collected Japanese prints and masks.

DS: He refers to that in the text. He said that he collected *Ukiyo-e* prints.

YS: It's quite remarkable. The book is full of praise for everything Japanese, and not one word of distance or critical perspective at all!

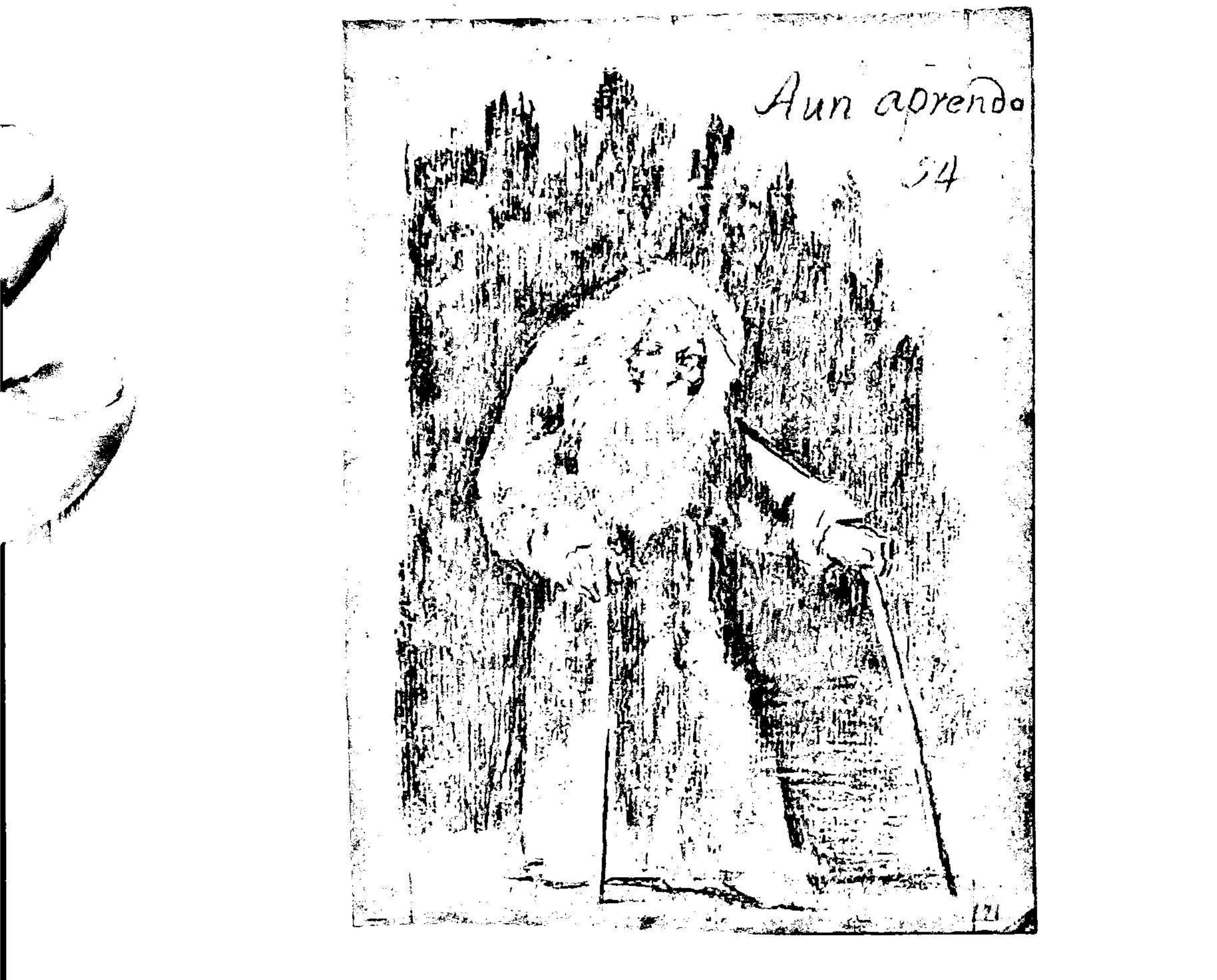
DS: He speaks of the Japanese tea ceremony as a "Cartesianism of the senses."

CG: (Ginzburg pauses, then smiling to Yehuda) So, there is, you said "no distance"?

YS: None at all.

CG: Ha! Interesting...

DS: Another question that follows in a sense from one of our previous ones. How would you characterize the aims of your current work, which has as its privileged focus paradigmatic figures of learned culture like Machiavelli and Pascal? Can this be said to mark a departure from your earlier work, which did not deal with protagonists of high or learned culture at all, but which focussed on marginal figures like Menocchio?



Francisco Goya, Aùn Aprendo.
Drawing, Black Chalk. 1825-28.

CG: I used to say that there are two foods that should be forbidden to a scholar: *aria fritta* and *minestra riscaldata*—stale air and reheated soup, if you like. In my case, the idea of dealing with the same theme and the same topic for decades would have been a big mistake.

I love to start from ignorance. Actually, I published a book in Spanish that is a collection of four retrospective essays. The cover is related to a drawing by Goya that I love. The drawing is of a very old man with a white beard, walking slowly, leaning on two sticks. The title, in Goya's handwriting, is *"Aún aprendo"*, "I am still learning". (fig. 2) I referred to this drawing in a lecture I gave in Rome when I received the Balzan Prize. [2010] Then, in Santiago de Chile, I referred to that drawing and I began my lecture with this image. Then I was asked by a friend to put it as the title of those four retrospective lectures.

I think I am trying to learn every day starting from ignorance. I used to say that I loved to teach, but to learn is even more interesting.

DS: But the intention behind that question is that you have seen aspects of well-known monuments or texts that previously escaped notice, such as the Machiavelli/ Michelangelo connection. That's what I was trying to get at with that question.

CG: I started from a detail of one of Michelangelo's statues in the Medici Chapel: the strange hybrid animal sculpted on a block of marble on which Lorenzo de' Medici, is leaning. The archaeologist Luca Giuliani, who brought the detail to my attention, interpreted the hybrid animal as a "lion-bat (*Fledermaus*)". My interpretation, which I repeatedly discussed with Luca, was different. Lorenzo de' Medici, to whom Machiavelli's *Prince* was dedicated, led me to recognize in the hybrid animal a lion-fox: the dichotomy discussed in a famous passage of *The Prince.* Retrospectively, I can see some continuity between the trajectory of that essay and what I did in the past. First, focusing on a detail; then, turning the detail into a case, i. e. the implications and the long term reception of the Michelangelo/ Machiavelli connection. In other words, an anomalous case can point out at something unnoticed which is (as in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*) under the eyes of everybody. I tried to reflect on this connection in a text that has only been published in Italian called, "Il caso, i casi", in which I focused on the two meanings of the word *"caso"* in Italian: chance and case. ("Il caso, i casi: A proposito di Nondimanco," online at *Doppiozero*, 12 April 2019, www.doppiozero.com/materiali/ il-caso-i-casi. See more generally, see



C. Ginzburg, "Preface," in Ginzburg and Lucio Biasiori, eds., *A Historical Approach to Casuistry: Norms and Exceptions in a Comparative Perspective.* London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 12-20). I worked on cases along my trajectory but also deliberately using chance as a strategy in my research before and after the advent of the Internet. I wrote several pieces on this.

DS: One of these is "Conversations with Orion." (*Quaderni Storici* 36, 3 December 2001, 905-913).

CG: Exactly.

DS: It would seem to be in the spirit of Mallarmé: *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard.*

CG: Yes. Absolutely. And at the end of my essay, "Conversations with Orion," I mentioned Max Ernst and his idea of *frottages.* And I also mentioned Leonardo, when he says that a young painter must learn to detect landscapes and faces in a damp wall. A magnificent passage.

So, what is the purpose of this? It's the idea of being taken by surprise. A long time ago, I came across Viktor Shklovsky's essay on estrangement, on which I wrote a piece ("Making it Strange: The Prehistory of a Literary Device," in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance.* Translated by Martin Ryle and Kate Soper. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 1-24). Estrangement is, I think, both the purpose and the starting point of this kind of research.

YS: Apropos Shklovsky, you addressed the works of Tolstoy, Marcus Aurelius and all that. But I was surprised that you didn't mention the *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius.

CG: Ha ha!

YS: Because *The Golden Ass* is a masterpiece of estrangement.

CG: Well, there are many! The list would be endless. But, I mean, on the one hand there is the *use* of estrangement and on the other hand there is a *reflection* on estrangement. This is something different, so I tried to work on the prehistory of Shklovsky's estrangement, which has a political subtext. And then I discovered something different, meaning Proust's estrangement, which has no political overtones and is purely aesthetic. I think the distinction between the two estrangements is very interesting.

Proust is fascinating from that point of view. He commented on a passage from a letter of Madame de Sévigné about a landscape covered with snow in which one can recognize human shapes. Unexpectedly, in that context Proust evoked Dostoevsky. Once again, we are confronted with the idea of estrangement: looking at reality as something opaque, and then discovering something concealed in it. So again, it's the idea of estrangement, the opacity of reality. Then, there is Elstir, that fictional

painter (a mix of Manet, Monet and so on) who was painting the sea as if it was a meadow or something. And then there is that marvelous passage, at the very end of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which Saint-Loup says *"La guerre n'est past stratégique"*, war is not strategic. Magnificent.

DS: Apropos war and strategy, is there any evidence that Proust knew the work of Tolstoy? Did Proust read Tolstoy? I don't recall that there's any specific evidence for that.

CG: Right. Dostoevsky was extremely important for him. Tolstoy...it's an open question. You are right, you are right...He regarded Tolstoy as a literary divinity.

I commented on that sentence by Saint-Loup, "War is not strategic", saying that it provides a dense definition of what "microhistory" could be, in other words, to start from something that is opaque in order to find a deeper knowledge.

DS: The unpredictable in war, which you spoke about in your text on Shklovsky.

CG: Exactly.

DS: Now we will shift to a totally different subject. What is your present view of Michel Foucault, whose work you have sharply criticized in the past? Could you tell us about the times you met and interacted, as in the round table on "L'Impossible prison" chaired by Maurice Agulhon in Paris in 1978, in which a number of historians were present including Jacques Revel and Arlette Farge? I particularly recall with regard to the subject of Foucault, that in your introduction to *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of A Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) you discerned in his work an aestheticization of historical experience and a focus on the mechanisms of oppression rather than on the experience of the oppressed. Has your assessment of his work changed, or is it substantially the same?

CG: Well, it is the same, but I must say I have not worked on Foucault deeply enough since that introduction to *The Cheese and the Worms*. Although there was that meeting in Paris, but this is more anecdotal.

The story is this: He had just published *Surveiller et Punir*, which I think is his best book. (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison.* Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Then, there was an informal seminar at the Sorbonne. It was a Sunday morning, so nobody was there. There was a table, and Foucault was there and some historians were there, including myself. There was a short introduction, and everyone was to say who they were. Someone said their name followed by "historian", and Foucault said, *"Michel Foucault, pas historien!"* I was struck by that

because I thought that, in another context, in a conversation with philosophers, he would have said, *"Michel Foucault, pas philosophe!"* This is a guess that perhaps could pave the way to an interpretation of Foucault's work. But I never worked on this; I'm not interested.

In any case, during that round table I asked Foucault if he thought that there was a relationship between his approach and Max Weber's approach. Then, the conversation was published at the end of that book, *L'Impossible prison.* (M. Perrot, ed. *L'Impossible prison. Recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au xix siècle.* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980). The questions had been rewritten. The answers were also rewritten. The names of the people who asked the questions were put together but not related to the questions. So, I thought there was a sort of dream of hypercontrol in Foucault's approach. He was certainly fascinated with hypercontrol, but then again, the controlled people were not part of his approach.

DS: It's interesting that you say that because when I read the questions, I thought the question that you asked was the one about the *Idealtypus* of Max Weber.

CG: (Laughs and nods) In any case, I think that the Foucault was an extremely intelligent person, but, in a way, he was a victim of some of his gifts. Rhetoric became a gift and, in another sense, a poison.

DS: I've always found reading Foucault very provocative in a way that was more fertile than, say, the thinker he broke with rather early, which is Derrida. I've always found Foucault more interesting, and stimulating, in a way, because Derrida goes off in directions that I can't see as useful.

CG: No, no, I agree, certainly, but I must say that I haven't been involved in a sort of intellectual conversation with Foucault, even in a metaphorical sense. This is the reason why, except for that introduction that you mentioned, I never wrote anything about him, except for a very short piece when the first edition of *Folie et déraison* was published. I wrote a little review. (*Studi medievali*, 3, v, 1964, 412-414).

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profound and original sense of what intellectual changes mean."—trans. DS] I was surprised!

CG: Yes, I recall that text of Momigliano praising Foucault, and I was surprised, too. I think Foucault was included in a series in which Jean-Pierre Vernant was mentioned. That [the mention of Vernant] was not surprising, but Foucault, well...

DS: Speaking of series, using the word in another sense, Manfredo Tafuri, as I recall, published his co-authored book with Antonio Foscari, *L'Armonia e i conflitti. La Chiesa di S. Francesco della Vigna nella Venezia del '500* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), on Jacopo Sansovino's church of S. Francesco della Vigna in Venice, in your series *Microstorie*. How did that inclusion of Tafuri and Foscari in your series come about? Could you say something about your relations with Tafuri and the circumstances of your intellectual exchange?[2]

CG: Now you are going to be disappointed by my answer!

DS: Not necessarily!

CG: Let me tell you why. I tried to reconstruct the chronology of our, let's say, connection. At the beginning of it, there was a rather long passage, a quotation, from a book called *Giochi di pazienza: Un seminario sul "Beneficio di Cristo"* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975) which I co-authored with Adriano Prosperi. The book is the description of a seminar on a 16th century Italian religious text which had, at that time, a great success. Only one copy was thought to have been preserved, because the Inquisition destroyed everything. Recently a second copy has been identified by a librarian in Bologna when there was a presentation of the reprint of *Giochi di pazienza*. Our book had been ignored by historians except for one extremely aggressive review in *Le Revue de histoire ecclésiastique*. (J.-F. Gilmont, in *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 74, 1, Jan 1, 1979, 115). Now, after nearly fifty years, *Giochi di pazienza* has been translated into Spanish; a Portuguese and an English translation will follow. Tafuri started the introduction to his book, *La sfera e il labirinto* with a long quotation from *Giochi di pazienza*. (M. Tafuri, *La sfera e il labirinto. Avanguardie e architettura da Piranesi agli anni '70*. Torino: Einaudi, 1980, 3: *"uno dei pochi volumi recenti che abbiano il coraggio di descrivere non i risultati, olimpici e definitivi, di una ricerca, bensì il suo tortuoso e complesso iter."* [One of the few recent books which has the courage to describe not the Olympian and definitive results of a path of research, but rather its tortuous and complex iter"—trans. DS]. I was really surprised! For some reason, Tafuri was intrigued by that book, and in particular by its description of how we have to maintain a distance in the process of research because we can be misled by our biases.

DS: By the time *Giochi di pazienza* was published in 1975, and even before the appearance of your book on religious dissimulation among Italian crypto-Protestants, *Il Nicodemismo. Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del Cinquecento.* Torino: Einaudi, 1970, Tafuri had already investigated the problem of heresy in the Veneto, and in particular, in Vicenza, among a number of the patrons of Palladio, including the Thiene and Repeta families, in an important article published in 1969: "Committenza e tipologia nelle ville palladiane," *Bollettino CISAP* x, 120 – 136. In this essay Tafuri argued for a close connection between the desacralization of sacred elements of typology, such as the dome and the pediment, associated with Roman temples and churches, in the villas of Palladio; he maintained further that this phenomenon should be read in light of the wider process of secularization illustrated by heresy and by the more general phenomenon of the *"Entzauberung der Welt"* (disenchantment of the world) analyzed by Max Weber. He also emphasized the stylistic austerity of many of Palladio's villas, which he compared to Quaker meeting houses, and showed that crypto-Protestants used at least one of the villas as the site of clandestine religious meetings. Finally, he argued that Palladianism was a tendency found more in Protestant countries such as Great Britain and the early USA, e.g. Jefferson, rather than in Catholic ones, where its impact was more limited. All of this goes some way to explain, or at least to contextualize, how Tafuri came to be interested in *Giochi di pazienza,* well before other architectural historians came to occupied with this problem, either in Italy or abroad: in fact, on this basis one can suggest that he could have come across the book due to his prior interest in its area of inquiry —religious nonconformism in sixteenth-century Italy —only to become intrigued by its far-reaching methodological implications.[3]

CG: *La sfera e il labirinto* was published in 1980; *L'Armonia e i conflitti* was published in 1983. In 1981 I asked Manfredo Tafuri to publish in "Microstorie", the series directed by Giovanni Levi and myself, the book he was working on with Antonio Foscari. I had long conversations with Tafuri during the making of the manuscript (this was a feature of our series). Regretfully, I don't remember the topics we discussed. In any case, anticipating the content of our conversation today, I reread *L'armonia e i conflitti* and I was struck by its density. I wonder how the collaboration with Foscari affected the structure and perhaps the content of the book. In reading it again I felt the presence of two hands, and even some echoes

of an older essay by Tafuri that had intrigued me deeply, on Piranesi and Eisenstein.

DS: Yes, it's amazing.

CG: Yes...amazing. I must say, Tafuri for me is a sort of distant scholar. I know just a few things about the early stage of his career. The utopian dimension of his work, which is so important, is something that is unknown to me.

DS: Among the most important works of his, of course, devoted to this topic is *Progetto e Utopia. Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico* (Bari: Laterza, 1973).

CG: Yes, but even before that he wrote on this subject. I have the book with me, and as far as I can see it says that he rewrote some of those essays. I think it would be interesting to compare the version that was published in the book by Laterza and the *Contropiano* version. (M. Tafuri, *Progetto e utopia* Bari: Laterza 1973; "Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica," *Contropiano* 1, 1969 39-79; English translation In K. Michael Hays, ed. *Architecture Theory Since 1968*. Cambridge, MA/London, MIT Press, 1998 , 6-35).

DS: That has been done by Andrew Leach in his book on Tafuri. (Andrew Leach, *Manfredo Tafuri: Choosing History*. Ghent. A&S Books, 2009).

CG: (Smiles and nods) Ah!

DS: Two very brief comments: first, *L'Armonia e i conflitti* that appeared in *Microstorie* was a turning point in Tafuri's intellectual trajectory because after reading *Giochi di pazienza* and after working more closely with Howard Burns, he began to become more focused on Renaissance architecture and moved away from dealing with contemporaneity. He became less theoretical and more philological. Always theoretical, at some deep level, though.

CG: Also, I would say there is a kind of awareness of the importance of the contexts as plural.

DS: This is his idea of the polycentric, of plural contexts working simultaneously upon a given text or work.

CG: Exactly. I can understand why you say "turning point". This would be fascinating to look at. In a way, this tension between contexts and form was something very much at the center of our reflections on microhistory.

DS: One other point before we move on. There are certain biographical parallels between your life and Tafuri's. You are both Italian secular Jews, and you both had an early history of persecution. His grandmother had to flee from the Fascists and the Nazis and this had a deep impact on Tafuri when he was a child. You were born in internal exile, correct? Or am I in error?

CG: I was born in 1939 in Turin, and when Italy entered the war in 1940, my father (who in the

meantime has been deprived of his Italian citizenship by the racist laws) was sent to internal exile in a village of Abruzzi, where my mother joined him. And so, I spent my early childhood in that little village.

But I understand your point. In a way, I am struck by the fact that the relationship between Tafuri and myself has been so asymmetrical. In other words, I should have learned, I might have learned a lot from him but it didn't happen.

DS: But he learned a lot from you, that's for sure!

CG: No, no, I can see that. Tafuri reworked microhistory in a direction that was all his own. In a way, it's this asymmetry that strikes me.

DS: Also, he started as you did, and many Italians of your generation, with a rejection of the idealism of Croce. He started with that.

CG: My father had a deep, personal relationship with Croce. The first history book I ever read, *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono* (Bari: Laterza, 1932) by Croce, has a handwritten dedication by Croce to my father, *"A Leone Ginzburg con grato animo"*.When the book was published as a series of articles in *La Critica*, my father sent a few letters to Croce, which were published after my father's death, pointing at some mistakes in the section on Russian history. Croce, whose wife was from Piedmont, used to go every year to Turin, where he met my father, then in his twenties. Then the Fascist regime imposed an oath of allegiance on university professors including *liberi docenti* (my father was one of them.) My father refused to sign the oath, notwithstanding Croce's insistence. But their relationship remained very deep.

Although my father never called Croce *"maestro"*, he did say this about the great philologist Santorre Debenedetti, a Jewish philologist who lived in Turin and was a truly fascinating figure. He published a book on Ariosto's *Frammenti autografi* exploring *varianti*, different versions of the same text by Ariosto. At that time this was an absolute novelty (*I Frammenti autografi di Ludovico Ariosto dell Orlando furioso*, ed. S. Debenedetti, Bari, Laterza, 1937). My father, after having worked with Santorre Debenedetti on that edition, edited Leopardi's poems in the series *Scrittori d'Italia*, directed by Croce. (Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti.* ed. Leone Ginzburg. Bari: Laterza, 1938). My father regarded himself as a philologist.

DS: And now a more speculative question. E. H. Gombrich, in a famous passage from *Art and Illusion*, observes that, strictly speaking, we cannot watch ourselves having an illusion. To illustrate this claim, he points out no perceptual middle ground can be said to exist between the duck and the rabbit in the famous Duck-

Rabbit image that Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*, cited as an example of visual ambiguity. In his explication of this perceptual excluded middle, Gombrich further adduces the impossible "right distance" that Sir Kenneth Clark tried to take up towards a Velasquez painting, the distance from which the blotches and strokes of pigment crystallized into a coherent illusion, a representation that was recognizable as such. (E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, 236). This, according to both Clark and Gombrich, was a position that could never actually be attained. One could perhaps compare (and contrast) this elusive point of observation, the point that cannot be found, where illusion clearly begins and the materiality of the visual sign ends, to the emic/etic distinction of Kenneth Pike, which refers to the distinction between the perspective of those within a given culture and that of those like the ethnographer who are outside of it. Not because the emic is the same as illusion, but because both emic and etic perspectives imply, as do reality and illusion, cognitively independent, opposed, yet possibly translatable points of view. Such a comparison raises the question: At what point can we enter into the mental universe of another culture, and leave our own behind? What are the limits of this process? What "codes" make it possible to translate from one cultural perspective to another? Is it possible to occupy a position between the two perspectives, or are they mutually exclusive, like the two readings of the Duck/Rabbit?

CG: Well, this is a very intriguing question, and I would say, first of all, that images and words are translatable but only to a certain extent. Actually, I pointed to this in an essay, a contribution to a festschrift for Gombrich. (C. Ginzburg, "Origen, Homilies on Exodus VIII. 3, and its Reception," in J. Onians, ed. *Sight and Insight. Essays on Art and Culture in Honor of E. H. Gombrich.* London, Phaidon, 1994) in which I mentioned the fact that images cannot imply a negation. I used Magritte's pipe for this. If, let's say, there would not be the label, *"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"*, it would be impossible to convey a negation.

Now, let's go back to your question. I mean, I would say that we could use words as a metalanguage in order to describe the etic vs. emic relationship. But I cannot see how an image can provide a metalanguage in order to describe the ambiguity that you mentioned. So, this is another asymmetry that is very interesting.

I've recently been very fascinated by ekphrasis as a phenomenon. I wrote a piece, "On Small

Differences: On Ekphrasis and Connoisseurship," *Visual History* II (2016), 11-29. I don't know if this is a digression, but in any case, it's about an attribution made by Philip Pouncey of a drawing in Christchurch College at Oxford. There is a naked man kneeling, and he says, "This looks like *'titani cinerei e nebbiosi'*"—ash-gray and foggy titans, a sentence used by Roberto Longhi to describe Bastianino's paintings. (Bastianino was the nickname of Sebastiano Filippi, a sixteenth century Ferrarese painter). I argued that, in this case, we can see that ekphrasis can have a predictive value, which seems to me shocking. It's an extreme case, because obviously we are thinking about ekphrasis like, well, *"equivalenza verbale"*, as Longhi used to say—as an actual verbal equivalence. But the idea that ekphrasis can open the way to an attribution of an unknown drawing, this is quite something.

In any case, why did I say this? Ah, yes, the relationship between words and images! I wonder how an image could describe that...that... ambiguity. I mean, I'm thinking. Maybe it's possible. It's a problem of frames. In other words, we can imagine a painting in which, let's say, the ambiguity related to the distance—the *right* distance from a painting—could be included in the larger frame. I wonder...

DS: In certain sense, related to the first part of your answer, I am reminded of Leonardo da Vinci's famous observation that the power of the word is weak when it is compared to the power of the image. In a way, you are giving more emphasis to the power of the word, and not only because you frame the argument in terms of metalanguage.

CG: Well, but one could say that I am trying to reverse the argument, saying that just because the images are so powerful, we try to fight with words in order to cope with that power: the fact that images are silent and their impressive presence does not imply denial. So, the fact that images are silent and there is this impressive presence that does not imply denial. Actually, the starting point of my piece for the Gombrich essay was a distinction made by Origen between idols and likenesses, which is striking. And so at the end, I was saying images that don't imply denial can be paradoxically compared to the dictum "I am that I am", *Exodus* 3:14.

In a sense, images imply a kind of challenge to theologians. And so, we are speechless, and we try to use words, but words are inadequate, in a sense. We can say whatever we like about Velasquez but he's there and he's beyond words. *"Teologia della pittura"*, theology of painting, said Luca Giordano in front of *Las Meninas*.

DS: But you always combined the internal stylistic reading with an external reading, as you wrote in your book about Piero della Francesca, which relies extensively on Longhi (C. Ginzburg, *Indagini su Piero*. London/New York: Verso, 1981; English translation: *The Enigma of Piero*, London/New York: Verso, 1985). You used context and style, external and internal factors, to reinforce connoisseurship.

CG: My book on Piero della Francesca will be republished by Adelphi (*Indagini su Piero*, new edition, with a new postface: Milano, Adelphi, 2022). I am preparing a postface in which I will argue that Longhi, the great connoisseur, regarded Piero's *Flagellation* as an early work because he was misled by an untenable chronology. But he thought that such an early date was compatible with the stylistic evidence – which is surprising.

DS: One more point. What do you think of Leo Steinberg, who Gombrich called a wild iconographer and a "dangerous model to follow" due to his interpretive excesses? (E. H. Gombrich, "Talking of Michelangelo," *New York Review of Books*, 20 January 1977, 19; for Steinberg's response, see Leo Steinberg, "The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting," *Critical Inquiry*, 6. 3, Spring 1980, 420-21). I attended a wonderful lecture Steinberg delivered as one of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1995/6 which either have been published already or are currently being published. Then he spoke on Mantegna and Alberti, and he referred in particular to "the mute image and the meddling text." In these lectures he argued that the historiographical or critical word can meddle, but the image that is mute is in the end more powerful than any of the weeds that grow around it, which are texts.

CG: I mean, I'm speechless. I will look immediately for this essay. I'm completely ignorant about it.

DS: I will send it to you.

Yehuda, I seem to recall that you met Gombrich more than once. What was your impression of him?

YS: I had a funny argument with him. Gombrich, you know, advocated the idea that art progresses by competence. In other words, if an artist is able to render things more competently, there is a point. My point was that sometimes the most important things actually are expressed by people who lack the means to express them. I gave him the example of Moses, who was stuttering. In fact, perhaps because he was stuttering, he was able to say whatever he said. And Gombrich looked at me like this (Yehuda shows expression of shock). And then I said, "And look at Cézanne, who famously said that whenever his right hand was moving too easily,

he changed to his left hand." And then Gombrich said to me, "And look at the results!". (laughter)

CG: This is absolutely fascinating. If you look at Cézanne's early paintings, they are so clumsy. I mean, I would say he was unable to draw. Just the opposite of let's say, Ingres. Just the opposite.

YS: Sure.

CG: And how he is able to turn this weakness into something absolutely extraordinary, well this is a mystery.

YS: Yes, it is a mystery. My point was that competence is perhaps not the most important criteria.

DS: Well, competence implies a linguistic context, and Cézanne shifts the paradigm to a new visual language. Creating abstraction in a certain way.

YS: Gombrich was very much affected by his friend Karl Popper, and in my view, this was unfortunate. (Laughs) I think Gombrich was, in his own capacity, superior to Popper.

CG: No, no, I see your point.

YS: And unfortunately, he adopted many of Popper's so-called "insights."

DS: When did you first meet Gombrich?

CG: Well, I think it was in 1967.

I had written an essay, "From Warburg to Gombrich," and so we had been corresponding; then he invited me to spend one year in London at the Warburg Institute. I don't think that I had met him before. I had spent one month at the Warburg Institute in 1964, and then I discovered *Art and Illusion.* For me, this was a real turning point, not only about history but from a general point of view. The idea of the filter implied an active process: an element which has been (and still is) ignored in a lot of literature on textual and visual reception.

YS: Well, this brings us to Hans Robert Jauss, who was the keynote speaker on the first day of a conference I attended in Germany in the 1980s. His lecture was titled, *"Was ist Hermeneutik?"* and his answer was simple enough: "Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation in the absence of authority." Then, there was a dinner that evening, and we spoke of school days. Somebody mentioned Prague, and he said in German "I was once there". Then, after discussing holidays, we spoke about jobs. Someone commented on Jauss becoming an emeritus professor and being invited to UC Berkeley and so forth and asked, "How is it going?", and Jauss replied, *"Wie ein Soldat."* [Like a soldier—trans. DS].

After the dinner, the organizers gave me a ride home and asked how the event was. I said "Hans Robert Jauss gave an excellent lecture and I am very much in favor of his thesis, but he must have been an SS officer in Prague during the Second World War."

And they said, "How do you know that?" "Well, his manner of speech, his choice of words for several questions, and his demeanor, suggested to me that he was an old soldier."

CG: I also have an anecdote that converges with yours. I was invited to give a lecture in Konstanz and Jauss was there. I don't remember the topic, but during the question and answer session, he was standing in front of me and he started by saying, "I didn't understand you." So, I started to rephrase my argument and then he looked at me and repeated, "I didn't understand you." And I was looking at him and started to think, "He looks like a member of the SS", and then I said to myself that this was just a stereotype. Then, many years later, information about his past emerged [which confirmed my suspicions].

Actually, I would suggest that in a way his approach to textual philology was a reworking of his silence about his past. In other words, and I think I made the same argument about Paul De Man, it's not a literal outcome but a reworking of a silence. For instance, the idea that the submerged or forgotten reception is more important than textual philology, because the idea of reconstructing the meaning of a text is in fact marginal vis-à-vis reception. Well, it could be looked at as a reworking of his own life.

DS: So, a kind of anti-philological stance related to the silence and to the repression of the political problem. I think it's a convincing argument, but then that brings up the whole question of whether attempting to bury or repress an "evil" past can sometimes give rise to a fertile intellectual development. Because certainly reception theory is very fertile, don't you think?

CG: Actually, I think I opposed Jauss's approach in favor of Roberto Longhi's approach. There is an essay by Longhi ("Due dipinti inediti di Giovan Gerolamo Savoldo"[1927] in R. Longhi, *Saggi e ricerche: 1925-1928*, 2 vols., Firenze, Sansoni, 1967, I, pp. 148-155). in which new attributions were advanced relying upon previous, different attributions, duly put a context. This seems to me just the opposite of opposing reception and philology. Philology may include reception as an instrument. Obviously, reception can be studied by itself, but the two approaches are not incompatible. I think I tried to do something like this in the book, "Nevertheless", which just came out in English, especially in the chapter "Intricate Readings: Machiavelli, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas" (pp. 63-86).

YS: "Nevertheless" [*Nondimanco*] was, as we know due to your scholarship, a favorite word of Machiavelli.

DS: And now we also know, due to your research, that his frequent use of this word was part of his reception of the tradition of causistry. When I wrote that essay on the harsh criticism elicited by Michelangelo's architecture in the 16th and 17th centuries, I was also looking at what Michelangelo was doing as a practicing architect and what was being written about him by his contemporaries and rivals, who were also architects as well as critics and theoreticians. In other words, I was trying to balance reception and production histories (D. Sherer, "Error or Invention? Critical Receptions of Michelangelo's Architecture from Pirro Ligorio to Teofilo Gallacini," *Perspecta* 6 (2013), 76-121; C. Ginzburg, "Moulding the People. Machiavelli and Michelangelo," *Nevertheless. Machiavelli, Pascal*, London/New York: Verso, 2022, pp. 87-110)

CG: Yes, in this case, and in others, I think the idea of combining reception and philology is very fruitful.

DS: Another question. Film and photography, particularly in relation to Sigfried Kracauer's readings of the historical development of these mediums, have occupied your attention in relation to what Alexander Kluge has called the "appetite for reality" in historical construction, in historiography. Could you tell us more about your interest in and relation to film, which as we recall from other sources was in part kindled by your youthful encounter with the texts and films of Eisenstein, and also is connected in multiple ways to your unrealized wish to have *The Cheese and the Worms* made into a film either by Ingmar Bergman, if I am not mistaken, and by Werner Herzog? Also, there is another aspect to this question, which is your critique of Pasolini, which I recall from many years back, as being rather negative in some respects.

CG: I watched Vittorio de Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948) when I was nine years old. Then Rossellini, Fellini and so on followed: my approach to microhistory was certainly indebted to them. Now, a little correction. I never thought of having *The Cheese and the Worms* made by Ingmar Bergman: but looking at his films, I thought Gunnar Björnstrand would have been a good actor for Menocchio! On the contrary, I had a weird conversation with Werner Herzog about the possibility of making a movie from my book, and he was very interested; but the film producer failed, and nothing came of it.

In a way, I read Kracauer through Eisenstein, especially the essay on the close-up, which impressed me deeply. I think the idea of montage marked my way of writing. From the very beginning, I started using

numbered paragraphs, and I can detect the sources of this. The idea is to have a blank between paragraphs. So, something more than a full-stop.

Later, I wrote an essay on that famous blank by Flaubert, starting from Marcel Proust's marvelous essay on Flaubert in which he says that blank was the apex of Flaubert, which is kind of ambiguous praise. I tried to analyze the blank in *L'Éducation Sentimentale* when Sénécal looked at the guard and... *"C'était Sénécal"*. Blank. *"Il voyagea"*. Splendid. (Carlo Ginzburg, "Reflections on a Blank", *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1999, pp. 92-110).

I tried to put Flaubert's blank in context. Of course, cinema did not exist yet but photography did. The idea of a blank of this kind, the possibility of cutting the narrative in that way, was therefore an option.

DS: Like montage.

CG: Yes, montage *avant la lettre*. But I was thinking about Eisenstein reading Leonardo's description of the deluge as a kind of proto-example, a forerunner, of cinema.

DS: Eisenstein also mentioned El Greco and Piranesi in that regard, in different ways.

To jump a bit in the other direction, what was the substance of your critique of Pasolini as a filmmaker?

CG: Well, I made a distinction between Pasolini as a writer and Pasolini as a filmmaker. I am quite fascinated by his films. There is a short masterpiece, *Che cosa sono le nuvole* (1967) with Totò, where human beings behave like marionettes. Marvelous movie! Pasolini's way of dealing with images was extremely impressive. Just a few days ago, I watched *Accattone* again because Pasolini was born in Bologna and there are celebrations of Pasolini's life everywhere now.

DS: It is now the centenary of his birth.

CG: Yes. Actually, there is an emphasis, and rightly so, on Pasolini meeting and visiting Roberto Longhi as a student. *Accattone* (1961) from a visual point of view is extremely impressive. There is something novel in his way of dealing with images that is quite incredible. The plot is... weak, and I wonder how I would react today to seeing some of his other films. *La Ricotta*, for instance, is a very good movie.

DS: Your mother was in *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964) so I imagine you met Pasolini?

CG: I met him once, with my mother. But after his death, through Elsa Morante, who was a close friend of Pasolini, I learned something quite unbelievable: Pasolini wanted to make a film from *I Benandanti*! A Friulian story, and his early poems were in the

Friulian dialect. I had never heard of that before, but Elsa Morante was certainly reliable. And then I checked the chronology and discovered that a competitor emerged and won out —Boccaccio! *The Decameron*!

YS: Really! No chance! When you're up against Boccaccio, well…

CG: No chance!

DS: That's an interesting *microstoria del film italiano*!

CG: Yes (laughs), about a failed movie! But obviously Pasolini had an emotional connection with Friuli that lasted until the end of his life, no doubt.

DS: Returning to microhistory. As Bernardo Secchi noted in his stimulating book *La Città del ventesimo secolo*, microhistory, alongside the cultivation of the *"mappa in profondità"*, and thick description of the Geertzian kind, is one of the approaches that has been adopted since the 1970s by urban historians interested in the relations between the architecture of the city and its multiple contexts. Have there been other fields or sub-fields of history where microhistory has played a paradigmatic role? (B. Secchi, *La Città del ventesimo secolo*. Bari: Laterza, 2005).

CG: Paradigmatic, but at the same time I think there is a plasticity in the notion of microhistory. First of all, I think there is a misunderstanding in taking "micro" as related to the dimension either symbolic or literal of the object, which is absurd and uninteresting to me. But what if you take "micro" as related to the microscope, or, if I may say so, to Piero della Francesca or to an unknown miller? I think this idea, which involves plasticity, traveled a lot and it's at the same time flattering and surprising. In a way, I am coming back to the beginning of our conversation when I said that I am not so much interested in labels.

So, microhistory was a collective project, a conversation that started in the late 1970s around the journal *Quaderni Storici*, and I was one of the people involved in the conversation. As far as I am concerned, my approach to microhistory is based on cases, and from my first book, *The Night Battles*, I was dealing with cases. I am not saying that this is what microhistory should be about—I detest orthodoxy—but my own approach was related to this.

Now, *The Night Battles*, a case related to Friulian men and women, has been translated into many languages. The last one was in Turkish, and it just came out a few months ago. There were three editions in one month. Why people in Turkey should react so warmly to that book I have no idea, but this notion of translatability seems interesting to me.

YS: Yes, but not only that. I think you made yourself relatively free from thoughts on "history".

CG: I see your point, and agree.

YS: I'm not saying it was your intention. It probably was not your intention.

CG: Well....

YS: But when I think of history, what comes to mind, above all, is that crucial discussion of the concept by Arnaldo Momigliano, the idea of the history as understood by the Hebrew texts in which it was invented, by the late texts in Aramaic. The conversion of the Greek *historìa*, which simply means an inquiry that has no temporal dimension, that has no teleology, into the Jewish version, which then becomes adopted by the Christians, and then becomes the dominant version in the West, and then....we are losing it! We have lost it more or less, in some way. And so, your version makes our life believable, in a sense you are saying, "Let's set aside these questions, and let's look at something less vast, something that we can deal with in our mind."

CG: No, no, I see your point. I learned a lot from Momigliano, but I can see a divergence between our respective readings of his work. I still remember the euphoria that took me when I started to write the first sentences of *I Benandanti*. This I remember very well. Certainly, I didn't think for a moment that a sentence of that kind could be translatable. In a way, the case of *The Cheese and the Worms* is easier because you have a character, so it is more easily approachable. Today, you can find microhistory everywhere. There is a network of microhistorians that was led years ago by a Hungarian historian and Icelandic historian. And I think that the geopolitics of microhistory is very interesting. The idea that one book on a community of Icelandic fisherman can have a deeper impact on the international scene than one more book on *la prise de la Bastille*, well, this goes back to Bronislaw Malinowski's words: it's not the tribe such-and-such that is important, but the questions we ask about that tribe.

And here we can see something that is at the very center of your initial question: the dialogue between history and anthropology. Anthropology emerged from antiquarianism: a tradition which Momigliano rescued from oblivion in his great essay "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," [1950] *Contributo allo storia degli studi classici*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1979, 67-206). So, I can see how fruitful the dialogue has been from the point of view of history, but I wonder whether it was equally fruitful from the side of anthropology. I'm not sure, maybe there is an asymmetry.

DS: Well, three people come to mind. The first is Marshall Sahlins. You wrote about him, there was an exchange. (C. Ginzburg, "On

Dichotomies," *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 2 (2017), no pagination; Marshall Sahlins, "The original political society," *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7.2, 2017, 91–128).

CG: Yes.

DS: The second thing is that microhistory, at first, in your sense of it, was not always received well. If I'm not wrong, the great Franco Venturi had a negative view. And, third, what did Fernand Braudel think of your work?

CG: Okay, okay. Venturi. This a story I learned from Giovanni Levi. Venturi said, "I like history without the additives." (laughter) I found this marvelous, and I used this in a positive sense, saying there is an artificial side in microhistory. The construct of the approach and the object, which is the opposite of taking for granted both the approach and the object. And so, okay, these are "artificial": that's fine.

Braudel. I have copy of a letter he sent to Giulio Einaudi immediately after the publication of my book *The Cheese and the Worms.* "I want to publish a translation of this book in my series," Braudel wrote "but the title is impossible!" (laughter) This was wonderful. For the French, "cheese" and "worms"—they cannot go together! In Italy you have cheese with worms in Sardinia and Abruzzi. Later I met Braudel in Paris and he was very generous.

DS: But I could see how your approach and the later generation of the *Annales*, represented *inter alia* by Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, would be very close in a certain way.

CG: For sure, for sure. Actually, we published Schmitt's book, *Le Saint Lévrier* in our series. (Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le saint lévrier: Guinefort, guérisseur d'enfants depuis le XIIIe siècle.* Paris: Flammarion, 1979; *Il santo levriero. Guinefort, guaritore di bambini.* Torino: Einaudi, 1982).

DS: And what was Le Roy Ladurie's reaction?

CG: Le Roy Ladurie wrote a very favorable review of *The Night Battles.* I think there was an intense dialogue with the generations of the *Annales*, and then Jacques Revel made a choice. He made a distinction between culturally-oriented microhistory, embodied by myself, and socially-oriented microhistory, embodied by Giovanni Levi, and he emphasized the importance of the latter. (J. Revel, *Jeux d'échelles. La microanalyse à l'éxperience*, Paris: Gallimard. Seuil, 1996, 15ff). This was perfectly legitimate, but I was not convinced by the distinction. In fact, I wrote an essay in order to argue that, in fact, this distinction didn't work. It was titled, "Latitude, Slaves, and The Bible: An Experiment in Microhistory". *Critical Inquiry* 31. 3 March 2005, 665-683, reprinted as chapter 1, "Latitudine, gli

schiavi e la Bibbia. Un esperimento di microstoria," In C. Ginzburg, La *Lettera Uccide* (Milan: Adelphi, 2022), 5-24.

Again, I found the topic by chance. I was working on an essay on Auerbach's reading of Voltaire that would appear in *Quaderni Storici*. ("Tolleranza e Commercio: Auerbach legge Voltaire," *Quaderni Storici* 37:1 2002, n.s. 109.) There is a passage in that text on the London stock exchange and I was fascinated by this. Auerbach described his own approach as perspectivism: I tried to put Auerbach in perspective. So, there was a series of Chinese boxes: Voltaire, Auerbach, and myself.

Then, I thought, "Well, it would be interesting to look at the reception of Voltaire so let's try an experiment." This was an experiment I had done a few times before. When I was at UCLA, I tried out this experiment with the on-line catalog, Orion. The idea was to take a random passage from the first section of a posthumously published essay by Voltaire, *Traité de métaphysique*. [1734, but not published until 1785] and then to check every word in the passage in the Orion catalog, in order to explore the reactions of Voltaire's early readers. Looking not for a subject but for a word included in the title of a book. Looking for the unknown: but in this case the project was absurd, since we know a lot about the early reception of Voltaire's work. In any case, I started with the word "Cafrerie." Not a word in the catalog. Then, I tried with "Cafres". There were seven titles, and the earliest ones were by an author who was completely unknown to me: Jean-Pierre Purry. I was immediately intrigued by those titles, concerning books published in Amsterdam in the early 18th century. One of them was not in the rare book collection, but there were photocopies of it on the shelves. I started looking at them... and I decided to work on Purry.

For me, Purry was completely unknown. Eventually, I went to Neuchâtel [A small town on the north shore of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland.] Purry was a Calvinist from Neuchâtel, and he had a project about colonizing Cafrerie, South Africa. When I arrived in Neuchâtel, I jumped from the train, and...there was a statue. Not of Purry, but of his brother, who had made an enormous amount of money with the slave trade with Brazil. He had donated a large amount of money to hospitals, schools, and so on: he had become a kind of local hero. In any case, I started to work on Jean-Pierre Purry. My wife Luisa and I also traveled to South Carolina to visit the site of a city he had founded there: Purrysburg. All that was left were half-destroyed graves in a dark forest.

I started to work on Purry, and used him as a kind of tool in order to imagine a kind of dialogue between Karl Marx and Max Weber about colonization. On the one hand, the absence of violence in Weber's approach and on the other, the absence of the importance of religion in Marx's approach. In the case of Purry, there were both. So, I was trying to show that, in fact, this case could overcome the boundaries between cultural and social microhistory. Here are Voltaire's words which ignited my research: "Once arrived on this small mass of mud [the Earth] with as little an idea of man as man has of the inhabitants of Mars or Jupiter, I [the being from the outer space] land on the shore of the Ocean in the regions of the Cafrerie, and I first start looking for a human. I see monkeys, elephants, Negroes, who all seem to have the glimmer of an imperfect reason." Once again, I would say, we confront the problem of estrangement.

DS: I want to ask one more question about historiography, historical method, and microhistory. Ever since I've been teaching at Princeton, I've been in some contact with Anthony Grafton, with whom I had a conversation in part about our plan for the dialogue we are having now. He said, "You should ask Carlo about Martin Mulsow." I was intrigued, as I had early been fascinated by the way Mulsow recast microhistory in his own way, as a multiple history of non-conformist intellectual milieux. (M Mulsow, "Qu'est-ce qu'un constellation philosophique? Propositions pour une analyse des réseaux intellectuels." *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales* 64, 2009, 81-109).

What is your view of Mulsow's version of microhistory? In your hands microhistory focused on the singular individual, but here it was transposed into the plural, towards a reconstruction of milieux, and away from a single figure, even an exemplary one, like Menocchio. I believe it was Hippolyte Taine who first spoke of the importance of milieu.

CG: Yes, but he [Mulsow] used this word "constellation", no?

DS: Yes, but in a way, it seemed almost like a return to Hippolyte Taine. (Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 2nd ed. 1866).[4]

YS: Also, Leo Spitzer. Spitzer wrote on milieu. (Leo Spitzer, "Milieu and Ambiance," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3.1. 1942, 1-42).

CG: Oh absolutely. Milieu, ambiançe. He wrote a marvelous essay on this topic. Well, Spitzer was exploring the density of that word, "milieu", the constellation of synonyms. But in the case of Mulsow, it was a kind of metaphor, of course.

I've met Mulsow and I am greatly interested in what he does. I tend to work in a similar but divergent direction. I wrote a piece a long time ago that was republished by New Left Review on the bond of shame. ("The Bond of Shame," *New Left Review* 120 Nov.-Dec. 2019, 19-26). And, actually, the starting point was a kind of question I asked to myself, "Why am I ashamed of Berlusconi?" In fact, the answer was not obvious. I think what emerged from my reflection was a topic that I reflected on a lot over the years, meaning the limits of the ego, which are not given. There were some remarks about this by R.D. Laing in an interview that I read a long time ago. (R. D. Laing, *Intervista sul folle e il saggio*, ed. by V. Caretti, Bari 1979, 6-7).

In any case, I tried to work on this notion of shame as a bond. My argument, what I discovered by reflecting on myself, was that the country that we belong to is the country that we can be ashamed of. I tested this argument with several friends from different countries and after a moment of uncertainty, they always agree about this. Obviously, the amount of shame varies from country to country, but in all cases it is connected to our feeling of belonging to that country.

To return to Mulsow. In my view, focusing on an individual or focusing on a group are not mutually exclusive approaches. At the end of my piece on shame, I looked at the ego as the point of intersection of different sets. I am a member of the animal species *homo sapiens sapiens*. I am a member of the masculine moiety. I am a member of the set that includes all retired professors born in Turin, so on and so forth. And then, there is a set in which you have just one member: fingerprints. Now, what is interesting, and maybe obvious, is that when we work on an individual, we have this interaction between unique elements and more and more generic elements. This is something that is unpredictable, so the result is unpredictable as well. Maybe everybody knows it, but to articulate this is maybe not irrelevant. That was my conclusion.

DS: Well, in a certain way you reproduced the thought of Hierocles the Stoic—something I had thought of in connection with your recent critiques—much needed today, given the widespread obsession with this category and its frequent misuse—of identity, as in identity politics.[5]

CG: I checked this, but correct me because I am completely ignorant about him. If I am not mistaken, he was thinking about concentric diagrams. My point is about intersection, and intersection implies something completely different.



DS: So, it's different. Then, there is also the famous book that I remember coming across as a young person. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict, in which she divides cultures between shame and guilt cultures. (Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword.* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

CG: Ruth Benedict's essay was the beginning of my essay, *"The Bond of Shame"*. Actually, I sent it to my Japanese translator, Tadao Uemura, who was editing a collection of essays of mine (The Bond of Shame, Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 2022). I thought that for a Japanese audience that essay would have been intriguing.

YS: Or close to them!

CG: But I think my argument was that shame was shared by everybody, not only by Japanese.

YS: It's shared by everybody, but in different proportions.

CG: This was Benedict's argument, I agree. Yet I think it would be interesting to test. Because even if shame is hidden, when you ask a question...ha!

YS: It comes out.

DS: And perhaps here is a smooth transition to another — rather broad—question: If one must study history to prepare not only for the present but also for the future, to avoid falling into the trap of a facile presentism or an equally questionable futurology, how can one make proper use of historical knowledge? Here I am referring to knowledge not only of the past but of its potential and actual relations with the present and even with the future, in order to confront our current hydra-like crisis. I ask myself: Why do people choose authoritarianism and lies over democracy and truth? Why are they blind to the glaringly obvious—the pernicious and pervasive effects of climate change, the spread of regressive political ideologies, the recourse to violence as an easy option, the spread of stereotypes that drown out a knowledge of individuals and of real evidence about them? Is the sense of helplessness that many feel at present, given the unprecedented massiveness of the crises facing us, linked to the spread of authoritarian ideologies and of neo-Fascisms today? One senses that an increase in uncertainty, on both an individual and collective level, enables new openings for authoritarianism. Yet surely there is no such thing as a valid monocausal explanation for all of this. The notion of historical causality itself, it would seem, needs to be radically rethought. Even the notion of multi-causal factors requires renewed scrutiny for it to suggest any horizon of potential utility for the historian. Or is it more or less futile to ask these questions when trying to figure out why authoritarianism

is on the rise, for a reason that is relatively straightforward and easy to grasp: namely, that we lack the requisite historical distance to do so? I am aware that these are big questions, perhaps without hard and fast answers—perhaps without any reliable answers at all.

CG: I think we may start from the opposite side. That is, what made this phenomenon possible? I mean, obviously, it's a phenomenon that existed in massive proportions in the 20th century, but I must say I always refused to use the word "fascist" outside its context. That is, until I was in Chicago years ago and there was the presidential campaign and I saw Trump on the television screen and I said, "He's a fascist."

DS: Absolutely.

CG: Now, I think we have to deal with the disappearance of political parties, in the old sense of the word. This has been affected basically by the tool we are using at the moment, meaning the Internet. So, there is a huge, empty space that has been filled by the Internet, and the Internet has been used asymmetrically by those authoritarian forces. I have been obviously concerned about the issue of fake news and have written something about this. I think what we should learn and what we should teach is an Internet philology, the use of philology for the Internet.

DS: Slow reading.

CG: Slow reading on the one hand, which is compatible with, let's say, the faster pace of the Internet. But on the other hand, if you go back to fake news, I think the model for the unveiling of a fake news, the demonstration that fake news was a fake news, is Lorenzo Valla's demonstration in his book, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatio* (1440). *The Donation of Constantine was a forgery*, ed. Coleman, Christopher B. (1922). *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine.* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1922). [See also Carlo Ginzburg, "Preface," to Lorenzo Valla, *La Donation de Constantin.* Paris: Giard, 1993, i-xxi.] I think there is something to be learned from this. There are historians who argued that this was just a thing of the past and we are not concerned with this kind of approach anymore. I think this is absurd. Actually, philology is a crucial tool and we should teach its use. What's interesting is that a sophisticated use of the Internet is not something we can learn from the Internet. We cannot be self-taught.

In other words, only human mediators can teach this use. This is crucial. Teachers should start from the very beginning, involving children in this kind of use of the Internet. This is the basic difference. We use it not only to find answers to our questions, but to find unexpected questions, and

more questions and more questions, and to how to deal with them. So, once again, to be taken by surprise. There is something fascinating about this. I mean, the thrill of research is something that can be contagious.

Franco Moretti's work dealt with this question, from the opposite perspective, in a certain way, which is distant reading. (C. Ginzburg, "Our Words and Theirs. A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today, in *Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, ed. by S. Fellman and M. Rahikainen, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, pp. 97-119, especially 112-115). But in another way, there is another asymmetry here, with slow reading versus fast reading and close reading versus distant reading. What is your view of not so much the reception of Franco Moretti's work on distant reading but its differences from your own approach?

CG: Well, I've been involved in a debate with Franco and this is going to be published soon in the journal of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin (F. Moretti, "Gegen den Trend. Auf Ginzburgs Spuren für die Leidenschaft der Anomalien", *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*, XVI/2, 2022, pp. 73-81; C. Ginzburg, "Was ist der Fall? Eine Spieleröffnung", *ibidem*, pp. 82-85). I think we'll meet again in a few months in Turin to discuss our most recent books, his own and mine, about that kind of issue. I am skeptical about the fruitfulness of distant reading. I think it's dangerous. Actually, what I wrote is that Moretti was advocating distant reading, but at the same time he wrote an excellent essay on clues. (Franco Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61 (2000), pp. 207-227). It was just the opposite, based on a close reading of a series of texts. I mean (laughs), he's a friend and a split personality, I would say.

DS: Yes, and he also started out as a Lukácsian. I'm speaking about the Lukács of the *Theory of the Novel* (Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London/New York: Verso, 2000).

CG: Oh, yes, that book on the *Bildungsroman* is absolutely beautiful!

DS: When I studied with you in the 1980s, I came across a figure who has been forgotten in the USA, and perhaps elsewhere, the Chilean psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte Blanco. He wrote *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets*, originally published in 1975, which had a wide impact in its time and that you sometimes refer to? (See *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, 294-95). When did you first encounter his work? Did this book enable you to look at the unconscious, and Freud, and the relation between logical and non-logical thought, in a new way?

CG: In fact, my sister, Alessandra, is a psychoanalyst and she had been a pupil of Matte Blanco. She has written extensively on Matte Blanco's work. I met him, but briefly. I found it impressive and suggested it for translation to Einaudi (*L'inconscio come insiemi infiniti. Saggio sulla bi-logica*, Torino 1981).

The person who was really taken by Matte Blanco's work was my friend Francesco Orlando. He wrote a splendid book, *Lettura freudiana della Phèdre*, followed by a retrospective theoretical work arguing for a Freudian approach to literature. This second work was important because it disregarded what Freud's biographical approach exemplified by his essay on Leonardo. (F. Orlando, *Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature, with an Analysis of Racine's* Phèdre, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1978). For Orlando, what was crucial was Freud's essay on jokes and its implications for the analysis of literary texts.

YS: Also, in that book, there is a great idea that every work of art is a joke.

DS: And now, Francesco Orlando is translated into English with Yale University Press. (Francesco Orlando, *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2013).

CG: And into French as well. I think the impact of his work outside of Italy has been very weak. In my view, he was a very impressive scholar. He was reading and using Freud before meeting Matte Blanco; then he also used Matte Blanco in his work, in a way which I found rather unconvincing.

Matte Blanco's reading of Freud is very unconventional. I looked at him with admiration but with a distance, and never used his approach in my work.

DS: Since we last met in Turin, I am now reading Orlando and noting his fascination with ruins and residues. It reminds me very strongly of Benjamin's reading of the *Trauerspiel*. Either it was a parallel or he was very much aware of Benjamin.

CG: Oh, he was obviously aware of Benjamin. Orlando was an extremely learned person. He was a pupil of Tommaso di Lampedusa.

YS: You quote him on your text on Lampedusa! "In order to for things to stay the same, they will have to change."

CG: Exactly.

DS: I thought there might be a relation to Blanqui's *Eternity by the Stars*, at the end of that book of Lampedusa because you are writing about the stars, the mountain. Maybe there was implicit reference to Blanqui?

CG: Oh, certainly Blanqui was crucial for Benjamin. I not sure it was crucial for Tommaso di Lampedusa. For him, Pascal was enough. Actually, he said, "The difference between the human being and the animal is the ability to read Pascal's *Pensées*".

YS: That's a very nice sentence.

DS: And with Matte Blanco, I had the impression that he might be familiar with Cantor's set theory.

CG: Absolutely. He was certainly deeply intrigued by mathematics and with the possibility of translating Freud's remark about the unconscious into mathematical language. He was very original thinker, no doubt.

DS: Just a few more questions. Here is the first: can you tell us something about what you regard to be the value of the work of Enzo Melandri, both in its time, and particularly in his seminal work on analogy, *La Linea e il circolo* of 1968, and now? If I am not mistaken, you, he, Calvino, and others were involved in discussions concerning the abortive journal *Ali Baba* in the early 1970s, which was to have been devoted at least in part to the attempt to think beyond, to move beyond what you have called "the sterile opposition between reason and unreason, the rational and the irrational." (CG. "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method.* Baltimore/ London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 85).

CG: Yes, there was that project that was started by Calvino and Gianni Celati, who just died recently. There was a very friendly connection between us, and Melandri joined the group. I remember one evening, Melandri came and we had dinner. There was a dense conversation. I was fascinated by him but I'm not really familiar with his work. I would love to read *La linea e il circolo* but it's a big endeavor. (E. Melandri, *La linea e il circolo. Studio logico-filosofico sull'analogia.* Bologna, Il Mulino 1968).

YS: *La linea e il circolo* is very difficult to read but it's very important. His understanding of analogical thought is exceptional. It has not been translated into English yet.

CG: Yes, but it was republished with an introduction by Giorgio Agamben years ago. (Enzo Melandri, *La linea e il circolo. Studio logico-filosofico sull'analogia* with an introduction by Giorgio Agamben, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2004).So, maybe there will be a Melandri renaissance, one hopes.

DS: Well, the re-publication of this book certainly helped me try to reconstruct what I have called the "culture of analogy" between Aldo Rossi, Calvino, Celati, Melandri, and yourself. And the persons involved in the construction of this culture didn't always seem to be aware of each other. Melandri didn't seem to be aware of Rossi, Rossi wasn't aware of Melandri, but Calvino and Rossi seemed to have been aware of each other.[6] And in fact, to bring us back to the beginning of our conversation, the first reference that I found in Calvino's letters to Rossi compared him, in 1965, to a young

fashionable architect. Intellectually fashionable because he is trying to emulate Lévi-Strauss' Structuralism. (Italo Calvino, *Lettere, 1940-1985*, ed. L. Baranelli, Milano, Mondadori, 2000, 867) In fact, what I know of Rossi, he wasn't deeply into Levi-Strauss. He was more interested in analogy rather than structure, the origin of his idea of *la città analoga*, or analogous city. He quotes Lévi-Strauss, but mainly he quotes Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory. Rossi saw the city as an analogical phenomenon and as repository of the "collective memory of man." (Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*. Translated by Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman. Introduction by Peter Eisenman. Cambridge, MA/ London: MIT Press, 1982, 33, 96).

YS: Yes.

CG: Yes. I recently looked again at Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: PUF, 1925). I read it a long time ago and impressed me deeply. It's really an extraordinary book. The emphasis on collective memory is in fact followed, as you remember, by an attempt to look for different categories which are included in it. And so, there is a tension, and I think that the tension between memory and history which emerges from that book is really challenging. I recently looked at a review of Halbwachs's book by Marc Bloch in the *Revue de synthèse*, which was published in 1925. They were both in Strasbourg… teaching in Strasbourg. There is more to be looked at on that issue, no doubt.

DS: I seem to recall that when you wrote an introduction to the Italian edition of Bloch's *Les Rois taumaturges*, in which you may have discussed his work in relation to Halbwachs's. (Marc Bloch, *I re taumaturghi. Studi sul carattere sovranaturale attribuito alla potenza dei re particolarmente in Francia e Inghilterra.* Turin: Einaudi, 1973, prefazione di Carlo Ginzburg e *Un Ricordo di Marc Bloch* di Lucien Febvre).

CG: Just a few days ago I was asked to write something for Memorial, the organization that has been suppressed by Putin. So, starting from *"memoria"*, I went back to Halbwachs and to Bloch's review.

DS: Now, a somewhat de Tocqueville-like question. Having lived and taught in the USA for many years, could you tell us something about your impressions regarding the differences between this experience and living in Italy (or if one prefers, in Europe), not only with reference to your experience of the two different academic systems, but also more generally, with respect to the tenor and texture of everyday life?

CG: Well, I must say, what struck me was the impossibility of making generalizations about the United States. I was in Los Angeles, and I spent some time at Princeton.

Incomparable realities. So, in fact, the mystery is...what keeps this together? That's still for me an open question. Is Los Angeles a city? In fact, Calvino asked this question in *Invisible Cities* and the answer is "Who knows?" Maybe, maybe not. We could call it an anomaly, but then you find anomalies everywhere. This is not an answer but, in fact, a series of questions.

As far as the academic life, it certainly was different and much better. This is also changing—our department at UCLA has been changing a lot in recent years —but I was fascinated by the diversity of the students. There is that dictum in Italian, *Tutto il mondo è paese, paese dappertutto*. When the entire world is a village, it is a village everywhere. But I believe my interpretation was: you can be *spaesato*. [feeling out of place—trans. DS].

DS: Everywhere—and anywhere.

CG: So, in a way, estrangement once again. I was deeply impressed and learned a lot from that human diversity. Students from all over the world. In a way, one could say that I am still digesting that experience. But then, if you go to New York City, is New York City the United States? Is it America? Certainly not! So, you can see, generalizations being impossible. It's a kind of endless challenge that I found extraordinary.

YS: One last question regarding your essay "Clues". I was intrigued by the fact that you considered many types of clues but somehow you completely ignored photography, and you never refer to it as a way of defining objects.

CG: You are absolutely right, although that essay has been reproduced in a book about photography!

YS: Oh really? That's a nice irony.

DS: But there have been several different versions of that essay.

CG: No, just a couple. There was a seminar in Lille, I was intrigued by the fact that I didn't mention proofs: that was a real weakness, so I came back to this. The Lille seminar has been published: see D. Thouard, ed. *L'Interpretation des indices. Enquête sur le paradigme indiciare avec Carlo Ginzburg* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014).

But, photography, yes you are right about that. In a way, I think I am going back to this obliquely through Walter Benjamin. So, now I am preparing a piece where I am trying to reflect on Benjamin but obliquely, and I think photography will be at least mentioned.

YS: I think you could also say the statement, "What is a thing and what is not a thing." is partly defined by the inclusion of photography. The existence of photography has produced a whole new world that we were not aware of before.

CG: This is right, but there is also a phenomenon that was unthinkable when I was a young man. At this moment, there are billions of photographs made by everyone. And this inflation of images is something that was completely unthinkable before. In a way, we took for granted the inflation of words, even of written words of all kinds. But images, that was something different. I think this is something that affected and is going to affect an issue that is very important. Meaning, the uniqueness of certain images, which is something I mentioned in that essay on clues. Now, this is something that is changing, of course.

DS: This has something to do with the aura, the uniqueness.

CG: Yes, of course, I was alluding to Benjamin and so on. This is a fascinating topic and I'm deeply engaged in this reflection.

DS: Right now I'm reading a very good book by Jacques Rancière on this subject, *Le futur de l'image.* (J. Rancière, *The Future of the Image.* London/New York, Verso, 2019).

CG: Thank you, I will look for it! It will be a challenging reading, for sure.

YS: Thank you so much for spending this last couple of hours with us!

DS: *Grazie*, Carlo!

CG: *Grazie!*

1. Yehuda Safran and Daniel Sherer, "An Interview with Vincent Scully," *Potlatch* 4 (Spring 2016).

2. On *Microstorie*, see Serena la Malfa, "La collana Einaudi 'Microstorie' (1981- 1991)," *Storiografia* 20 (2016), 197-214.)

3. On Tafuri's reading of Weber, see D. Sherer, "Disenchanted Architecture. Manfredo Tafuri as Reader of Max Weber," in *Manfredo Tafuri: His Readers and Their Readings/Manfredo Tafuri: seus leitores e suas leituras,* ed. R. A. Retto, et. al. São Paolo, Brazil, Proceedings of Conference, FAUP (2018), 374-401.

4. On Taine's theory of milieu, see R. Wellek, "Hyppolite Taine's Literary Theory and Criticism," *Criticism* 1, 1 (Winter 1959), 1-18 .

5. B. Inwood, "Hierocles: Theory and Argument in the Second Century AD," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984), 151-183. I would like to thank Sir Raphael Wedgwood for calling my attention to Hierocles. (DS).

6. Daniel Sherer, *Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City*, exhibition catalogue, Princeton 2018 (Princeton School of Architecture, 2018), 8 and no.8.

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On March 6, 2022, *Potlach* editor Yehuda Safran and frequent contributor Daniel Sherer interviewed Carlo Ginzburg. A broad spectrum of themes was discussed. These include the complex relationship between microhistory, ethnohistory and anthropology, the impact of Marc Bloch on Ginzburg's formation as a historian, the formalist and structuralist approaches of Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, the work and figure of Michel Foucault, disparate receptions of psychoanalysis (Yosef Yerushalmi, Francesco Orlando, Ignacio Matte Blanco), Machiavelli's impact on the visual arts (and on Michelangelo in particular), the uses of estrangement in literary texts (Flaubert, Proust and Tolstoy), Ginzburg's interactions with Manfredo Tafuri, the importance of film for the comprehension of historical narrative (with specific reference to Sergei Eisenstein), Italian postwar cinema (above all, Pier Paolo Pasolini), the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss, "slow reading" as a partial antidote to our present political and cultural predicament, the various factors contributing to the alarming and dangerous resurgence of authoritarianism in our own time. Offering a sort of "living portrait" of a mind endowed with insatiable curiosity, the interview must be counted among the more revealing and significant to have been carried out with this pivotal historian and thinker.

POTLATCH

A Journal of the Potlatch Lab
Pratt Institute School of Architecture

61 St James Pl,
Brooklyn, NY 11238