



## Ginzburg in the education historian's workshop: some methodological considerations<sup>1</sup>

Ginzburg na oficina do historiador da educação: algumas considerações metodológicas

Ginzburg en el taller del historiador de la educación: algunas consideraciones metodológicas

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### Abstract

In this article, we reflect on the methodological procedures employed by the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg in his work, pointing out how these procedures can be used in our research in the area of education history. We started from two articles that dealt with the evidential paradigm in the field of the history of education from the categories of distance and strangeness and the relationships between truth and language. We propose to think our research based on literary density, interdisciplinary dialogue, and treatment of sources. We understand that research in the history of education inserted in an Evidential Paradigm implies erudition, preservation of doubt, dialogue with the reading of other areas to our objects of investigation, understanding the role of chance in research and assuming a posture of exile in relation to the sources (and ourselves) so that our method of reading evidences can preserve the character of indecipherability present in all human cultural production.

**Key words:** Evidential paradigm. Evidential method. Scientific methodology. History of Education. Carlo Ginzburg.

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## Resumo

Neste artigo, refletimos sobre os procedimentos metodológicos empregados pelo historiador italiano Carlo Ginzburg em sua obra, apontando para como esses procedimentos podem ser usados em nossas pesquisas na área de história da educação. Partimos de dois artigos que trataram do paradigma indiciário no campo da história da educação a partir das categorias de distância e estranhamento e das relações entre verdade e linguagem. Propomos pensarmos nossas pesquisas a partir da densidade literária, diálogo interdisciplinar e tratamento das fontes. Compreendemos que a pesquisa em história da educação inserida em um Paradigma Indiciário implica erudição, preservação da dúvida, diálogo com o olhar de outras áreas para nossos objetos de investigação, compreensão do lugar do acaso na pesquisa e assunção de uma postura de exílio em relação às fontes (e a nós mesmos) para que nosso método de leitura indiciária possa preservar o caráter de indecifrábilidade presente em toda produção cultural humana.

**Palavras-chave:** Paradigma indiciário. Método indiciário. Metodologia científica. História da Educação. Carlo Ginzburg.

## Resumen

En este artículo, reflexionamos sobre los procedimientos metodológicos empleados por el historiador italiano Carlo Ginzburg en su producción, señalando cómo estos procedimientos pueden utilizarse en nuestra investigación en el área de la historia de la educación. Comenzamos con dos artículos que trataban el paradigma evidencial en el campo de la historia de la educación desde las categorías de distancia y extrañeza y las relaciones entre la verdad y el lenguaje. Proponemos pensar nuestra investigación basada en la densidad literaria, el diálogo interdisciplinario y el tratamiento de las fuentes. Comprendimos que la investigación en la historia de la educación insertada en un paradigma indígena implica erudición, preservación de la duda, diálogo con la búsqueda de otras áreas para nuestros objetos de investigación, comprensión del lugar del azar en la investigación y asumir una postura de exilio en relación con las fuentes (y nosotros mismos) para que nuestro método de lectura de evidencias pueda preservar el carácter de indescifrábilidad presente en toda la producción cultural humana.

**Palabras clave:** Paradigma evidencial. Método evidencial. Metodología científica. Historia de la Educación. Carlo Ginzburg.

## Introduction

This paper intends to reflect on the methodological procedures employed by Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg (born in 1939) in his historiographic production, considering the possibilities these procedures offer to research in the field of History of Education.<sup>2</sup>

The work of the Italian historian comprehends a little more than half a century, including dozens of publications, beginning with “Stregoneria e pietá popolare”, which came to light in *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* (1961). Some of his works published in Brazil are monographic pieces such as *Andarilhos do bem* (originally published in 1966), *O queijo e os vermes* (originally published in 1976), *História noturna* (originally published in 1989), as well as lesser-known monographic works and numerous papers, essays and conferences, many of them published in journals and subsequently collected in anthologies.

In these texts, as well as the refined analysis of the objects chosen for historical research, we can see the author’s persistent concern with exposing and discussing the guiding principles of historiographic practices, contributing to the improvement of the historian’s craft.

Ginzburg’s publications in Brazilian Portuguese start in 1987, with *O queijo e os vermes*. In following years, *Os andarilhos do bem* (1988), *Mitos, emblemas, sinais* (1989) and *Indagações sobre Piero* (1989) were published. *A micro-história e outros ensaios* and *História noturna* were both published in 1991. In the following decade, *Olhos de madeira* (2001), *Relações de força* (2002), *Nenhuma ilha é uma ilha* (2004), *O fio e os rastros* (2007b), a new edition of *Investigando Pietro* (2010) and *Medo, reverência, terror* (2014) went to print.<sup>3</sup>

As we can see, the author was prolifically translated and published in Brazil in the last twenty-five years. However, Ginzburg is still rarely cited and mentioned in Brazilian historic research. In the specific field of History of Education, the situation wasn’t that much different ten years ago (cf. Leonardi; Aguiar, 2010) and continues the same nowadays. When we look at the author’s writings circulated by research, we notice a certain unfamiliarity with his work, even considering solely translated materials. Even among authors who cite Ginzburg, a significant portion only refers to two of his pieces, as we’ll see later on.

Of course our gaze is shaped by the way in which the author contributed to our own research (cf. Leonardi, 2010; Aguiar, 2012; Peres, 2012) and in which we continued it. However, we understand, including in respect to the way in which the author presents his ideas, that Ginzburg’s methodological propositions, as offered to History of Education research, can’t be taken as sufficient, exclusive or beyond any possible criticism. And, in that sense, we refer to the criticism leveled by Pires (2013) regarding the “unsuspecting method”<sup>4</sup> aspect that the Italian historian’s propositions tend to assume at various times.

Besides, in this paper, we won’t delve into the discussion on micro-history as an Italian historian movement and Ginzburg’s links to this “set of propositions and questions about the methods and procedures of social history” (Espada Lima, 2006, p. 16). As this relationship is thoroughly explored in Ronaldo Vainfas’s (2002) and Henrique Espada Lima’s (2006) works, as well as in Ginzburg’s (2007b, p. 249 on) and Levi’s discussions, we will refer the reader to those works.

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<sup>2</sup> We, the authors of this paper, thank the members of the History of Education and Religion Study Group GEHER, in particular for the time we spent together reading and discussing a significant portion of Carlo Ginzburg’s work. In a way, this paper honors and records the various years of systematic reading of the author’s work, as well as its later reverberations in our work as scholars.

<sup>3</sup> As this paper is placed in the context of Ginzburg’s translations into Brazilian Portuguese, his books and essays will be referred to by their translated titles throughout.

<sup>4</sup> All quotes, unless stated otherwise, have been translated or retranslated from the Portuguese.

Ours is a different perspective, because we intend to record the efforts to appropriate Carlo Ginzburg's work, employing it as an important methodological tool when entering the historian of education's workshop. To engage in this methodological reflection, we begin with one of our first systematizations of the author's work and a dialogue with a recently published article that also attempts to make such a systematization. Next, in the wake of what those texts accomplish, we advance into a broader reading of the author's work, proposing to the historian of education who intends to work with Ginzburg as a theoretical-methodological reference a guide through his vast collection of published works in Portuguese. In order to do so, we look at the Italian historian's contributions through three axes: literary density, interdisciplinary dialogue and document treatment.

### Ginzburg among Brazilian historians of education

Considering the Italian historian's contributions to research in history of education involves searching for references to theoretical-methodological discussions in his work. At certain moments, he proposed to engage in such reflections, but we must not only observe how he explains his procedures, but also how he conducts them. In this sense, we need to dive into a significative amount of his work, going beyond a specific set of theoretical-methodological texts.

Searching for papers who have mapped this out in the field of history of education, we could only find two. In the first, Leonardi and Aguiar (2010) proposed to survey the publications in the field referring to the Italian historian in four field-specific journals to that point. They found 11 papers. In this survey, they came to the conclusion that, up to that point, the most common finding was papers using the terms "evidences" or "vestiges" in their historic research or used the evidential paradigm as a "general and unspecific inspiration" to develop their investigation. Few authors, in regards to the Italian historian's role in establishing the theoretical-methodological foundations of that work, went beyond a general description of an evidential reading of sources. It was also relevant that, among the author's vast published oeuvre in Brazilian Portuguese translation, the main references cited are *O queijo e os vermes* and *Mitos, emblemas e sinais* (and, more specifically, the author's most famous essay, translated as *Sinais, raízes de um paradigma indiciário*).

It's understandable that these texts are most often cited, since the former is the author's most widely internationally circulated book, which made him known, and where his proposed evidential reading is thoroughly described in the preface and extensively developed throughout. The latter, particularly the *Sinais* essay, is the author's main effort to systematize what he called the "evidential paradigm" and the way in which his investigations fit inside the paradigm. However, if Ginzburg is used as the main theoretical-methodological guide for a research in history of education, only reading those two texts can restrict the understanding of what he proposed as historiographic work, particularly considering the former was first published in 1976 and the latter, in 1979. Since then, the author, who is still alive and professionally active, has published a wide array of writing. The aforementioned paper pointed to this fact ten years ago:

By neglecting the continuity of his thoughts regarding the evidential paradigm contained in **Nenhuma ilha**, the reader is unable to realize the emphasis Ginzburg himself gives to writing history, to narrative. The evidential paradigm that's a through line in Ginzburg's work is characterized by an observer who, through apparently negligible data, disposes the data in order to make a narrative emerge. These

three elements (observer, data, narrative) are indissociable. However, there's yet another element we will further emphasize in this paper: the observer's posture before the evidence, a posture of detachment and wonder. (LEONARDI; AGUIAR, 2010, p. 115).

The authors are referring to the fact that Ginzburg mentions, in his preface for *Nenhuma ilha é uma ilha*, the way in which the *Sinais* essay is inserted in his historiographic research. They then go on to point at the detachment and wonder categories as fundamental to understand the evidential paradigm, understanding them in an exercise of historiographic writing based on the interchange of micro and macro, general and particular, particularly considering the pieces featured in *Olhos de madeira*. The authors state that “detachment is built in the understanding of another's existence, wonder at our own existence and the maintained tension between a subjective point of view and objective truths” (LEONARDI; AGUIAR, 2010, p. 120).

With an emphasis on detachment and wonder as terms used to understand the evidential paradigm (beyond evidence), the authors opened up the space to expand the understanding of how to use the Italian historian's ideas as references to theoretically-methodologically sustain history of education research. Considering the fact that he didn't specifically deal with education, the authors conclude their paper proposing questions specific to the field. There are three main questions: (1) consider the necessarily interdisciplinary character of “education” as an object; (2) looking “obliquely” at the history of education, attempting to avoid a reading that considers current educational practices as the necessary result of developing previous eras' practices; and (3) questioning the possibility of an evidential approach to phenomena whose sources only allow for indirect references, such as understanding a student's point of view through sources produced by the educator.

In the last ten years, the Italian historian has continued to be referenced in the field of history of education in similar terms to those described in 2010, with one commendable exception. In the second paper we found, Paziani and Perinelli (2018) propose to introduce scholars in history and history of education to Carlo Ginzburg, with the intend of “promoting reflection around the evidential paradigm”, especially in relation to the “domains of language and Pêcheux's discourse analysis”. The authors attempt to insert him in the field of history of education as someone who isn't “post-modern”, who maintains an important dialogue with Marxist thinkers and who shouldn't be placed among (New) Cultural History historians due to the criticism leveled by Dermeval Saviani in the late 90s to the impact of this historiographic approach in history of education research.

In their final thoughts, they call the reader's attention to unfamiliarity with Ginzburg's work and clearly state that the historian isn't part of the (New) Cultural History, nor is he a post-modern author:

Although he's considered a fundamental name in Micro-History (VAINFAS, 2002; LIMA, 2006) and establishes theoretical and methodological mediations with the Annales historiography production, he can't be categorically labeled as part of the “(New?) Cultural History” (nor as a “post-modern” intellectual): it's axiologically reductive, not only fragmenting historic knowledge, but encasing it in the false autonomy of culture (PAZIANI; PERINELLI, 2018, p. 330).

Later on, the authors attempt to show there are striking (“notorious”, in the authors’ words) references to two Marxist researchers in Ginzburg’s thought: “In an analogy to the Marxist aisle, Ginzburg would be in the same intellectual spectrum as Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin” (PAZIANI; PERINELLI, 2018, p. 330). Finally, using Saviani’s text’s “clues”, they conclude:

it seems convenient to consider the contributions of Carlo Ginzburg’s work, especially in regards to the theoretical-methodological reflections contained in the “evidential paradigm”, in view of the different problematisation it presents concerning the relationship between language, history and truth. (PAZIANI; PERINELLI, 2018, p. 330).

This more general summary is sustained, throughout the text, by Ginzburg’s education’s political aspects (particularly regarding his parents) and the way in which he relates to language. Approximating it to Pêcheux’s Discourse Analysis, there are various similarities, but one important difference: the relationship to truth and access to it. That’s a central element to delimit Ginzburg’s place as someone who doesn’t fit into Saviani’s criticism of post-modern thought in history of education research.

Throughout the paper, Paziani and Pernielli conduct a broad discussion of the relationship between the the Italian historian’s intellectual education and his work, looking for “parallels” that can better understand his relationship to research, in particular when it comes to language. The authors dedicate a few paragraphs to highlight certain elements of Leone and Natalia Ginzburg’s lives, particularly their work in literature, as well as their political activism (Natalie was a Communist Party congresswoman from 1983 to 1991), followed by a long stretch where three university/research spaces (the Pisa and Bologna universities and the Aby Warburg institute) will become references for the Italian historian’s education in the 1950s and 1960s.

The authors also highlight the influences of debates around Croce’s and Gramsci’s works, pointing out that Ginzburg never affiliated himself to the former and, while claiming to be “quite ignorant” in regards to Marx’s works, had Marxist influences through Hobsbawm and Gramsci and through the epistemology field (particularly citing hermeneutics authors) with Ricoeur and Gadamer. Then, they list influences in young Ginzburg’s education: (1) philology and “slow, detailed reading”, particularly through Cantimori, Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer and Gianfranco Contini; (2) Marc Bloch and the confrontation with “marginal themes” to think about “broader issues”, the “alterity practice when confronting discourses constituting research sources”, and the “presence of doubt and the unceasing search for truth”; (3) Italian historian Frederico Chabod and the time at Warburg Institute to consider the “study of the particular”; (4) linguists such as Fernand Saussure, Roman Jakobson and Mikhail Bakhtin”; and (5) Freud, in particular *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (PAZIANI; PERINELLI, 2018, p. 320).

Without dismissing the specific scope of the authors’ paper, we can add Ginzburg’s mention of Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (GINZBURG, 1989, p. 10), as well as, later in life, the importance of his time working at UCLA for the author’s understanding of detachment and exile (GINZBURG, 2010, p. 11).

Paziani and Perinelli go on to explore the aspects of the evidential paradigm, particularly through an approximation to discourse analysis:

A method of discourse analysis where the historian, for example, should dedicate themselves to intensively read and interpret collected sources, seeing sources as pieces of “discourse” that can help them understand the subjective intentions and narrative devices present in a certain “text” (or set of “texts”), both in its strict discursive dimension, and in its extra-discursive dimension (the non-transparency of language). (PAZIANI; PERINELLI, 2018, p. 325).

Later, they go into a dense discussion of the issues of truth and historical proof, indicating differences between discourse analysis and the evidential paradigm precisely when it comes to the understanding of true knowledge, which

in history writing is necessarily intertwined with the heuristic value attributed to historical and fictional narratives and the ways in which, in a dialectic perspective, they make possible a varied array of accesses to the “Other” in time and to what we call “the past”. (PAZIANI; PERINELLI, 2018, p. 329).

Both the 2010 and the 2018 papers present, given their scopes, broad readings of Ginzburg’s works, especially when attempting to understand the ways in which the author is still relatively unknown in the field of history of education, particularly due to being cited very superficially. They also present the understanding of detachment and wonder as central categories to understand the evidential paradigm and the statute of proof and truth in historic production, in particular in dialogue with language scholars.

Following what was already pinpointed by the authors, we will now attempt to look not only at the way in which Ginzburg makes explicit his issues in speculative essays about his theoretical-methodological toolbox, but also at other texts where this toolbox is put to use. This exercise led us to systematize Ginzburg’s contributions in three topics: literary density, or erudition; interdisciplinary dialogue; and document treatment.

### **Literary density**

Ginzburg’s writings bring the reader a broad variety of authors and their works, many of which have little circulation among Brazilian historians. Employing a bibliography in Italian, English, French and German, as well as Latin and Greek, his pieces transform into an exercise in exploring an unknown world. As stated by Peter Burke (1990, p. 108), “It is clear that Ginzburg is a voracious reader, that he has not forgotten his classical and philosophical education (...)”.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, we might even state that Ginzburg was an “erudite”, if this expression didn’t have such a peculiar sense in a historian’s career — that of a specialist, versed in the critical analysis of documents, since at least the late 19th Century.

However, his essayistic writing favors a reading that’s unconcerned with references. It’s not unusual for people to read his essays almost as literary fiction. But it’s in analyzing his footnotes and endnotes that we find references point towards his characterization as a voracious and varied reader, always willing to undertake a vast and thorough bibliographical review.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Untranslated quote.

<sup>6</sup> This concern is present since his first essay, written in 1961, when the author was 22 years old.

As an example,<sup>7</sup> we can recall certain Greek and Latin Antiquity authors, and from the early Christian era, who are visited by Ginzburg's narrative: Augustin (354-430); Ambrose (c. 340-397); Aristotle (384-322 BC); Boethius (c. 480-c. 525); Cicero (106-43 BC); Diogenes of Seleucia (c. 230-c. 140 BC); Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st Century BC); Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-339); Gaius (c. 130-180); Herodotus (c. 485-420 BC); Hippocrates (c. 460-c. 377 BC); Jerome (c. 347-420); Lactantius (c. 240-c. 320); Lucian of Samosata (c. 125-c. 181); Macrobius (c. 370-c. 430); Marcus Aurelius (121-180); Ovid (43 BC-AD 18); Plato (c. 428-348 BC); Plutarch (c. 50-125); Polybius (c. 203-120 BC); Quintilianus (35-95); Sallust (86-34 BC); Sextus Empiricus (AD 2nd Century–3rd Century); Socrates (c. 470-399 BC); Tacitus (c. 55–c. 120); Tertullian (c. 155-c. 222); Titus Livius (59 BC–AD 17); Thucydides (c. 465-395 BC); Ulpian (150-223); Vitruvius Pollio (1st Century BC); Xenophon (c. 430-355 BC).

Similarly, Ginzburg uses, in his History studies, literary authors: Balzac; Boccaccio; Cervantes; Conan Doyle; Dante; Dostoyevsky; Flaubert; Goethe; Heine; Homer; John Donne; Proust; Robert Louis Stevenson; Stendhal; Swift; Tolstoy; Victor Hugo.

Great thinkers are also visited and analyzed by Ginzburg: Adorno; Benjamin; Descartes; Diderot; Erasmus; Freud; Gramsci; Hegel; Hobbes; Hume; Leibnitz; Lévi-Strauss; Luther; Machiavelli; Marx; Montaigne; Nietzsche; Spinoza; Thomas More; Tocqueville; Voltaire.

Historians are often remembered and broadly quoted as well, in particular Michelet, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre.

As for primary sources, Ginzburg employs inquisitorial processes, literary works and works of art to elaborate his historical reflections. As an example, we can mention *Os andarilhos do bem*, *O queijo e os vermes* and *História noturna* as texts that exhaustively employ inquisitorial processes. Voltaire, Balzac and Stendhal appears in the papers composing *O fio e os rastros*. And, beyond literature, Piero della Francesca's artworks are explored in *Investigando Piero*, as Picasso appeared in essays featured in *Mitos, emblemas e sinais* and *Medo, reverência e terror*.

Literary density, then, presents itself as an important recommendation to trade historians: quality historical research presupposes a knowledge of classic texts from the history of humanity, the use of primary sources and constant contact with historiographic research of the subject to be investigated. It's always worth remembering that we don't write history alone, disconnected from great thinkers and currents of thought, and without an incessant search for documents that might prove our historical and narrative inquiries. The *da poco fare più* that's associated with Ginzburg, in a misleading reading would lead us to think that few materials are needed to create a piece of historical work. One of the main lessons Ginzburg offers is noticing that few sources and references can only be used to great production with intense historiography research and the erudition that comes from deep knowledge of the theme. The author's itinerary for creating his three main monographs — *Os andarilhos do bem*, *O queijo e os vermes* and *História noturna* — corroborate the previous statement.

His strong anchoring in empirical research, with critical analysis of primary sources, is enough to banish all suspicion that the author practices literary fiction in his writing.

Besides, in the scope of Evidential Paradigm, we understand this literary density as an assumption to deal with deciphering an opaque reality through "privileged zones — signs, evidences — that allow us to decode it" (GINZBURG, 1987, p. 177). The author understands and values the possibility of knowledge that attempts totality, even when dealing with marginal,

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<sup>7</sup> The following lists aren't intended to be exhaustive, but we were careful to include broad examples.



negligible elements. Insofar as we state that direct access to (an object of) knowledge is impossible, we highlight its existence and the existence of indirect means of access.

This relationship between a knowledge that attempts totality and its access through signs and evidence is pervaded by erudition. How to deal with scarce sources on a historical object? “Filling” gaps with the dense understanding of surroundings, building analogy and preserving the character of doubt these analogies offer. Davis (1987, p. 21), in his historical investigation of the Martin Guerre case, after describing his source-finding, states: “What I offer the reader here is, in part, of my invention, but an invention built on the close attention to voices of the past.”

Ginzburg wrote an afterword to the Italian edition of Davis’s book, where he thoroughly discusses the relationship between fiction and truth. Looking for the “post-modern” approximation between fiction and history, Ginzburg, in this afterword (2007b, p. 311 and later), inserts his project (and, therefore, the debate on the evidential paradigm) as part of a reflection on conflicts arising from the way in which both fiction and history represent reality. In a certain way, they create tension, provocation and exchange off each other, but it’s not the same representation. Ginzburg’s work should be read in that sense. As the author mentions in a note to his “twenty years of research”, this reflection is present in *Olhos de madeira, Relações de força, Nenhuma ilha é uma ilha* and *O fio e os rastros*.

In this sense, we can understand the evidential method as the way Ginzburg proposes to understand a relationship between selected traces, vestiges, evidences and signs of a researcher’s investigated object and the narrative the researcher creates to give the selection meaning. The understanding of this relationship demands reflection concerning tensions between fiction and reality.

This tension is fundamental to understand Davis’s term “invention” and the way in which we “fill” the gaps in documentation with the necessary literary density. Ginzburg begins the preface with Montaigne’s essay to create an analogy between the French essayist and Natalie Zemon Davis’s term choices to write her book. It’s an eulogy to partial statements, with the presence of terms that clearly express the historian’s doubts. Besides, this analogy is established with a text that directly mentions the same case studied by Davis.

This procedure of looking for analogies and associations between texts that quote each other, understanding their circulation and the way in which one might have read the other is usual in Ginzburg’s essays. It’s all about looking for direct or indirect approximations and connections, whether historically proved or simple hypotheses (as in *História noturna*, published by Ginzburg a few years after this afterword).

Later, Ginzburg writes about the term “invention”, expanding its meaning in the fiction-reality debate:

The term “invention” is voluntarily provocative — but, in the end, it’s deviant. Davis’s research (and narration) isn’t centered in the juxtaposition of “true” and “invented”, but in the always scrupulously indicated integration between “realities” and “possibilities”. Thus the swarm of expressions such as “maybe”, “should”, “presume”, “certainly” (usually meaning, in historiographic language, “quite probably”) etc. in her book. (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 315).

It’s a spotlight on the correct juxtaposition presented by Davis’s research, not between true and made up, but between reality and possibility. What Ginzburg brings, then, is the consideration that, unlike a judge, for a historian the absence of evidence demands an investigation of “men and women from the same time and place” (p. 316,

quoting Davis). This leads to his central argument: “‘True’ and ‘credible’, ‘evidence’ and ‘possibility’ blend together, while continuing to be rigorously distinct” (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 316). Therefore, the presence of evidence and possibility is part of the historiographic exercise of filling in gaps in truth with what’s credible. But this doesn’t imply they’re indistinct. Davis’s work makes clear what’s established by evidence and what’s established by possibility. Doubt is, therefore, present and explicit, not only as an issue to be resolved, but as an issue resolved through analogy.

In the field of research, it implies the understand that the evidential paradigm isn’t about searching for small elements to imagine how to fill in the rest. It’s about dealing with conjecture, accepting it as it is, dealing with doubt, accepting as it is, becoming involved in the research, explicitly defined as it is. It’s about being present. It’s not about presenting content as certain, but in the gradient of certainty levels allowed by research, clearly marked in the text.

At the end of the afterword, following a long discussion about the relationship between truth and historical knowledge, Ginzburg concludes:

Terms such as “fiction” or “possibility” shouldn’t induce error. The question of proof is more than ever at the center of historical research, but its statute is inevitably modified when different themes regarding the past are faced, with the help of also different documentation. Natalie Zemon Davis’s attempt to circumvent gaps with archival documentation, adjacent in time and space to what was lost or never materialized, is but one of many possible solutions (up to what point? it’s worth discussing). Among those that should definitely be excluded is invention. In addition to being contradictory, it would be, through what it precedes, absurd. Among other reasons, because some of the most illustrious 19th Century novelists spoke with disdain of invention, attributing it, with extreme irony, precisely to historians. (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 334).

In this sense, a historian’s literary density is a necessary part of their work to deal with gaps in sourcing, considering a different gradient of certainty the historian should present depending on sources directly related to the object, marginally related sources and previous bibliography concerning the object and its surroundings.

However, staying within the object and its surroundings isn’t sufficient as an approach to historical research. Ginzburg’s objects and need to explore “opaque zones”, in dialogue with his familiar and scholarly education, implied a necessary interdisciplinary dialogue to consider the conditions in which he produces historiographic work. By extension, it’s valid for an object as overflowing with cultural relations as education.

### **Interdisciplinary dialogue**

Ginzburg adopts a perspective that doesn’t consider history as an isolated, “exiled” discipline. On the contrary, his work is in constant dialogue with other areas of knowledge. In his writing, it’s evident the relationship between history and psychology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, philology, semiotics, morphology and anthropology (see GINZBURG, 1989, p. 7, pp. 99, 145 e 151; GINZBURG, 1991b, *passim*; GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 307; GINZBURG, 2010, p. 276). Specific fields within history are also often explored by author: the history of religion and history of art. We can also include here literary sciences,

photography and folklore (see GINZBURG, 1989, p. 143; GINZBURG, 1991b, *passim*; GINZBURG, 2001, p. 41; GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 231; GINZBURG, 2010, p. 276).

This adventure through other areas of knowledge doesn't imply their mischaracterization in name of history, nor the dilution of history in other disciplines. Ginzburg, even when dealing with a specific object within an area, does it through a historian's lens and uses these areas' contributions to compose his outlook:

Much has certainly be said (and usually not done) about interdisciplinary research; but it's undeniable that historians and art historians have every reason to work together, each one with their own instruments and tools, in order to reach a deeper understanding of figurative testimonies. (GINZBURG, 2010, p. 20).

Or, as written by Philippe Ariès:

Here's why the margins between history and other sciences within the humanities are finally getting thinner: a more recent event than one might believe, after fifty years of proclaimed, but never experienced, interdisciplinarity (ARIÈS, 2011, p. 281)<sup>8</sup>.

When invited to write about interdisciplinarity in an art history journal, Ginzburg pondered its naive usage, opposed to an expert in a certain work of art. He recalls that being educated in a discipline means, above all, “to learn which questions, which methods, which answers must be regarded as inadmissible by its practitioners”,<sup>9</sup> but that this might hide “a lazy alliance with disciplinary traditions” (GINZBURG, 1995, p. 534). However, for Ginzburg, using interdisciplinarity as a way to subvert a worn out intellectual program is a naive endeavor.

This naiveté is due to the fact that, on one hand, certain interdisciplinary approaches are born from wrong assumptions in areas that serve as basis for epistemological construction. In the case of art history, for example, Ginzburg shows that certain opponents to expert knowledge end up using historical knowledge in a naive positivist way, such as considering that the existence of a birth certificate is undeniable proof of the actual existence of an individual by that name. In addition to this naive positivism, a certain art history author mentioned by Ginzburg also presents skepticism surrounding historical knowledge, associating it with fiction.

The Italian historian shows that this naive interdisciplinary attitude is guided by an opposition to the expert's work, usually claimed to be excessively disciplinary by their opponents. To go against this position, Ginzburg brings examples of how artistic expertise is deeply interdisciplinary, such as in the case of an analysis conducted by an expert which included informations obtained by “botanists, archivists, paleographers, experts in watermarks, as well as art historians”. In this case, a good expert has “a cognitive richness” that “perhaps implies more, albeit silent, theory than the wide-spread, allegedly theoretical approach which treats works of art in order to illustrate general, preexisting formulations such as classical representation, modernity, and so forth”. The author proposes, then, that considering a certain “interdisciplinarity from within” might be as good, or even better, than “interdisciplinary from without”, that in the field of art history can be “a safer activity, unchallenged by the objects it deals with, and understandably far more popular than the alternative” (GINZBURG, 1995, p. 536).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Originally published in 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Untranslated quote.

<sup>10</sup> This paragraph's quotes are in their original, untranslated forms.

This interdisciplinary dialogue in Ginzburg's work comes in stead of a Warburgian art history tradition. This tradition is upheld by names such as Bing, Wind, Saxl, Panofsky and Gombrich, not forgetting Cassirer. The Italian historian, as well as Frances Yates, Arnaldo Momigliano and Gershom Scholem, passed through the Warburg Institute in London. As told by Ginzburg in a piece featured in a dossier dedicated to Warburg (GINZBURG, 2012), it was in the institute's library that, in the 1960s, he found the essay that began the correlation he drew between the Benandanti and Shamans years later.

Warburg's and Warburgian authors' ideas are turned towards an issue of method to understand the relationship between figurative testimonies and history (GINZBURG, 1989, p. 41 on). In a way, the methodological issue featured in this tradition was developed by Ginzburg in his research on the dating of Piero de La Francesca's works (GINZBURG, 2010) and is quite detailed in his uses of the notion of *Pathosformeln* in his most recent book (GINZBURG, 2014).

As we wrote a few years ago, commenting on the methodological exercise the Italian historian proposed to analyze Piero de La Francesca's works:

This interdisciplinarity, proposed by Ginzburg in works such as *História noturna* or *Mitos, emblemas e sinais* (history and morphology), as well as *Nenhuma ilha é uma ilha* (history and literature), traditionally tends to translate into a touted juxtaposition of results from various areas. However, the Italian historian proposes to escape from this unproductive practice, since the divergence regarding concrete problems, such as the issue of dating Piero's works, are more fruitful than the convergence between areas. It's through divergence that we can "bring back into discussion each discipline's tools, areas and languages. Beginning, no doubt, with historical research" (p. 21). (AGUIAR, 2012, p. 69).

It's in this sense that we understand the interdisciplinary dialogue proposed by the author. Without escaping from the historian's peculiar characteristics and methods, they can use contributions from other areas to better understand their investigated objects. Moreover, these objects are a permanent source of provocation for the historian's work, always tempted to diversify their investigative tools, alternating expertise (i.e. erudition) with dialogue between other sciences. That's what the author did in his work, as seen above.

Similarly, it behooves to refute the idea of interdisciplinary as a kind of "methodological panacea". Ginzburg, when venturing into other areas of knowledge, is firmly anchored in historiography and the tools created by past historians.

## Document treatment

Ginzburg exhaustively uses primary documents, the starting point for his historical research, conducive to the discussion of various methodological issues particularly relating to the treatment of sources.

One of these issues relates to the presence of chance in a historian's investigative trajectory. It's not unusual for a "careless" document to bring information capable of turning around the entire logics of research: "When perusing one of the manuscript volumes of [a Friuli cult's] trials, I found an extremely long sentence. One of the accusations made to the defendant was that he claimed the world originated from putrefaction" (GINZBURG, 1987, p. 9). During a research on witches, healers and *benandanti*, this entirely casual statement brought about the book *O queijo e os vermes*.

A similar experience was told when the Italian historian “was working in a spare project” at UCLA and a certain treaty “crossed [his] path” (GINZBURG, 2007a). Or when Ginzburg mentions the “wonderful analysis” Federico Chabod made of a “forgotten, scribbled, almost destroyed document, where someone, maybe a small anonymous clerk” had written in the back a few sentences on predestination, allowing a renewed outlook on the religious history of 16th Century Milan and the first reactions to the Protestant Reformation (GINZBURG, 1990).

A researcher’s (in this case, a historian’s) gesture is an arbitrary gesture of chance, not exclusively obtained through a procedure that can be rationally and objectively mapped from start to finish. Part of our research work implies in dealing with elements that, similar to the historical subject investigated in *O queijo e os vermes*, are “a lost fragment, arrived to us by chance, from an obscure, opaque world, that we can only incorporate to our history through an arbitrary gesture” (GINZBURG, 1987, p. 26). The fragmentary aspect of these elements from the past culture we attempt to understand implies in an “indecipherability residue”, in the author’s terms, that must be preserved. This residue exists in every research attempting to understand people and their relationships (especially when educational).

Due to this fragmentary character, the sources we have access to are often doubly indirect, written by people connected to the dominant (hegemonic) culture and preserving the voices of people from subaltern layers, used to study the latter’s culture — that’s Ginzburg’s case (1987). It’s the historian’s work to decode the relationship between an illiterate or semiliterate population’s oral tradition and the printed page. This collision of book and reader, imbued in spoken culture, allowed the Friuli miller to formulate totally original opinions for himself, his fellow citizens and judges (GINZBURG, 1987, p. 89). In other words, evidential sources are written records of spoken testimonies, provoking a deep change in the way in which these documents must be studied and analyzed.

Still on the subject of oral traditions, Ginzburg’s historiographical production often restates something that, although it seems obvious, can’t be neglected by the researcher: “An almost exclusively oral culture such as the one in pre-industrial Europe’s subaltern classes tends not to leave any clues, or just distorted ones” (GINZBURG, 1987, p. 230).

Ginzburg recommends “brushing history against the grain”, in a beautiful reference to Walter Benjamin, and “learning to read testimonies inside out, against the testimonies of those who wrote them” (GINZBURG, 2002, p. 43; GINZBURG, 2001, p. 217; GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 11).

For research that intends to understand time periods, facts and characters marked by scarce documentation or “doubly indirect” sources, Ginzburg proposes an evidential method, i.e., an “interpretative method focused on residue and marginal data considered to be revelatory” (GINZBURG, 1989, p. 145, p. 149). With it, it becomes possible to recover lost, distorted or suffocated voices from the past.

When elaborating these methodological tools, the author uses Freud (symptoms), Sherlock Holmes (evidence) and Morelli (pictorial signs) — that is, the creator of psychoanalysis, a literary character and an arts critic. He also uses the medical semiotics model.

Beyond what was previously mentioned, particularly in relation to an often-cited text such as *Sinais*, we can highlight the two epigraphs chosen by the author to begin the essay. The first, Warburg’s “God is in the details”, points to the scale play the author will establish in this piece and in other works (particularly in *Olhos de madeira* and *O fio e os rastros*). This scale play, alternating micro and macro, is featured in the Ginzburg’s discussion of Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), a German writer known for his film study oeuvre, who was in the same circles as Adorno and Benjamin. Ginzburg takes him for an “indispensable interlocutor”. In the essay dedicated to Kracauer, the Italian historian

brings up an excerpt where the German writer quotes Russian film director Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin (1893-1953) describing his framing technique:

To have a clear and precise idea of the demonstration, the observer should [...] first climb **on the roof of a house** to see the patio in its totality and calculate its size; afterwards he should club down and **look through the first floor window** and read the signs held up by protesters, and, finally, he should **blend into the crowd** to have an idea of the external aspects of participants. (PUDOVKIN apud GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 246, all highlights ours).

This description is an excellent image to, similarly, describe Ginzburg's essays' historical narrative. At various points he looks at the same object with different temporalities and spatiality's. How is this historical phenomenon in another region at the same time? How was it in the same region, at a different time? How did it change in a short time period? How did it change throughout the centuries (or millennia)? Particularly in *História noturna*, his analysis of Witches' Sabbath makes various movements like these, showing, as we've previously mentioned, that Ginzburg doesn't investigate evidences to remain with them. If "God" is in the details, it's not to remain there, but to understand the totality accessed through detail. Kracauer "defined himself as the defender of lost causes and connected the close-up to David and Goliath, i.e., the conviction that the most significant forces manifest in what's small and insignificant [...]" (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 248) — thus, the Italian historian reminds us of the need to focus on the particulars.

The essay's second epigraph is from Dada American painter Jasper Johns (born 1930): "An object that tells of the loss, destruction, disappearance of objects. Does not speak of itself. Tells of others. Will it include them?". It's a visual artist's note during a moment of creation, bringing up ideas about objects that might be created. As an epigraph, Ginzburg references the main doubt of evidential reading: can an object's evidence allow us to access the object?<sup>11</sup> His answer, throughout the text, is positive, as this is the methodological brand of his work. However, as an evidential reading is an indirect reading, Ginzburg highlights our relation of stranger towards sources.

Historians are strangers, foreigners in the world of sources, and must pierce external appearances to try and understand the realities inside (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 238.). Historians are "strangers to the world evoked by sources" (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 238) and this condition can only occur through an attitude of doubt, un-recognition, of disbelief. It's a process in search of the un-self, of the anomalous, the difference that comes up at the "instant of un-knowing" (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 238). It consists in writing guided by exile.

This lack of recognition doesn't imply a positivist attitude of neutrality or exemption. Quite the opposite: as Ginzburg himself pointed out at other times, in confrontation with a skeptic posture, un-recognition consists in our implication in every step of research. In this sense, faced with our own presence, we can present ourselves entirely, narratively and dialogically, with our sources/data, with our bibliography, considering writing as a state of exile.

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<sup>11</sup> Notice that Ginzburg's epigraph doesn't contain the final word in Johns's notes: "the flood". What this flood might mean is still beyond our understanding, considering our limited knowledge of Jasper Johns's work, but we can't help considering, as a hypothesis, that the absence of said flood in Ginzburg's inscription is his attempt to cling to the possibility of method and not loss in the midst of total destruction.

Thus, the idea of distance as a research category is, in fact, regarding the experience of exiled thought. Ginzburg, talking about his experience as a professor at UCLA and the cultural difference between him and his students, reflects:

I gained better understanding of something I thought I knew, that is, that familiarity, ultimately connected to cultural belonging, can't be a gauge of relevance. "The world is our home" doesn't mean all things are equal; it means we all feel as though we were foreign to something and someone. (GINZBURG, 2011, p. 11).

In those terms, a research conducted in this exiled posture, considering the fragmentary character of our reading of sources, implies, when looking at evidence, the attempt to understand what's foreign in the familiar. Besides, what connects us is precisely our fragmented reading of the world, our exile from each other, from what's difference, and, therefore, the dialogical possibility of dealing with the other is what connects us. When it comes to research, our first other is the researched object. Our second other is ourselves when faced with such an object. Ginzburg recommends that trade historians should constantly use this un-recognition, as it is a powerful antidote to the risk of banalizing reality and, consequently, clouding research (GINZBURG, 2001, p. 41).

Finally, considering this exiled relationship to sources, Ginzburg's work proposes, as a general rule for document work, a deep reading of sources, attempting to surpass the undeniable fact that, often, when existing in large amounts, documents are generally repetitive (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 293). The historian should then develop the previously cited "art of reading slowly" and not be afraid of proposing risky hypotheses, merging them with a constant rigor in regards to sources (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 302; GINZBURG, 2010, p. 250). Historians should also not fear ignorance — on the contrary, they should value it as a moment of euphoria, promising for the development of research (GINZBURG, 2007b, p. 296.).

## **Final thoughts**

In this paper, we tried to point towards methodological tools that historians of education interested in using evidential reading with their sources might use, based on Carlo Ginzburg's work, both in regards to the theoretical-methodological issues mentioned in his writing and to a set of elements present in the way in which he writes essays. We started in dialogue with two essays proposing, at different times, to reflect on these aspects in our field. From the first, we understood the centrality of distance and un-knowing to understand Ginzburg's work's potential in history of education, with a special focus on what these potentials imply in relationship to a multifaceted object such as education. Then, we resumed the necessarily interdisciplinary aspect of "education" as an object, the "oblique" gaze towards the production in history of education, and the possibility of looking at educational phenomena that is only indirectly accessible.

From the second essay, we understood the marks left by the Italian historian's life and intellectual education in his work, especially to build the evidential paradigm as it connects to slow philology reading, the history of marginal themes, the study of the particular, the production of mid-20th Century linguists and some of Freud's writings. Besides, we had a glimpse of the statute of truth and proof, indicating the latter as an important divergence between the Evidential Paradigm and Discourse Analysis and between the paradigm and a set of "post-modern" or "skeptical" discussions.

Following that, we pointed towards the Italian historian's literary density, understanding the need to know classic writing throughout the history of humanity, to use primary sources and to place ourselves in dialogue with the production of other historians who work(ed) with the same object we're investigating. The need for literary density is even more relevant faced with a context where gaps in source implicate us in dealing with our certainties and doubts, presenting terms to qualify our certainty gradient.

Later, with interdisciplinary dialogue, we understand that, without running from the characteristics and methods peculiar to historiography, historians might use contributions from other fields to better understand the objects they're investigating, particularly in regards to the provocations that different outlooks towards the same object can bring. This dialogue pointed to the need to consider our methodological efforts, particularly in the field of history of education, also through the lenses of other disciplines.

Finally, when thinking about the treatment of sources, we highlighted the presence of chance in a historian's investigative trajectory, the fragmentary character of our worldview and the need to preserve a certain indecipherability that characterizes humans and our cultural productions. This preservation implies taking up an exiled posture in relation to sources and ourselves, an exile built through un-knowing and slow reading.

To summarize, we conclude this paper leading to our current understanding of an evidential method, which we have systematized in the following terms. Considering the fragmentary aspect of reality, we reassemble a complex reality, that can't be directly experienced, with evidences disposed by us, researchers, in a narrative form, in erudite dialogue with the evidences' surroundings. Through an indirect reading of the collected evidence, we build narrative questions that allow us to decipher them with flexible rigor. Alternating between micro and macro, we search for knowledge that features as aspect of totality, not only through recurring elements, but through anomalies (since they contain both rule and exception). In an exercise of distance and unknowing, we, as implicated subjects, bring ourselves closer to the humanity of others in our research, preserving the undecipherable character of all that's human, but building a narrative that purports to be true given the relationship between reality and its representation, which exists, even when highly problematic.

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