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# Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life

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“The Time is approaching when History will be attempted on quite other principles; when the Court, the Senate and the Battlefield, receding more and more into the Background, the Temple, the Workshop and the Social Hearth will advance more and more into the foreground, and History will not content itself with shaping the answer to the question: How were men *taxed and kept quiet* then? But will seek to answer this other infinitely wider and higher question: how and what *were men* then? Not our Government only, or the ‘house wherein our life was led’, but the *Life* itself we led there, will be inquired into.”

Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1899), p 83.

“The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental, nor it is accidental that today only within the smallest and intimate circles, in personal human situations, in *pianissimo*, that something is pulsating that corresponds to the prophetic *pneuma*, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together.”

Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, in H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford, 1955), p. 155.

This essay is an extended reflection on the place of micro-history and of other historical accounts of everyday life, one that seeks to locate them not just within the context, assumptions and methods of historical writing in the past forty years, but also in the context of post-war politics. It is not intended as a comprehensive survey (clearly impossible in an essay), but as the opening of a conversation about certain aspects of social and cultural history. It is unquestionably partial, and I should make clear at the outset some of its aims and assumptions. It is not as insider’s polemic like Geoff Eley’s *A Crooked Line* or William H Sewell’s *Logics of History* - both incidentally books of formidable scholarship and great insight.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it intended as a rallying cry for one particular sort of history. While I have strong personal tastes about the sort of history I like to read and write, I am not interested in the hubristic task of „defending history“ or patrolling its borders (almost invariably intellectually impoverishing enterprises) nor do I wish to tell colleagues how they should go about their business.<sup>2</sup> The essay has some obvious lacuna. It has less to say than it ought about Braudel and the Annalists in this story, in part because I have discussed them elsewhere; gender historians will (among others) probably feel short-changed.<sup>3</sup> And it does not address directly the issue of the so-called and much misunderstood „linguistic turn“, a topic I plan to address in a separate essay.<sup>4</sup>

In fact its emphasis is less on language than on ideas of space, size and distance and their relationship to affect and historical interpretation, a topic that has been brilliantly discussed by Mark Salber Phillips in his analyses of distance and closeness in historical representation. Phillips argues that most forms of historical representation (and not just written history) deploy form, affect, ideology and cognition as means of mediating between the past

and present, creating different „distance effects ... that modify and reconstruct the temporality of historical accounts, thereby shaping every part of our engagement with the past.”<sup>5</sup> Arguing, as he does, that the fundamental historical question of the relation between the here and now and the there and then, of how we negotiate the time and space between past and present, is best understood in these terms is, I think, immensely illuminating, not least in opening up a field that extends beyond the issues of narrative, emplotment and genre – the literary territory, the tropics of discourse, famously inhabited by Hayden White. But I also want to include notions of size as well as distance (the two bear an obvious but not necessary relationship), taking from the critic and poet Susan Stewart in her book, *On Longing*, the insight that scale has a powerful bearing on the sorts of affective and psychological response we have to both accounts of and objects from the past.<sup>6</sup> As she explains, „We cannot speak of the small, or miniature, work independent of the social values expressed towards private space – particularly, of the ways the domestic and the interior imply the social formation of an interior subject. And we cannot speak of the grand and the gigantic independent of the social values expressed toward nature and the public and exterior life of the city. Aesthetic size cannot be divorced from social function and social values.”<sup>7</sup> As we shall see small-scale and intimate histories have a complex relation to these issues of distance and scale, and deploy a varied repertoire of means to negotiate them.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie famously remarked that historians fall into two categories, parachutists and truffle hunters.<sup>8</sup> I’d want to put it slightly differently and, remaining mindful of Phillips and Stewart, draw on the work of such humanist geographers and landscape theorists as Yi-Fu Tuan and Jay Appleton, who are concerned to talk about the psychic and social properties of different sorts of environment. Appleton in particular hypothesizes two ideal-types of landscape, prospect and refuge which I think can be profitably applied to an analysis of historical writing.<sup>9</sup> I propose these types, not because they cover every type of historical writing (which they clearly do not), but because they provide us with a cluster of characterizations that help us recognize

(in a manner that has already been described in a slightly different idiom by Phillips) how historical works grapple with size, closeness and distance.

I would characterize prospect history as written from a single, superior point of view – a bird’s eye perspective or from a lofty peak – in which an extensive, large-scale landscape is surveyed and analysed. The perfect example of such a history would be Charles Tilly’s aptly titled, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*.<sup>10</sup> The writer, viewer or reader is not in the picture but outside it. Because of height, size and distance, what is observed and recorded is general not specific, an undifferentiated shape or aggregated trend whose contours and surface can be seen but which lacks distinct detail, though it may enjoy numerical expression. The pleasures of this sort of history are formal and abstract, a bit like the aesthetic appeal that Adam Smith attributed in *The Wealth of Nations* to the contemplation of the workings of the market. But they are also the pleasures of power, a sense that the intractable materials of the world can be re-formed as a pattern or shape that in some way will serve the needs of their creator. Knowledge and insight come from abstract science. Subject and object are clearly differentiated and distinct.

In contrast refuge history is close-up and on the small scale. Its emphasis is on a singular place rather than space, the careful delineation of particularities and details, a degree of enclosure. It depends upon the recognition that our understanding of what is seen depends on the incorporation of many points of view rather than the use of a single dominant perspective. Within the space of refuge historical figures are actors and have agency, motives, feeling and consciousness. They are the subjects not objects of history. The emphasis is on forms of interdependence, on interiority and intimacy rather than surface and distance. The pleasures of refuge history derive not from a sense of control of history but from a sense of belonging, of connectedness – to both persons and details – in the past. Whether as the expression of a certain common humanity or as an identification with a particular group, this sort of history sees sympathy and understanding – a measure of identification which can range from the quite abstract to the

deeply emotive – as essential to historical knowledge and insight. Refuge history is therefore often *heimlich*. (This is Adam Smith again, but of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* rather than of *The Wealth of Nations*).

I make the distinction between prospect and refuge history in part because these types of history correspond rather well to the two sorts of history – social science history and the new social history – that together launched the attack in the anglophone world on conventional (usually political) history in the 1960s. Nowhere can this be more clearly seen than in the special issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*, „New Ways in History“, published in April 1966. The *TLS* essays – by the likes of Keith Thomas, Eric Hobsbawm and Edward Thompson – revealed an uneasy tension between an Annales and sociologically inspired technocratic serial history and „history from below“ designed to excite sympathy and to be „relevant“ to a larger body of readers. The former proposed large-scale collaborative projects of the sort associated with prospect history; the latter was far more concerned to recover the experience of particular actors.<sup>11</sup> At the time these differences in approach were largely overlooked in the shared critique of a history that was political, chronological, and elitist. But the contrast between the two, which was to be played out over the next forty years, and which remains salient today, lies at the heart of much disagreement over method amongst those who have seen themselves as social and cultural historians. Secondly I distinguish prospect and refuge history in order to draw a metaphorical contrast between two very different styles of historical writing. These differences can be expressed in many different ways: as a contrast between structure and narrative, determinism and agency, science and humanism, grand narratives and micro-histories, or as a difference in the poetics of history. Of course the way in which these contrasts play out in individual historical works often involves a more complex amalgam of ideas. History written on a small scale, for instance, can be quite distant in other ways, and grand narratives can also be combined with the strong expression of identification and sympathy. One only needs to think of a masterpiece like Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* to realize this.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it is tempting to argue

that the best histories are usually those that most effectively combine several of Phillips' „distance effects“.

It is something of a cliché that a large body of historical writing in the last forty years has made „everyday life“, the experiences, actions and habits of ordinary people, a legitimate object of historical inquiry. Anglophone new social history, history written in the context of the new social movements concerned with gender, race and sexual orientation, *Alltagsgeschichte* in Germany, *microstoria* in Italy and post-Annales cultural history in France all concern themselves with the lives, beliefs and practices of those who had previously been „hidden“ from history. And all, to a greater or lesser extent, constitute a departure not just from histories that ignore such populations, but from the sort of economic, social and demographic history, much of it inspired by the Annales, that treated such people as the objects rather than the subjects of history. These new histories explored the values, beliefs and feelings of their subjects and gave their protagonists a degree of agency, whether in the circumstances of the everyday or the extraordinary. The scale and focus of such writing is often small, personal and intimate. We are all familiar with at least some of this work – by John Demos and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich on colonial and revolutionary America,<sup>13</sup> Robert Darnton, Natalie Zemon Davis, and Le Roy Ladurie to name but a few of those who have written on early modern France,<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Steedman and Ronald Fraser on modern Britain,<sup>15</sup> Gene Brucker, Judith Brown, Carlo Ginzburg, and Giovanni Levi on Italy,<sup>16</sup> David Sabeau, Hans Medick and Alf Lütke on Germany<sup>17</sup> and Richard Kagan on Spain.<sup>18</sup> I'm well aware that in putting together social history, microhistory and the history of everyday life, I am conflating works that are distinct and operate within different (national and political) historical traditions, and which deploy differing methods. Even within the field of microhistory David Bell and Brad Gregory have drawn a distinction between what they respectively call extraordinary and ordinary histories, or episodic or systematic histories.<sup>19</sup> They distinguish, in other words, between studies of a remarkable event that enable us to open up an otherwise obscure social world, and those that painstakingly reconstruct day to day transactions. But I think that all these different sorts of history do have a

family resemblance, a common set of preoccupations, and a shared culture that merits investigation. They also belong to a common if somewhat protracted moment that begins in the late 1960s and reaches its culmination in the 1980s, and persists today, despite a growing sense of its limitations.

So I want to explore the history, politics, methodological assumptions, strengths and weaknesses of these forms of history inquiry, placing them in the context of other social scientific writing – in critical theory, sociology and cultural studies – since World War II. Essentially I want to argue that this historiographical trend emanates from two major debates within the social sciences and politics – one that is concerned with the nature of everyday life under modern capitalism, the other with the vexed issue of the relations between free will and determinism – the question of the efficacy of human agency. What unites critical theory and historical investigation, I want to show, is a commitment to a humanist agenda which places human agency and historical meaning in the realm of day-to-day transactions and which sees social reality as grounded in the quotidian. The position is one that rejects both an abstract and quantitative (liberal) social science, and a skeptical anti-humanism, whether structuralist or post-structuralist. In order to make my case I will draw on a range of historical and cultural theoretical scholarship, but my chief cases and primary focus will be on Italian and to a lesser extent French scholarship, rather than that on Germany, North America and Britain.

Academic writing about everyday life, I think, grows out of two long-standing traditions. The first is what I will call the antiquarian and ethnographic version of everyday life. The emphasis of such works is on material culture, social practices, folklore, popular beliefs and superstitions, and the family. Where it is concerned with change through time, it is often suffused with a certain nostalgia – an attachment to the recovery of, in the words of Peter Laslett's title, *The World We Have Lost*.<sup>20</sup> It, in turn, has a long pedigree dating back in Europe at least to the seventeenth century in local, antiquarian, archaeological and genealogical studies, and which flourished in the romantic ethnography of the likes of Johann Gottfried

von Herder. Studied in continental universities under the rubric of ethnography and folklore, and akin to and sometimes an inspiration for such historians as Carlyle and Michelet, such writing was largely absent from British universities, though it flourished in many voluntary associations and had a healthy profile in the realm of print. Yet it was to prove an important resource not just to cultural anthropologists (who in turn inspired much of the new social and cultural history) but to historians such as Le Roy Ladurie, Robert Darnton, Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Davis and Edward Thompson, all of whom drew explicitly on works in this tradition.

The second body of literature is the critical cultural theory version of everyday life that dates from the early twentieth century and is associated with a *marxisant* or Leftist critical tradition. It has come in scholarly circles to have a standard pedigree that runs from George Lukács, through the Surrealists, Walter Benjamin, Bakhtin, Henri Lefebvre, the Situationist international (notably Guy Debord) to Michel de Certeau. The primary concern of these scholars has been with the nature of modern everyday life in commodified, capitalist societies, their consciousness of its constraints and their concern to transform a realm of necessity into a world of freedom, of boredom into creativity, and of alienated and fragmented existence into human wholeness. Crucially this is a story about historical change as loss, one that sets the agenda as one of humanist recuperation and, that, like its antiquarian and folklorist counter-part, looks back nostalgically to a pre-modern era of *Gemeinschaft* characterized by strong collective attachments and local solidarities. One of its major premises – this can be seen most clearly in the writings of de Certeau and Lefebvre – is that modern specialized forms of knowledge have become debased instruments of social control and discipline, and that in consequence it is only in the realm of everyday life that we can find the resources for self-fulfillment, for the realization of a whole, human self. It draws then, on what Charles Taylor has called the „expressivist“ tradition of the Young Hegelians (including the early Marx). It has to be seen as part of the post-war trend to shape a new form of Marxism or socialism bereft of the rigid and stultifying economism associated with repressive Stalinism and the orthodox Communist

parties of Western Europe. It looked critically to the Right as well as the Left, mounting a resolute attack on liberal and then Cold War apologetics for western capitalism.<sup>21</sup>

It is quite often said that concern with the everyday and the intimate is explained or should be understood as part of the more general rejection and critique of grand narratives in social sciences and critical theory. This is true. But it is important to understand that what is at stake here is not, as we shall see, the question of narration as such but, as Giovanni Levi has emphasized, the issue of scale and point of view.<sup>22</sup>

We can see this more clearly if we turn to the critique of one particular sort of grand narrative, the story of liberal modernization as developed by Cold War apologists, and which was revitalized as the new conservative liberalism of Reagan and Thatcher at precisely the moment when the new history of everyday life reached its heyday. As many commentators have pointed out – I’m thinking of Brad Gregory and David Bell, both of whom have written excellent essays on microhistory and the history of everyday life – this new history reflected both a political and intellectual disillusionment.<sup>23</sup> The political disillusionment was twofold: with the receding prospect of radical political change, the astonishing durability of the institutions and values of liberal capitalism, and the apparently irresistible sirens of consumerism. The upheavals of 1968, though they had a profound effect on universities in Britain, Europe, and the United States, did not produce the social transformation that many on the Left longed for, and the downturn in economic fortunes in the 1970s resulted not in a refurbished Left but the rise of a radicalized Right whose values were to become more and more politically dominant.

This was reinforced and paralleled by an intellectual disillusionment with quantitative social science history, whether socialist, liberal or Annalist, both as a tool for social change and as an account of social experience. Moreover the strictures of structuralism, whether coming from the early Foucault or Althusser, seemed to reinforce the sense that, in Gregory’s words, “the protean interplay of political institutions, corporate power, technological innovation and mass advertising” were an

iron cage imprisoning the disoriented forces of radical change.<sup>24</sup> Both structuralist Marxism and late capitalism seemed to consign human agents to a position somewhere between impotence and passivity. (Philippe Ariès, for one, commented in the 1970s on how criticism of progress „has passed from reactionary Right that had, moreover abandoned it, to a Left or, rather, a leftism with poorly drawn borders, rough, but vigorous“, and connected this to a growing flight to the study of „pre-industrial societies and their mentality“.<sup>25</sup> Jacques Revel takes a similar view of the French historical scene after the events of 1968: „Progress, the rallying cry in a time of rapid transformation, no longer seemed assured. The present was uncertain, the future opaque; the past became a safe place in which to invest ... What people now wanted from history was no longer lessons, precedents, or ways of understanding the present but, rather a refuge against the uncertainties of the moment.“<sup>26</sup>

The reaction was not just to liberal capitalism and modernization theory but to the particular version of everyday life it endorsed, one built around a culture rich in commodities, what was usually referred to as „consumer society“. It was this view of everyday life against which all others – those of Lefebvre, the Situationists, de Certeau – sought to distinguish themselves. I think we tend to forget just how powerful modernization theory had become in the post-war era – especially by the 1960s when its proponents were heralding the end of scarcity – with its own (highly politicized) version of everyday life and its relations to western capitalism. The hiccup of the 1970s was no more than that, a moment of transition when post-war mass consumption was gradually replaced by what is conventionally known as post-Fordist capitalism with its reconfigured notions of consumption organized not around mass society but around notions of consumer choice as a means of self-actualisation and identity formation.<sup>27</sup>

Modernization theory employs a standard set of criteria for modernity: sustained economic growth; high levels of political participation; secularization; high rates of geographical and social mobility; and a new sort of historical subject, modern man.<sup>28</sup> The theory is self-contained – it never questions its notion of modernization;



it only asks whether a particular case constitutes modernization – and operates using transhistorical quantitative categories. It deploys a single, linear progressive model of time against which all societies are measured. It is, as has often been pointed out, a westernized notion of both time and space, in which all societies are mapped according to the degree to which they have reached modernity, a state explicitly associated with the West. This makes it possible to say, „what time is this place.“ As Pierre Vilar has put it: modernization theory “has managed to fix a single standard of measurement” – world time – produced by a “single global space of coexistence”, within which action and events are subject to a single, quantifiable chronology.<sup>29</sup> This was prospect history with a vengeance, a view that placed all economies, societies and cultures on a time/space continuum that culminated in the triumph of the west. The effect of such a model was to see the rest of the world in relation to “Western” developments, to treat the Third World as a sort of laboratory in which modernization could be cultured. Ginzburg has stressed that Italian microhistory was very self-consciously opposed to what he describes as this „ethnocentrism“, the sense that all societies should be judged from a single standard which culminated in modern consumer society.<sup>30</sup>

This sort of analysis was not of course new. It followed the stage theory of societal development first made by Turgot, Adam Smith and the conjectural historians of the Scottish Enlightenment. The literature on economic development in the 1950s and 1960s used a similar model and indeed looked back to the experience of the first industrial nation and its theorists to elaborate its models of growth. Thus W.W. Rostow’s *The Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-Communist Manifesto*, which between 1960 and 1972 sold a staggering 260,000 copies in English alone, was an explicit attempt to use British history „to the formulation of a wiser public policy“, to show that the western model rather than Russian communism was the right way forward for the Third World.<sup>31</sup>

As André Burguière has pointed out, there was a certain accommodation between the cold war warrior and Leftist (sometimes even Communist) historians in the

Annales school, built around a common interest in growth and a shared view that its success depended upon „mental dispositions“ and values (though Rostow’s persistent emphasis on politics was hardly very Annalist).<sup>32</sup> But politically what mattered was not so much Rostow’s account of how take off occurred and how the Malthusian cycle was broken (only a small part of a study chiefly focused on later development), but his version of mature societies as characterized by „high mass-consumption“, and his belief that „in its essence Communism is likely to wither in the age of high mass-consumption“.<sup>33</sup>

This Cold War formulation of economic development was further elaborated in theories that connected growing affluence and the ownership of goods to conceptions of democracy. Goods made for the good life – not just one that entailed comfort and choice – but for a life of political virtue. This sort of argument is well represented in another classic text of the early 1960s, Seymour Martin Lipset’s *Political Man*. Lipset argued that only mass affluence ensured that „the population [could] intelligently participate in politics and develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues.“<sup>34</sup>

Lipset’s measures of democracy include not only education and wealth, but levels of consumption - persons per motor vehicle, numbers of telephones, radios and newspapers per capita. Like Rostow, he was particularly exercised about car ownership: „In the more democratic European countries, there are seventeen persons per motor vehicle compared with 143 for the less democratic. In the less dictatorial Latin-American countries there are ninety-nine persons per motor vehicle versus 274 for the more dictatorial.“<sup>35</sup>

In short, here we see the explicit association of certain sorts of commodity (or more precisely the density of certain sorts of commodity) with a particular political regime. This idea had a pedigree that, as Victoria de Grazia points out, dates back at least to a speech of President Woodrow Wilson made (aptly enough) in Detroit in 1916 to the first World’s Salesmanship Conference in which he urged American entrepreneurs to

„go out and sell goods that will make the world more comfortable and happier, and convert them to the principles of America.“<sup>36</sup> But it acquired its full salience during the Cold War when, as Lizabeth Cohen has shown,<sup>37</sup> American commodities came to represent the American (liberal democratic) way of life. (The most famous example, of course, is Coca Cola, brilliantly used by Stanley Kubrick in *Doctor Strangelove* and adopted by the French newspaper, *Humanité*, to describe the post-war Marshall Plan as Coca-colonization). Consumption, conceived of somewhat unproblematically as ownership (rather than say as use) becomes a key measure of politics; a set of economic and social practices (signed through goods) is conflated with a political vision or ideology of the good. The appurtenances of a modern everyday life – soft drinks, refrigerators, and phones – become part of what was then a global struggle. Think, for instance, of the famous kitchen debate at the American exhibition in Moscow in 1959, when Richard Nixon opposed the American housewife’s washing machine to Russian „machines of war“, or of David Riesman’s witty essay, „The Nylon War“, in which the Cold War is won through the saturation bombing of the Soviet Union with consumer goods.<sup>38</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of Cold War liberals, the connection between the projection of a certain (American) way of life and consumer goods has become naturalised. But we should rather recognise this conjunction as a historically specific consequence of the ideological struggles of the Cold War which were sustained in the American case not only by academic scholarship but by bodies such as the U.S. Information Agency and the State Department which deliberately sought to export a particular version of the American way of life, and which treated Europe as a major battle-ground between two different ways of life. Two percent of the Marshall Plan’s budget was set aside to propagate the American way of life in such displays as „Le Vrai Visage des Etats Unis.“<sup>39</sup> Here was capitalism’s politics of (the American way) of everyday life, one that placed commodity culture at its centre, and which has framed the debate about modernity, commodity culture and everyday life ever since.<sup>40</sup>

The political objections advanced against such a view are easy to imagine – that it was a triumphalist apologetic for capitalism, and that it failed to take into account the inequality, conflict, false consciousness and alienation engendered by what Lefebvre called „the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption“. <sup>42</sup> In fact hostility to the American model of development and modern consumerism was one of the few issues (apart from American foreign policy) on which the many factions and fragments of the European Left could agree. The American story with its progressive narrative and emphasis on consensus and classlessness built through affluence and consumer goods was hardly conducive to a Leftist history that emphasized class struggle, resistance, enduring inequality and poverty, and the heroic distinctiveness of working class life. At the same time, it became a cliché, in no way confined to the Left, that the inexorable process of Americanization was profoundly corrosive of community and local solidarities. Both the analyses of development and the phenomenon itself – the move towards liberal, capitalist consumerism – were seen as threatening to create an anodyne and passive uniformity. This gave a political edge to historical work that recuperated the diverse and often engaging practices and communities of the past, especially those that did not seem to be on the winning side with capitalism; and it encouraged both the move towards studies on a smaller scale (to an attachment to particularism), and the move into the early modern or pre-modern world that seemed so much more palatable than its more recent counter-part.

The story of inexorable modernization – in its Marxist as well as liberal versions – also raised the question of agency: how much scope was there for conscious human choice and action or were historical actors imprisoned in an iron cage? And how could the presence or absence of agency be discerned by the historian? One answer to this question has been to argue that it is only by shifting the perspective, scale and point of view of historical analysis, creating variations on small-scale history, that the relationship between structure and agency can properly be understood. The Italian micro-historian, Giovanni Levi, for example, has urged historians to turn away from what he calls „the idea of a regular progression through a uniform and predictable series of stages in



which social agents were considered to align themselves in conformity with solidarities and conflicts in some sense given, natural and inevitable".<sup>42</sup> Levi explicitly attributes the power of a uni-linear developmental vision to contemporary political developments that „have led to a re-introduction of the mistaken notion that long-term historical developments can, in spite of interruptions and abrupt changes, be interpreted as a continuous and unchanging evolutionary progression which is, for the most part, homogenous."<sup>43</sup> His and others' objections to what he condemns as the „ideology of destiny and uniformity" are that such overarching, what I have called prospect narratives, are exclusionary and univocal.<sup>44</sup> Exclusionary in that they efface any sort of individuality – the accounts are abstract and faceless, dehumanized. And exclusionary in that they fail to confront or take account of human agency, refusing what Levi calls „an enquiry into the extent and nature of free will within the general structure of human society."<sup>45</sup> They are univocal in their exclusion of voices that do not fit the uniform model of change, and univocal in that they do not recognize the contradictions and conflicts within the model. What Levi offers is an alternative vision, one in which „all social action is seen to be the result of an individual's constant negotiation, manipulation, choices and decisions in the face of a normative reality which, though pervasive, nevertheless offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms".<sup>46</sup> A proper treatment of agency proceeds from a method that emphasizes „an open [historical] process laden with conflicts and negotiations" and that therefore entertains a variety of possible outcomes.<sup>47</sup>

This is not a question of denying the existence of larger historical processes – modernization, industrialization, commodification, urbanization etc. – but of how best to understand and portray them, of looking at them from the perspective of everyday life. As Lüdtko, one of the most vigorous proponents of this approach in Germany puts it, we need to look at „how the expansion of commodity production, the state and bureaucracy was *experienced* by the many".<sup>48</sup> Wolfgang Kaschuba takes a similar view: „such an approach does not entail any abandonment of the 'big questions' regarding the formation of states and classes, religions and churches, industrialization

and capitalism, nation and revolution".<sup>49</sup> So the issue is one of point of view. As Levi has written, „The unifying principle of all microhistorical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved ... phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation. It is then possible to use these results to draw far wider generalizations although the initial observations were made within relatively narrow dimensions and as experiments rather than examples".<sup>50</sup> One aim of this approach is to establish dynamic interconnections. As Roger Chartier has written, „it is on this reduced scale, and probably only on this scale, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of beliefs, of values and representations on the one hand, and social affiliations on the other".<sup>51</sup> Social and cultural history unite in the micro-processes of everyday life.

At times it seems that one of the claims that some historians want to make is that the shift in scale offers the possibility not merely of greater complexity but of greater completeness. For certain sorts of microhistorians may confess themselves dissatisfied with grand narratives but still aspire to a notion of total history. This is especially true of some Italian and French microhistorians who both react against but want to remain within the great Annales tradition of *histoire totale*, writing what Revel has described as „a total history, but this time built from the ground up".<sup>52</sup> The sort of highly detailed network analysis practiced by Levi, based on the micro interactionist anthropology of Frederick Barth, for instance, purports to achieve a new sort of comprehensiveness.<sup>53</sup>

But the claim to completeness or totality, regardless of scale, is the most exclusionary version of historical narrative. It supposes one true history rather than competing histories. This seems to me deeply problematic, for, as any theorist of narrative will tell you, there is no *formal* difference between grand narratives and micro-narratives. No story is innocent; all narratives involve plotting. They necessarily involve choice, inclusion and exclusion. The claim that scale and point of view enable us to see and explain what otherwise might be overlooked –

that closeness will lead to different sorts of explanations – is entirely plausible as a methodological or epistemological claim, but it cannot be sustained by the assertion that micro narratives are different from macro stories as *narratives*. This claim to completeness or plenitude is connected to another – to which I will return – that histories on a small-scale provide „a more realistic description of human behavior“.

Without necessarily subscribing to the notion of a total history both de Certeau and Ginzburg have emphasized how changes of scale and approach recover and explain phenomena lost to conventional analysis. This is true of practices or beliefs that were dismissed, like Menocchio’s cosmology or the possession of the Ursuline nuns of Loudon, as irrational, superstitious or „anomalous“, but also of the transitory, evanescent practices of modern everyday life that de Certeau describes as „unprivileged from history“. <sup>54</sup> Italian historians have enshrined this idea, in Edoardo Grendi’s notion of the „normal exception“, an event or practice that, viewed in the context of modern „scientific“ inquiry seems exotic, remarkable or marginal, but that, when properly investigated, i.e., placed or coded in its proper context, reveals its own logic and order. <sup>55</sup> Levi goes further, claiming that working from the exceptional and the marginal enables the historian to rewrite grand narratives. <sup>56</sup>

De Certeau, both in his historical investigations and his work on contemporary everyday life, has probably advanced this notion to a greater degree than any other historian. He has urged a history that deliberately seeks out what he calls „exceptional details“ and „significant deviations“ from actions or events readily accommodated within the explanatory models of the prevailing social-scientific and political order. <sup>57</sup> At the same time, in his work on contemporary France he identifies „the tactics of the other“ as the means by which the alien strategies of power are transformed by the weak to their own ends in the practices of everyday life. <sup>58</sup> Like Lefebvre, de Certeau emphasizes individual capacities to resist or deflect hegemonic forms of dominance and control in the present (what the Situationists in the 1960s called the tactic of „détournement“), while he also joins the Italian and German microhistorians in urging a historical

investigation of comparable phenomena in the past.

One of the key ways in which de Certeau conveys the difference between notions of dominance and the deployment of tactics – the recovery of knowledge occluded by a single point of view - is in a remarkable passage in the chapter on „walking the city“ in his *History of Everyday Life*. He begins, in a brilliant description that cannot be read without a certain terrible irony, with an account of the all-powerful thrill of looking down from the top of the World Trade Centre in New York:

*To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of „seeing the whole“, of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts.*

*To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city’s grasp. One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, one leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors and spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was „possessed“ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. <sup>59</sup>*

This passage captures, better than any other I know, the pleasures (and illusions) of the prospectival point of view, its sense of power and control that stems from its dis-embodied abstraction, its separation and distance from the phenomenon it observes. <sup>60</sup> But for de Certeau, this view fails to capture – indeed it deliberately occluded – the sort of open-ended knowledge that could only be obtained through the fragmented, unpredictable experience of wandering through the city at street level.

The account is, of course, about our knowledge of the everyday in the present, but it serves as a metaphor for the contrasting sorts of illumination sought by single-view prospect history, and by a multi-perspectival micro history or account of everyday life.

Ginzburg's method, though it resembles that of de Certeau, is somewhat different. In his famous essay on clues he traces the genealogy of a conjectural method which, in the manner of the art connoisseur Giovanni Morelli and Sherlock Holmes, relies on faint traces or observable discrepancies (the dog that did not bark in the night) as signs of hidden truth.<sup>61</sup> Particularly important are the gaps, slips and misunderstandings found in the historical record. (The debt to Freud is obvious and acknowledged.)

Ginzburg's approach can be seen as part of a general concern among students of everyday life for small things and discrete particulars, a preoccupation going back to the brilliant essays of Georg Simmel but also found in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer (whom Ginzburg speaks of as an indirect „influence“).<sup>62</sup> They focused on ephemora, fragments, anecdotes (the literary form that punctures narrative), „insignificant details“, and „superficial manifestations“, to achieve what Benjamin called „profane illumination“.<sup>63</sup>

This raises, of course, the key question of the relationship between the fragment and the whole, and the micro and the macro.<sup>64</sup> In much conventional historical writing this is seen as a question of representativeness or typicality, but the claims of micro-history are rather different. In Levi's case, as we have seen, he argues that shifting the point of view enables us „to draw far wider generalizations“, to reformulate larger historical processes. Ginzburg's „evidential paradigm“ uses a hermeneutic technique close to philology and art connoisseurship to elaborate a more general historical vision. The trial of the miller Menocchio carries the very considerable weight of a millenarian cosmological tradition and a larger vision of the relationship between peasant and elite cultures. But Ginzburg is more cautious than Levi, taking from Kracauer the view that „reality is fundamentally discontinuous and heterogeneous“, and consequently „no conclusion

attained apropos a determinate sphere can be transferred automatically to a more general sphere.“ This heterogeneity, he concludes, „constitutes both the greatest difficulty and the greatest potential benefit of microhistory.“<sup>65</sup>

While one of the key objectives in changing the scale and viewpoint of historical analysis was methodological and epistemological, it is important to remember that these concerns were framed by a consideration of who and what counted as history. As we have seen, most historical investigations of everyday life, like most cultural criticism, have a democratic, populist or socialist agenda, one that usually wants to give a voice and the capacity to make meaning, to give agency and the power to change the world to those who act out the practices of everyday life.<sup>66</sup> This applies both to figures like Lefebvre who explore the theoretical possibilities of transformation possible through modern everyday life, and to historians and sociologists eager to put new subjects (both topics and persons) on the disciplinary map. Obviously this preceded the initiatives of the 1980s. Thus the social historians of the sixties and seventies saw it as an obligation to follow Thompson's much quoted determination to rescue ordinary subjects „from the enormous condescension of posterity“.<sup>67</sup> Thompson, of course, was drawing on a long-standing tradition, working chiefly outside the academy, of British labour and socialist history. But in the following decades the new social movements soon expanded the subjects of history to include children, women, gays and lesbians and people of colour. Italian microstoria has been described as opening „history to peoples who would be left out by other methods.“<sup>68</sup> Davis speaks of uncovering „the social creativity of the so-called inarticulate“ and Chartier of „the illuminations of the illiterate, the experiences of women, the wisdom of fools, the silence of the child.“<sup>69</sup> And the sociologist Dorothy Smith in her strongly feminist analysis of everyday life criticized conventional sociology because „its methods of analyzing experience and writing society produce an objectified version that subsumes people's actual speech and what they have to tell about themselves; its statements eliminate the presence of subjects as agents in sociological texts; it converts people from subjects to objects of investigation“.<sup>70</sup>

The changing personnel and content of history – women and gender, the emotions and intimacy, the poor and the routines of everyday life, the mad and the heretical – posed awkward questions about how history should be written.

One of the major effects of this quandary was to change the relationship between the historian and the archive. Over the last thirty years, historical archives have undergone a major transformation. What has been indexed, catalogued, made available, included in the archive (and therefore deemed a legitimate historical source) had changed profoundly. This has been accompanied - indeed was preceded by - a re-reading of the archive. Italian *microstoria*, in particular, repeatedly and brilliantly uses the nation's rich institutional records – of the church, state, and local authorities – not to write a history of the exercise of power but to reconstruct the vision and experiences of those who were its subjects.

Before the 1960s the models of history that prevailed were woefully ill-equipped – both in terms of content and style – to address new subjects. Put very schematically, there seem to have been three main responses to this problem. The first, more common in Britain and Germany than in France and Italy (it was also one of the trends in the US), was to adopt Thompson's category of „experience“ (which, incidentally, he used both in a subjective and objective way) as the organizing principle of inquiry to illuminate the everyday life as well as political struggles of the labouring classes.<sup>71</sup> The second, predominantly American move (you could call it the Princeton shuffle) was towards cultural anthropology and the interpretive strategy most fully developed by Clifford Geertz in his heuristic of „thick description“.<sup>72</sup> The third way, adopted chiefly in Italy but also in France and Germany, was towards microhistorical analysis. In the Italian case this was in part a self-conscious opposition to the long-term serial history of the Annales school that relegated the subordinate classes to what Francois Furet called „number and anonymity“.<sup>73</sup> None of these tactics or moves was isolated or autonomous, and they all shared, to differing degrees, a hostility both to overarching narratives and (often even more ferociously) an antipathy to any anti-humanist position, whether structuralist –

like that of Thompson's *bête-noire* Althusser – or post-structuralist like Derrida.

What these approaches also shared – this was most true of those who wrote about the experience of everyday life and microhistory – was a humanist realism. For much of this writing – especially in Italy – was driven not by skepticism but by the determination to write the real. This is also obviously the case in Thompson's attachment to a history that was both brilliantly polemical and unrepentantly unapologetic about British empiricism.<sup>74</sup> In Italy it had a rather different register. Levi talks of „the search for a more realistic description of human behavior“, stating that „the true problem for historians is to succeed in expressing the complexity of reality“.<sup>75</sup> Ginzburg ends his interview with Maria Luisa Pallares-Burke with a ringing call to undertake the hard task of seeing reality.<sup>76</sup> This seems at first sight anomalous with his categorical assertion of an anti-positivist, constructivist view of the production of history – „based on the definite awareness that all phases through which research unfolds are *constructed* and not *given*: the identification of the object and its importance; the elaboration of the categories through which it is analysed; the criteria of proof; the stylistic and narrative forms by which the results are transmitted to the reader“.<sup>77</sup> But realism and positivism or empiricism are not for the Italian historians the same. For they take their views first and foremost from the Italian neo-realist movement of the immediate post-World War II era, and more generally from twentieth-century notions of realism derived from literature and film.

Neo-realism is best known outside Italy through the films of Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti – „Paisa“, „Roma, Citta Aperta“, „Ladri di Biciclette“, and „La Terra Trema“. (Indeed I would argue that Rossellini's „Paisa“ was one of the first works of Italian microhistory.)<sup>78</sup> These films were part of a larger post-war cultural movement intent on ending the ideological and aesthetic obfuscation of real, everyday life. As the novelist and friend of Ginzburg, Italo Calvino, put it: „for us the problem appeared to be entirely one of poetics, of how to transform that world which for us was *the* world into a work of literature“ or, as the critic Cesare Zavattini noted,

„What we are really attempting is not to invent a story that looks like reality, but to present reality as if it were a story“.<sup>79</sup> Neo-realism began as an attack on the unreal, spectacular and imperial designs of Italian fascism, and as a way of recuperating the harsh experiences of World War II, but its values and approach, later underpinned criticism of what were seen to be the new delusions of post-war capitalism.

And what sort of world did the neo-realists depict? They depicted a world that was fragmentary, sometimes capricious and arbitrary, full of conflict, skewed by partial knowledge and different levels of consciousness, marked by different temporalities that were circular, repetitive and subjective, discontinuous as well as linear. It was a world inhabited by every sort of person, speaking in every sort of voice.<sup>80</sup>

Take “Paisa”, for example. Rossellini’s film takes one grand narrative, the progressive liberation of Italy by the British and Americans in 1943-44, which frames six stories set in different regions of Italy from Sicily to the Po Valley. The stories reduce the conflict to a human scale, yet in doing so they undercut or re-write the positive story of liberation, showing how time’s arrow is often diverted. People die needlessly, fail to achieve mutual understanding. Acts of kindness lead to death. Love turns to indifference. The characters (many not actors but „ordinary people“) speak in a babble of languages and dialects – American English, English English, German, Sicilian, Neopolitan, Roman, Tuscan and Venetian dialects of Italian, as well as the pure version of the language. The viewer is both made conscious of cinematic artifice – conscious of the presence of the camera – but also aware of Rossellini’s curious sense of detachment. Throughout there is a tension between veracity and verisimilitude, between the patterns of everyday life and the forces of a larger history.

Rossellini’s neo-realist aesthetic that depicts history from ordinary, everyday points of view is part and parcel of the process that Erich Auerbach in his masterpiece described as „Mimesis“, the process by which western literature (to which we must add film) developed forms of representation that vividly depicted the everyday and

the ordinary.<sup>81</sup> For, as Auerbach showed, the conjunction of realism and the everyday was far more developed in the novel than in any historical writing. The best (most plausible, most real) versions of this world in the nineteenth century were literary fictions (Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy), which, in Ginzburg’s words, brought „to light the painful inadequacy with which historians had dealt with the historical event“.<sup>82</sup> This was just as true, even if the forms of narration were different, in the modernist fiction of Woolf, Proust, or Joyce. So, when Lefebvre wants to explain everyday life in the modern world, he turns first to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, to Dublin and to Bloom and his wife Molly, to a social realm that can be both quotidian and enchanted.<sup>83</sup> When Ginzburg is asked his advice for aspiring historians he tells them their historical sensibility will be sharpened by reading novels.<sup>84</sup>

Imaginative fiction provides access to the real. As Ginzburg puts it, „A writer is someone who is able to make us aware of certain dimensions of reality. This is the cognitive side of fiction, of which I became aware through Calvino“.<sup>85</sup> But this does not mean that fiction and history cannot be distinguished. Rather the processes by which history is made need to be explicit – much as neo-realism makes us conscious of the place of the camera – in order to enhance its realism. Levi insists on „incorporating into the main body of the narrative the procedures of research itself, the documentary limitations, techniques of persuasion and interpretive constructions“ so that „the researcher’s point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account“ and “the reader is involved in a sort of dialogue and participates in the whole process of constructing the historical argument“.<sup>86</sup> For Ginzburg such a stratagem was essential to a realistic account of Menocchio’s beliefs in *The Cheese and the Worms*: „The obstacles interfering with the research were constituent elements of the documentation and thus had to become part of the account; the same for the hesitations and silences of the protagonist in the face of his persecutors’ questions – or mine. Thus the hypotheses, the doubts, the uncertainties became part of the narration; the search for truth became part of the exposition of the (necessarily incomplete) truth attained“.<sup>87</sup> Davis takes a very similar position in her spirited defense of *The*



*Return of Martin Guerre*, elaborating in detail her reading of the documents, her strategies and assumptions, and finally leaving interpretation open to conjecture.<sup>88</sup>

This position both invites and refuses the literary. Invites because it directly addresses the question of narrative strategy; refuses because, as Ginzburg points out, historical realism with its incomplete and conjectural analysis differs from fictional realism which can, if it so wishes, offer a coherence and closure not available in an honest historical investigation. To pretend otherwise – as is often the case in historical writing – is at best misleading and at worst mendacious.

I don't intend to pass judgment on how successful this interpretive strategy is, nor even on the question of whether it is an accurate account of the practices of historians of everyday life. But I want to emphasize that it is a response to the intractable questions of closeness and distance that the metaphors of prospect and refuge history embody. On the one hand, micro histories that engage with the problems created by the historical sources thereby mediate their history, establishing a certain distance even when the scale of the investigation is small. As Phillips has pointed out, Le Roy Ladurie's *Montailou* differs from Ginzburg's *Cheese and the Worms* because the former treats the Inquisitor Jacques Fournier's account as if it were „the direct testimony of peasants themselves“, while the latter makes the reader conscious both of the role of the Inquisitor and of the historian in the process of historical reconstruction.<sup>89</sup> As a result there is less direct identification, less of an affective attachment in such works when compared with those that seek direct engagement with their subject.

That said microhistory and other accounts of everyday life frequently seem to make two rather contradictory claims. One is about strangeness (and therefore distance and difference), the other about familiarity (and therefore closeness and similarity). In the preface to the English edition of *The Cheese and the Worms* Ginzburg speaks first of how „Every now and then the directness of the sources brings [Menocchio] very close to us: a man like ourselves, one of us“, but in the very next paragraph he writes „But he is also a man very different from us.“<sup>90</sup>

Generally Ginzburg is very insistent upon the strangeness of the past, its alien nature, but cases where the emphasis is on strangeness, it seems to me, involve a complex and particular strategy, one that on the one hand says – what I uncover is strange in the context of conventional history and, indeed, of the present – and on the other draws on the long tradition of „strange but true“ to reinforce a reality effect. It is typical of such accounts that they reproduce, often in the form of direct speech that employs non-standard or old linguistic usage, extensive quotation or documentation, letting, as it were, the subjects speak for themselves. The overall effect is to make the account seem „true“ even while it reinforces its exoticism/strangeness.<sup>91</sup> This is the substance, for instance, of Dominick La Capra's criticism of Robert Darnton's approach in *The Great Cat Massacre*. „The entire complex problem of the interaction of proximity and distance between and within the past and present is reduced to the rather simple idea of difference back then, which is recuperated and familiarized in the here and now.“<sup>92</sup> The position in LaCapra's scathing dismissal is „that of the folksy spectator – if not voyeur – of the exotic past“.<sup>93</sup>

Two related criticisms are often applied to this sort of history. The first attacks the epistemologically naïve adherence to „lived experience“ as a source of insight, as in Joan Scott's famous essay on experience.<sup>94</sup> This critique, of course, goes back at least to Althusser for whom the language of experiential immediacy was pure ideology. „Lived experience“, he wrote, „is not a given, given by a 'pure reality,' but the spontaneous 'lived experience' of ideology in its peculiar relationship to the real.“<sup>95</sup>

The second critique, from a traditional historical perspective about source interpretation, emphasizes what it sees as an ahistorical interpretation of historical evidence prompted by the historian's sympathy and identification with actors in the past, an association that destroys difference and the distance between the past and present. This is the thrust of Robert Finlay's critique of Davis's account of the peasant woman Bertrande de Rols in *The Return of Martin Guerre* and of several critics of Brucker's portrayal of Lusanna in his study of a fifteenth century dispute over a clandestine marriage.<sup>96</sup>



In both cases it is said that a contemporary feminist sympathy with women as independent and resourceful actors has led a historian to an erroneous because anachronistic interpretation.<sup>97</sup>

The issues of closeness and distance recur in the literature about everyday life under contemporary capitalism. Thus the language that is used about an „authentic“ everyday life is rather like that about primitive societies – it’s about its progressive recession towards an undesirable vanishing point, about the way it is threatened, and the need for its conservation. The notion that everyday life is strange, almost irrecoverable by conventional scholarly means, that it is, from an academic point of view „exotic“ or „other“, sits together, in a more comfortable relation than we might imagine, with the sense that the everyday offers us access to the real, which is not partial, not ideological, not encumbered with disciplinarity, not illusory, but somehow „the real thing“. This is reinforced by the scale of everyday life which brings its student into a concrete, intimate relation with her material, much harder to achieve in the realm of large abstractions. The presence of the „voices“ of the everyday enhances that feeling. It is almost as if the investigator can feel that through examining daily life he is experiencing a communality rather than a difference from those people and circumstances he is examining. (Of course the question is also one of what group is doing the sharing – is it humanity, or a reference group based on race, class or gender). Equally important is the possibility of recovering human agency, the sense that freedom is not entirely an illusion and that, as in Joyce’s Bloom, there are heroic sagas in the stories of ordinary lives. The issue here is not whether or not these feelings are real or false (consciousness), but that they are historically conditioned needs that the process of the study of everyday life can seem to fulfill.

But, if the project of studying everyday life provides us with satisfactions and fulfills desires that some of our predecessors would not have felt in the same way (or put in the same place), it does not excuse us from seeking to establish some perspective on the phenomenon we study. Perspective, Ginzburg has written, „we are told is good, because it emphasizes the element of subjectivity; but it is also bad, because it emphasizes intellectual

distance, rather than emotional closeness (or identification)“.<sup>98</sup> The latter position Ginzburg condemns as anti-intellectual. For Italian neo-realism and the micro-history that is its progeny seek to solve this problem of distance not through a humanism based on an essentialist view of human nature nor through an assertion of shared experience derived from identity politics, but on a universal model of the human, social condition. What we (humanity) share is the experience of both choice and necessity, agency and restraint. Any historical account that chooses one over the other is not so much untrue as unreal. The issue of sympathy and closeness, though certainly apparent in neo-realist historical writing, is in the end much less important than writing the real. This may seem an act of extreme hubris in the post-modern world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, but to those who grew up under fascism and lived through the Cold War, it was and has been a vital act of demystification.

- 1 Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line. From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2005); William H Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005). Both books seek a revived, more totalizing social history in the wake of an altogether more fragmented cultural history.
- 2 There is no more salutary warning against this than Peter Novick’s brilliant and disturbing account of how notions of what history really is, and especially ideas of historical objectivity, have been repeatedly used as weapons of intellectual repression. See his *That Noble Dream. The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988).
- 3 “Il tempo Minimo: microstoria”, *Studi Culturali* 1 (2004), pp. 7-29.
- 4 See Eley’s characteristically shrewd remarks, *A Crooked Line*, p. 156.
- 5 Mark Salber Phillips, „Distance and Historical Representation“, *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004), p. 126. Cf. *ibid.*, „Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography“, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 118, no. 3 (2003), 436-49; *ibid.*, „Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance“, *New Literary History* 34 (2003), 211-29.
- 6 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham NC, 1993), p. 95.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 8 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: a History of Climate Since the Year 1000* (New York, 1988).
- 9 Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, rev. ed. (Chichester, 1996).
- 10 Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).

- 11 For a fuller analysis see my "New Ways in History or, Talking About my Generation", in Luisa Passerini and Alex Geppert (eds), *European Ego-Histories: Historiography and the Self, 1970-2000* (Athens 2001). (Also: *Histoirein: A Review of the Past and Other Stories*, vol. 3 [Athens, 2001], pp. 24-46 ).
- 12 Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).
- 13 John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story From Early America* (New York, 1994); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary 1785-1815* (New York, 1991).
- 14 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984) ; Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA, 1975) ; LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1978).
- 15 Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape For A Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London, 1986); Ronald Fraser, *In Search of A Past: the Manor House, Ammersfield, 1933-1945* (London 1984).
- 16 Gene Brucker, *Giovanna and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley, 1986); Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1986); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1980); Giovanni Levi, *Inheriting Power: the Story of an Exorcist*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1988).
- 17 David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984); Hans Medick, *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650-1900: Lokalgeschichte als all-gemeine Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1997); Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, 1995).
- 18 Richard Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley, 1990).
- 19 Brad S. Gregory, "Is Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life", *History and Theory* 38 (1999), p. 102; David Bell, "Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms", in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (eds), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2002), p. 269.
- 20 Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1965).
- 21 For good general surveys of this literature see Michael E. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (London, 2000), Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London, 2002), Tony Bennett and Diane Watson, *Understanding Everyday Life* (Oxford, 2002).
- 22 Giovanni Levi, "Un Problema di Scala", in *Dieci interventi di Storia Sociale* (Turin, 1981).
- 23 Gregory, "Is Small Beautiful?", p. 100; Bell, "Total History and Microhistory", pp. 266-267.
- 24 Gregory, "Is Small Beautiful?", p. 100.
- 25 Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know About It", *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993), p. 20.
- 26 Jacques Revel, "Introduction", in *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, eds Revel and Lynn Hunt, translated by Arthur Goldhammer et al, (New York, 1995), p. 34.
- 27 See William Sewell's extremely interesting discussion of the phenomenon and its effects on historical writing in the section "Post-Fordism and the Cultural Turn" in his *Logics of History*, pp. 53-62. As Tom Frank has pointed out, the critique of mindless mass conformity and advocacy of notions of self-fashioning and identity formation were the driving force behind Madison Avenue and the marketing industry long before they reached the academy. Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago, 1997).
- 28 Mustafa O. Attir, Burkart Holzner, and Zdenek Suda, *Directions of Change: Modernization Theory, Research and Realities* (Boulder, CO, 1981), pp. 42-46.
- 29 Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York, 2000), p. 49.
- 30 Ginzburg, "Microhistory", p. 20.
- 31 David Cannadine, "The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution, 1880-1980", *Past and Present* 103 (1984), pp. 147-48 and 152-54.
- 32 Burguière, *The Annales School. An Intellectual History*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca, 2009), pp. 112-14; Walt W. Rostow, "Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La Longue durée", *Annales ESC* no 4. (1959).
- 33 Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-Communist Manifesto* (3rd edition, Cambridge, 1971), p. 33.
- 34 Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (London, 1963), p. 50.
- 35 Ibid., p. 54; Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth*, appendix A, pp. 168-71.
- 36 Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).
- 37 Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic. The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003).
- 38 For the Kitchen debate see <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=176>. Riesman's essay is in *Individualism Reconsidered and other Essays* (Glencoe, Ill., 1953). The contrast between irenic American consumerism and Russian military power, seemingly strange given America's military might, was based on the argument that Russia's twenty percent of GDP spent on the military in its pursuit of "world primacy" had the effect of "postponing or damping the advent of the age of high mass consumption" in the Soviet Union. (See Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth*, pp. 132-33).
- 39 See Sheryl Kroen, "Negotiations with the American Way: The Consumer and the Social Contract in Post-war Europe", John Brewer and Frank Trentmann (eds), *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives. Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 251-78.
- 40 Cohen, "Citizens and Consumers in the United States in the Century of Mass Consumption", in Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton (eds), *The Politics of Consumption, Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2001).
- 41 Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. S. Rabinovitch (New York, 1984), ch. 2.
- 42 Levi, "On Microhistory", in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 94.
- 43 Levi, "The Origins of the Modern State and the Microhistorical Perspective", in Jurgen Schlumbohm (ed), *Mikrogeschichte – Makrogeschichte: komplementär oder inkommensurabel?* (Göttingen, 1998), p. 58.
- 44 Ibid., p. 59.
- 45 Levi, "On Microhistory", p. 95.
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- 47 Levi, "The Origins of the Modern State", p. 62.
- 48 Lüdtke, *History of Everyday Life*, p. 170.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Levi, "On Microhistory", pp. 97-98.

- 51 Roger Chartier, „Intellectual History or Sociocultural History“, in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca, NY, 1981), p. 32.
- 52 Jacques Revel, „Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social“, p. 497.
- 53 Paul-Andre Rosental, „Construire le macro et le micro: Frederick Barth et la micro storia“, in Revel (ed), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996).
- 54 Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis, 1986), p. 189.
- 55 Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, „The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace“, in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore, 1991), p. 7.
- 56 That said his attempt to do so for the modern state in Levi, „The Origins of the Modern State“, seems largely unsuccessful, in no way depending – regardless of its plausibility – on microhistorical methods.
- 57 De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, 1988), pp. 35-36.
- 58 Ibid., p. xix.
- 59 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. 92.
- 60 There's an obvious reference here to Michel Foucault's account of the panopticon, part of de Certeau's engagement with what he saw as Foucault's denial of agency in his studies of systems of control.
- 61 Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 96-125.
- 62 Ibid., „Microhistory“, p. 27.
- 63 Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*, pp. 71, 86.
- 64 For a valuable discussion of these issues see Matti Peltonen, „Clues, Margins and Monads: the Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research“, *History and Theory* 40 (2001), pp. 347-59.
- 65 Ginzburg, „Microhistory“, pp. 27, 33.
- 66 See, inter alia, Paul Cartledge, „What is Social History Now?“, in David Cannadine (ed), *What is History Now?* (New York, 2002), p. 22: social history is about „changes in the experience of ordinary people“.
- 67 Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 12-13.
- 68 Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, xxi.
- 69 Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA, 1975), p. 122; Chartier, „Michel de Certeau: History, or Knowledge of the Other“, in Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore, 1997), p. 46.
- 70 Dorothy E. Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Toronto, 1990), p. 311.
- 71 For Thompson and experience, see the excellent critical synthesis in Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience. Modern American and European Versions on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), esp. pp. 199-215.
- 72 Sherry B. Ortner, *The Fate of 'Culture': Geertz and Beyond* (Berkeley, 1999).
- 73 François Furet, „Pour une définition des classes inférieures a l'époque moderne“, *Annales ESC* (1963), p. 459.
- 74 Perry Anderson offers some characteristically shrewd and sharp remarks on Thompsonian polemics in „In Memoriam: Edward Thompson“, in his *Spectrum from Right to Left in the World of Ideas* (London, 2005), esp. pp. 177-78, and 186-87. If Thompson was the knight in shining armour of Leftist historians charging into the fray, Anderson is an intellectual samurai, capable of exquisite dissection.
- 75 Levi, „On Microhistory“, p. 110.
- 76 Maria Lucia Pallares-Burke, *The New History: Confessions and Conversations* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 210.
- 77 Ginzburg, „Microhistory“, p. 32.
- 78 For neo-realism and micro-history, and especially Rossellini's Paisa see Angela Dalle Vacche, *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes of History in Italian Cinema* (Princeton, 1992), esp. pp. 213-18, and 257-58.
- 79 David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real* (London, 2000), p. 39; Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), p. 73.
- 80 In Dalle Vacche's summary, neo-realism aimed „to shoot in the present tense in order to explore the impact of history on daily life; to rely on the episodic narrative in order to historicize the role played by chance encounters; to use the bodies of non-professional actors in order to show that the flow of public history and the rhythm of private behavior are neither neatly joined nor totally unrelated but, most of the time, at odds, while their effects overlap and intersect with each other.“ (*The Body in the Mirror*, p. 257.)
- 81 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1968).
- 82 Ginzburg, „Microhistory“, p. 24.
- 83 Lefebvre, *Everyday Life*.
- 84 Pallares-Burke, *The New History*, p. 203.
- 85 Ibid., p. 192.
- 86 Levi, „On Microhistory“, p. 106.
- 87 Ginzburg, „Microhistory“, pp. 23-24.
- 88 Davis, „On the Lame“, *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), 572-603.
- 89 Phillips, „Histories Micro and Literary“, *New Literary History*, 2003, pp. 224-25.
- 90 Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, pp. xi-xii.
- 91 Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago, 2001), pp. 54-56.
- 92 Dominick La Capra, „Chartier, Darnton, and the Great Symbol Massacre“, *Journal of Modern History*, 60 (1988), p. 105.
- 93 Ibid., p. 106.
- 94 Joan W. Scott, „The Evidence of Experience“, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), pp. 773-97.
- 95 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1971), p. 223.
- 96 Robert Finlay, „The Refashioning of Martin Guerre“, *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), 553-71; Thomas Kuehn, „Reading Microhistory: The Example of Giovanni and Lusanna“, *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989), p. 517.
- 97 What is at stake in these exchanges is, of course, more complex than mere questions of anachronism, closeness and distance. See the outstanding discussion of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), passim.
- 98 Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York, 2001), p. 156.