

# The Insistent Copy: The Evidential Paradigm and Photography

Fábio Gatti

Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB)

## Abstract

Reading *Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm* by Carlo Ginzburg, sparked an interest in questioning the paths which the text takes and the reverberations which the author's reflections have on the history and technology of photography. The evidential paradigm examines clues in order to understand the representation of a model of thought (also understood as a practical attitude) and even shapes the ways of seeing and producing technologies of vision and their standards of discipline and control. In order to make the text speak, Roland Barthes' idea of 'writing reading' was borrowed as an exercise in interrogating the arguments contained in Ginzburg's discussions as they were read, examining the ways in which this paradigm has determined violence against gender and racial identities, by defining who is normo-typical or sick, criminal or innocent.

**Palavras-chave:** evidential paradigm; photography; potential history; identification technologies; violence.

The direction of this article may be more speculative than assertive. Reading *Signs: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm*<sup>1</sup> by Carlo Ginzburg (1939-) was the trigger for the ideas, approaches, biases, connections and openings presented here. It led me to ponder the presence of the evidentiary paradigm within photographic technology. That is to say that even before the existence of photography as a device and product, there was something, the form of which was in gestation, not a cumulative process of attempts culminating in a discovery, but an organizing link of a mode of thinking and, consequently, of a type of visuality. However, I do not intend to reach a specific conclusion with the discussions gathered here. On the contrary, I looked at this text with what Roland Barthes called 'writing reading', a way of

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<sup>1</sup> This text was first published in 1979 in the book *Crisi della ragione. Nuovi modelli nel rapporto tra sapere e attività umane* and later republished by the author himself in a new collection of articles under the title *Miti emblematici spie. Morfologia e storia* in 1986.

accessing the reverberations which are only constructed in the act of reading itself, questioning the reading in order to make it speak.

To open the text, to posit the system of its reading, is therefore not only to ask and to show that it can be interpreted freely; it is especially, and much more radically, to gain acknowledgment that there is no objective or subjective truth or reading, but only a ludic truth; again, “game” must not be understood here as a distraction, but as a piece of work – from which, however, all labor has evaporated: to read is to make our body work (psychoanalysis has taught us that this body greatly exceeds our memory and our consciousness) at the invitation of the text’s signs, of all the languages which traverse it and form something like the simmering depth of the sentence. (Barthes, 1989, p. 31)

I tried to understand as I read, which elements required me to make notes, to focus, to highlight and research other sources and references with the clear intention of participating in this ‘game’ of truth. The first contact with *Signs* is with its two epigraphs. The first from historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929), “God is in the detail.”, and the second from the artist Jasper Johns (1930-), “An object that speaks of loss, destruction, the disappearance of objects. It does not speak of itself. It speaks of others. Will it also include them?” There is a German proverb which says *Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail* (The good God is in the details) usually transposed to the Warburgian maxim cited by Ginzburg in the original Italian as *Dio è nel particolare* (Ginzburg, 2000, p. 21). Marcel Cohen (1937-), in chapter X of his book *Details. Faits* (2017), says that the aphorism is originally from the Parashat Mishpatim, one of the 54 sections of the Hebrew Bible, which are read in full in the synagogues each year”.<sup>2</sup> Ginzburg’s motivation in citing Warburg apparently relates to a methodological influence on his research and his elaboration of microhistory. The idea of God, or rather, of his presence in the details<sup>3</sup>, makes me think of Christianity as institution from the foundation of the Church and, with it, all the visibility, ordering, disciplinarity and control which came from its crushing imperialist power structure, and I will return to both microhistory and imperialism throughout the text.

The other quote is from one of Jasper Johns’ notebooks and is transcribed in the catalogue of the exhibition *Jasper Johns: a Print Retrospective*, held at New York MoMA, Museum of Modern Art, in 1986 and curated by Riva Castleman (1930-): “An object that speaks of loss, destruction, the disappearance of objects. It does not speak of itself. It speaks of others. Will it also include them? Deluge. (Sketchbook [n.d.] 1964)” (Castleman, 1986, p. 20).<sup>4</sup> In the Italian edition of Ginzburg’s book, it reads, “*Un oggetto che parla della perdita, della distruzione,*

<sup>2</sup> Piauí magazine <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/deus-e-o-diabo-estao-nos-detalhes/>.

<sup>3</sup> There is a similar maxim which says, ‘The devil is in the details’. The idea is attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and can be found inverted in Karl Kraus (1874-1936): “It is in the details, that the devil hides.” (Pires *apud* Bertozzi, 2013). I do not intend to discuss such aphorisms, much less the idea of divinity in relation to God or the Devil or their presence in literary, philosophical and historical discussions.

<sup>4</sup> The catalogue is available for download from the New York MoMA, Museum of Modern Art: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1816>.

*della sparizione di oggetti. Non parla di sé. Parla di altri. Includerà anche loro?*”. Note the omission of the word ‘deluge’. There are three aspects to my curiosity here: on the one hand, Jasper Johns’ work is one of the central points of contemporary American art production to this day. He overturned the way in which artistic products, especially painting and lithography, were being made and thought about; a possible connection with the concern with authorship set out by Ginzburg and based on the studies of Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891). On the other hand, the question of disappearance, of loss that speaks of others contained within it, reveals a paradox: speaking of an object which does not exist because it has disappeared, while other existences are made explicit by its absence. I might risk making a link with the venatic lore, in which the animal to be hunted imprints its passage on elements which keep its presence alive precisely in its absence. Finally, the suppression of the idea of the deluge. This flooding, by force of my imagination, is both capable of maintaining the conceptual paradox aspired to by Johns by swallowing (destroying) all forms of life, and turning them into remnants (clues) through the presence of the new materiality, in this case the water; and reminds us of the story of Noah with its historical character with regard to geology (on the scientific side)<sup>5</sup> and the Christian idea of salvation from evil (according to biblical studies, Noah was a good man, in the image of God).

Warburg had a strong influence on Ginzburg’s research and, despite the differences in their methods, the great number of figurative and documentary sources which he used resonate with the way in which the Italian historian pursues his investigations. In *Signs* it is no different; “what myths and paintings (works of art in general) have in common is, on the one hand, that they originated and were transmitted in specific cultural and social contexts, and on the other, their formal dimensions” (Ginzburg, 1990, p. xi). The presence of a god occurring in the particular, or in the details, corresponds directly to the idea of the visible remaining unnoticed, although existing – Johns’ paradox –, until someone sees it. This is what Ginzburg seeks when dealing with documentary sources to outline the roots of an evidential paradigm: “At every point in nature there is something to see” (Johns *apud* Castleman, 1986, p. 12-13).

However, the work, no matter how it may provoke avalanches of meaning, reveals itself only as its parts may be identified and related to each other. The sort of iconographical games that this revelation provides never opens the right or wrong doors to the mystery of the work. Like all enigmatic art, Johns’s is profoundly complicated by his own labyrinthine preoccupations, yet it offers clues; truth is there, and one finds one’s own measure of it. (Castleman, 1986, p. 9)

It is in searching out these clues in order to understand the representation of a model of thought (also understood as a practical attitude) that to my mind, the evidential paradigm also

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<sup>5</sup> See the interview with the geologist and paleontologist Professor Marcos de Souza Costa on the origin of the continents as we know them today as well as theoretical comparisons specific to the area: <https://origememrevista.com.br/2017/11/30/supercontinente/>

configures the modes of seeing and of producing technologies of vision and their standards of discipline and control.

*Signs: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm* is marked by Giovanni Morelli's research on the attribution of authorship to works of art together with distinguishing the original from the copy. Morelli's method is equated with the idea of detective work, hence the analogy with Arthur Conan Doyle's character, Sherlock Holmes, at this initial moment of the text. Furthermore, Ginzburg finds a reference to Morelli's book, first published under his Russian pseudonym Ivan Lermolieff, in Freud's text, *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914) saying that "his method of inquiry is closely related to the technique of psycho-analysis. "It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered or unnoticed details, from the rubbish heap, as it were, of our observations" (Freud *apud* Ginzburg, 1990, p. 99). Here, I would make two observations: 1) the question of authorship could open up a discussion of the ways in which Western historiography has clung to naming, attributing, certifying and guaranteeing the signature of works of art produced by men (consider gender marking necessary) for its own market and<sup>6</sup> 2) from the moment that the field of health absorbs this paradigm as a presupposition, culminating in the current quantity of technologies for fragmenting the body at every moment in order to map those of its internal signs which are invisible to the naked eye, the difference is established between what is *The Normal and the Pathological*<sup>7</sup>.

As in a detective novel, in which the narrative does not follow a linear factual structure but one of deduction of the facts in order to solve a crime or mystery (the flow of the plot being determined by this activity), Morelli obstinately pursues the observation of details in a painting: "earlobes, fingernails, shapes of fingers and of toes" and constructs a catalogue of all of these fragments, providing material for the identification of the author in a previously unimaginable way. It is "a method of interpretation based on discarded information, on marginal data, considered in some way significant" since "they constituted the instances when the control of the artist, who was tied to a cultural tradition, relaxed and yielded to purely individual touches" (Ginzburg, 1990. pp. 97 and 101). In any case, one relevant aspect in the observations made by Ginzburg is the centrality given to medicine: the author points out that both Freud and Conan Doyle were doctors, and Morelli had graduated in medicine. One way for Ginzburg to affirm that the roots of medical semiotics allowed for the emergence of the evidential paradigm in the late nineteenth century, although it existed previously in the practice of hunting and divination.

The Morellian method demonstrated the need to know art, artists, their styles and forms. In the eighteen-hundreds the *connoisseur* went about, "a critical judge of any art, one well-acquainted

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<sup>6</sup> There are still many museum collections containing non-European objects and artefacts, plundered over the centuries, which continue to be unattributed to guarantee that they remain in the 'care' of those institutions (this is an expression of political domination).

<sup>7</sup> Title of a book by George Canguilhem (1904-1995), originally published in French in 1974.

with any of the fine arts and thus competent to pass judgment on its products.”<sup>8</sup> Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) explains that the “*connoisseur* is the collector, the museum conservationist or expert who deliberately limits his scientific contribution to identifying works of art by date, provenance and author and evaluates them as to their quality and state of conservation” (*apud* Coli, 1996). Morelli was this professional, this person whose capacity for knowledge was outside the limits of academic disciplines, different from a professor or a historian as such:

This is actually a non-university discipline which has developed in directions closely linked to the needs of the art market and the modern concept of authorship. This concept requires, at all costs, finding a name responsible for the work, a name that justifies the idea derived from the romantics of a creative genius, but which also reinforces the market value of the work. Every art dealer knows that the same painting will have a different price depending on whether or not it is possible to attribute a prestigious authorship to it.

We are therefore in unclear waters. Art history owes much to the practice of attribution, which has allowed us to greatly refine catalogues. The great attributors – from Morelli to Zeri, via Berenson and Longhi – have contributed fundamentally to the establishment of corpuses belonging to the most important artists. All of these specialists have very strong personalities, only incidentally linked to academic circles. (Coli, 1996)

And despite so much effort, there are unresolved cases of authorship (the difference between the original and a copy) for example that of the *Virgin of the Rocks* (or *Madonna of the Rocks*), by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) which exists in two versions, one of them in the collection of the Musée du Louvre, in Paris, and the other in the National Gallery, in London.<sup>9</sup> Perino (2020) explains that the work in the Louvre was painted between 1483 and 1486, while the other dates from 1495 to 1508 and that a more accurate method of comparison is required, such as that applied to *The Madonna of Jakob Meyer* (1526) by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98-1543) from the episode which became known as the Holbein controversy of 1871. This reminds me of the documentary *Made You Look: A True Story About Fake Art* (2020) directed by Barry Avrich telling the story of one of the world’s biggest cases of art forgery, which occurred in the United States and involved Ann Freedman (1949-), the director of the Knoedler Gallery. I remember it for two reasons. Firstly, my dismay at the possibility of someone imitating the lines of painters such as Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), Robert Motherwell (1915-1991), Barnett Newman (1905-1970) and Franz Kline (1919-1962), and secondly in connection with the evidential paradigm which Ginzburg noticed,

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<sup>8</sup> 1714, from French *connoisseur* (Modern French *connoisseur*), from Old French *connoisseur*, an expert, a judge, one well-versed,” from *conoistre*, “to know”, from Latin *cognoscere*, “to get to know, recognize, become well-acquainted with 1714 *Online Etymology Dictionary*: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=connoisseur>.

<sup>9</sup> Musée du Louvre: oil on canvas (wood added to the canvas in 1806). National Gallery: oil on poplar (cradled panel), a type of box used in restoration and preservation consisting of strips of wood on the back of the painting to keep the surface of the canvas flat. There are primary strips, which are fixed and may be vertical or horizontal, and secondary perpendicular strips which are moveable, allowing the degree of stretch to be maintained in all areas of the painting. This avoids possible deformations due to changes in atmospheric pressure and humidity.

when detective work revealed by means of chemical analysis that one of the colors of the paint used to falsify a painting by Pollock did not exist at the time when he painted his canvases.



Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519),  
*Vergine delle Rocce* (1483-1486).  
Oil on canvas (wood added to the canvas in  
1806). 199 x 122 cm. Collection of the Musée  
du Louvre, Room 5. Public Domain.



Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519),  
*Vergine delle Rocce* (1491-1508).  
Oil on poplar (*cradled panel*).  
189,5cmx120cm. National Gallery, London,  
Room 66. Public Domain.

Medical semiotics emerges with the character of detection, perhaps quite close to that of the venatic practice. It is sufficient to recall the similarity which Freud observed between psychoanalysis and the Morellian method. Hippocrates (460-370 BC), who is considered the father of medicine, formulated distinctions and fundamental concepts in the field, such as the difference between symptoms and disease and thence to diagnosis, prognosis and treatment. He held that the face of the patient “is the first thing that a doctor should observe at length. Establish the traces of an extremely sick face, its color, forms and movements and compare them with a healthy face.” (Baitello Jr., 1999, p. 19). Hippocrates breaks with the mysticism in vogue and places disease on the plane of natural, not divine etiology. In this way, the practice of the Hippocratic school was based on detailed anamnesis to map the signs which indicated

the presence of one disease or another. “In summary, the medical interview is a blend of the cognitive and technical skills of the interviewer and the feelings and personalities of both the patient and the interviewer. [...] The interview should be flexible and spontaneous and not interrogative.” (Swartz, 2021, p. 7). It was Claudius Galenus (129-199 AD) – or Galen of Pergamon – who formulated symptomology as an area of medical studies, in other words, semiotics itself (Baitello Jr., 1999). In his *Textbook of Physical Diagnosis: History and Examination* (2015), Mark Swartz presents all of the parameters connected to this practice, divided into 25 illustrated chapters with written and illustrated examples to be used. It is interesting to observe the use of the words ‘signs’ and ‘symptoms’ with respect to the identification of a disease and by extension its cause (authorship); the symptoms always being described by the patient and the signs discovered exclusively by the health professional (just like the connoisseur). In other words, medical semiotics is “that discipline which permits the diagnosis of diseases inaccessible to direct observation based on superficial symptoms, sometimes thought to be irrelevant in the eyes of the layman.” (Ginzburg, 1990, p. 102).

At this point I need to recapitulate something about microhistory, interdependent of the time relations analyzed by Ginzburg. In his presentation on the two primeval modes of evidential knowledge, the venatic, relating to hunting, and the divinatory, relating to faith, distinct time periods are specified. While the art of hunting looks to the past as it investigates vestiges, marks or signs left by something which has already happened to reconstitute the facts and arrive at a solution (by analogy to the crime, authorship or disease), divinatory evidential knowledge is produced in relation to something, the materialization of which is as yet unknown, a hereafter (over which there is no control), or as Ferreira Gullar (1930-2016) pointed out in his final one act monologue, *O homem como invenção de si mesmo* (2012), for anything possible man himself suffices, and for the impossible he has invented God. Meanwhile in medical semiotics all three time periods combine, past, present and future (anamnesis, diagnosis and prognosis respectively). I would suggest that this temporal coincidence underscores the indelible and irrefutable truth of medicine. The promises of medical science, the problems of the clinical encounter and the development of forensic medicine (leading to criminology) reach back centuries and have passed through a variety of institutional power structures, assuring its efficacy and competence. This structure has over time become unquestionable and has formed in the collective imagination what the faces of sick people, freaks, queers, the inadequate, the undesirable and the repulsive are<sup>10</sup>:

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<sup>10</sup> I am thinking here of Michel Foucault with *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *Microphysics of Power* (1978); George Canguilhem with *The Normal and the Pathological* (1974) and *Writings on Medicine* (2002); Liana Albernaz de Melo Bastos with *Corpo e Subjetividade na Medicina: Impasses e Paradoxos* (2006); Elaine Scarry with *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) and Paul B. Preciado with *An Apartment on Uranus* (2019) and *Can the Monster Speak?: Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts* (2022).



doctors described what for centuries had remained below the threshold of the visible and the expressible, but this did not mean that, after over-indulging in speculation, they had begun to perceive once again, or that they listened to reason rather than to imagination; it meant that the relation between the visible and invisible—which is necessary to all concrete knowledge—changed its structure, revealing through gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain. A new alliance was forged between words and things, enabling one *to see* and *to say*. (Foucault, 1973, p. xii)

It is necessary to pay attention to this structural change, because the production of visuality has also changed, and in both cases, together with technological development. Taking these modes of evidentiary knowledge as an example, Ginzburg (1990) designed his paradigm within the field of history. As the historian that he is, he remained concerned about what his role was and faced the difficulty of not knowing whether he wanted “to broaden the horizons of historical research or tighten its boundaries, solve the difficulties tied to my work or continually create new ones” (Ginzburg, 1990, p. x). This brings me back to microhistory: “the obstacles interfering with the research were integral elements in the documentation and thus had to become part of the account” (Ginzburg, 2012, p. 204). The description of what is known in his essay on microhistory reveals his debt to the way it was conceived by the French school in contrast to Braduel’s<sup>11</sup> historiographic model which, as Chaves (2020) points out, was macroscopic and quantitative in scale and exerted great influence between 1950 and 1975. A discussion of the problem of microhistory has at its core the idea of narrative together with the question of the genre of autobiography – also present in *Signs* – since microhistory is understood by Ginzburg (2012), based on Giovanni Levi<sup>12</sup> (1939-), as a self-portrait, not a group portrait. In another of his texts, *Witches and Shamans*, the author states that “the experience that I am about to describe is itself fairly confused and untidy, though it pertains not to a group but to an individual — myself” (Ginzburg, 2012, p. 216).

Chaves (2020) traces a genealogy of microhistory, detailing the Italian researcher’s concern with going beyond the naturalist narrative of the 19th century. Based on Pires’ (2013) harsh criticism of the evidential paradigm, Chaves points out a tautological problem arising from work based on clues and intuitions. I do not intend to focus on the specialized discussions of the field of history in Pires’ text, *Indagações sobre um método acima de qualquer suspeita* (2013). However, one of his main findings is the fact that Ginzburg was not given to the similar concept of indictment which comes from Thucydides<sup>13</sup> (460-400 BC): “since medical science, but also

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<sup>11</sup> See *Fernando Braduel e a geração dos Annales*, José D’Assunção Barros (2012): <https://ojs.ufgd.edu.br/index.php/historiaemreflexao/article/view/1883/1051>.

<sup>12</sup> See *Sobre a micro-história* (1981) by Giovanni Levi and her interview entitled *O pequeno, o grande e o pequeno* with Guido Crainz, Gino Massullo and Giacomina Nenci in 1990, published in issue 10 of *Meridiana*.

<sup>13</sup> Thucydides, Greek general, historian and author of *History of the Peloponnesian War*. For his biography and how the book has been considered, see Helio Jaguaribe’s preface in the Coleção Clássicos of the International Relations Research Institute (IPRI) at the University of Brazil (UnB), translated from the Attic Greek to Portuguese by Mário da Gama Kury: [https://funag.gov.br/loja/download/0041-historia\\_da\\_guerra\\_do\\_peloponeso.pdf](https://funag.gov.br/loja/download/0041-historia_da_guerra_do_peloponeso.pdf).



police affiliations get around the criticism of veracity because they respond, for example, to the historiographical praxis of indictment, the original Thucydidean *tekmérion*”, indicating a “somewhat astonishing lapse, not being a question of ignorance or lack of knowledge, since Thucydidean remembrance was referred to, however marginally in a footnote, but an ambiguous (mis)remembrance which (dis)considered its (ir)relevance as an instance of reflective contribution to the paradigm” (Pires, 2013, p. 25 and 34). Although such criticisms exist from various sides, and Pires’ article offers a great deal of material for understanding them, it can nonetheless be inferred that the project of microhistory in Ginzburg aims to “cut out the object on a microscopic scale, but explore it to exhaustion, in order to reveal the universe of a society beyond the actual protagonist of the study.” (Coelho, 2014, p. 3).

Considering the insistence in both *Microhistory* and *Signs* on reports of armed conflict on the one hand and police action on the other as primeval means of operationalizing and standardizing knowledge linked to medicine, I cannot ignore the hypothesis that, at that moment, a set of technologies (in both the technical and conceptual senses) capable of defining, pointing out, choosing and criminalizing was being created: the face of the patient easily becomes the face of crime proven by medical truth.

From the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century, the knowledge of life was caught up in the circle of life folded back upon and observing itself; from Bichat onwards it is ‘staggered’ in relation to life, and separated from it by the uncrossable boundary of death, in the mirror of which it observes itself.

It was no doubt a very difficult and paradoxical task for the medical gaze to operate such a conversion. An immemorial slope as old as men’s fear turned the eyes of doctors towards the elimination of disease, towards cure, towards life: it could only be a matter of restoring it. Behind the doctor’s back, death remained the great dark threat in which his knowledge and skill were abolished; it was the risk not only of life and disease but of knowledge that questioned them. With Bichat, the medical gaze pivots on itself and demands of death an account of life and disease, of its definitive immobility of their time and movements. Was it not necessary that medicine should circumvent its oldest care in order to read, in what provided evidence of its failure, that which must found its truth?

But Bichat did more than free medicine of the fear of death. He integrated that death into a technical and conceptual totality in which it assumed its specific characteristics and its fundamental value as experience. So much so that the great break in the history of Western medicine dates precisely from the moment clinical experience became the anatomo-clinical gaze. (Foucault, 1973, p. 145-146)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Marie François Xavier Bichat (1771-1802) was a French physiologist and anatomist considered the father of modern histology and tissue pathology, having written some of the most important treatises on the subject. For his biography, see: <https://www.wonders-of-the-world.net/Eiffel-Tower/Pantheon/Marie-Francois-Xavier-Bichat.php>. In the eulogy given on Bichat’s death, Busquet Halle said that, “Bichat has died on a battlefield which has more than one victim, and no one in so few years has done so much and so well”. The idea of a war against disease is explored in Susan Sontag’s text, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (first published in 1978). In the case of cancer, it will always be a battle to be won and the person who faces it is a warrior, a soldier who having defeated it returns home as a hero (and even if they die, they die fighting for their lives which is praiseworthy). In the case of AIDS, the question is different. It is associated with promiscuity and vice, all of which is the fault of the person for whom death is the reward for those attitudes: “the unsafe behavior that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency – addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant.” (Sontag, 2001. p. 83).

This 'pivot on itself', which transforms the medical gaze, results in a device of even greater control over life in the tireless search for immortality (understood as the need to stay alive). But whose?<sup>15</sup> Sontag (2001) shows that Europe, as a privileged cultural entity, sees itself as exempt from disease, which always comes from outside. "And Europeans have been astoundingly callous about the far more devastating extent to which they – as invaders, as colonists – have introduced their lethal diseases to the exotic "primitive" world: think of the ravages of smallpox, influenza, and cholera on the aboriginal populations of the Americas and Australia." (Sontag, 2001. pp. 98-99). This type of programmed distortion (yes, deliberately, in the breast of a society that considers itself superior with its imperialist practices and whose colonial project of invading other worlds is the icing on the cake) leads to the association of illness with the poor, as Sontag (2001, p. 99) explains: "the fact that illness is associated with the poor—who are, from the perspective of the privileged, aliens in one's midst—reinforces the association of illness with the foreign: with an exotic, often primitive place" and furthermore, according to the author, endows whites with a place of much greater suffering (they feel more pain) than other populations such as Asians, Africans and the poor (for whom the technology of visibility, from imperialism to coloniality, imposed the condition of being biologically inferior; savages, and as such, more resistant).

All these paths are opened to me by the elements Ginzburg translates regarding the traces or signs by which the doctor identifies the disease and the patient, the detective reconstructs the crime to capture the criminal, and the hunter follows the tracks of his prey until he finds it. This evidential paradigm can also be seen in photography: "The view of reality as an exotic prize to be tracked down and captured by the diligent hunter-with-a-camera has informed photography from the beginning, and marks the confluence of the Surrealist counter-culture and middle-class social adventurism" (Sontag, 2005, p. 42). The association of the figure of the photographer with that of the hunter is a very common metaphor in the development of photography, going so far as to including the manufacture of equipment in the shape of a gun. Kodak's own slogan, "You press the button, we do the rest", was linked to the idea of hunting. Aquino (2016), in the chapter on hunters, tourists and photographers from her book *Picture Ahead. A Kodak e a construção do turista-fotógrafo*, draws an excellent explanatory outline of the connection between photography and the image of the hunter. The closeness of George Eastman, the founder of Kodak, to William Walker, a gun manufacturer, could have led to the alternative version of the slogan: "You pull the trigger, we do the rest", as Landau recalls (*apud* Aquino, 2017, p. 95). One of the best-known models of this type of equipment in the history of photography is Étienne-Jules

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<sup>15</sup> Achile Mbembe's (1957-) essay, *Necropolítica* (published in Portuguese in 2016), updates Foucault's 'disciplinary society', the mechanisms of which work to control bodies, their forms and their desires by the application of biopower and biopolitics. In Mbembe's view, what currently exists is 'necropower' and 'necropolitics', directed against the black population demonstrating who can live and who must die: <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/ae/article/view/8993>.

Marey's (1830-1904) chronophotographic gun, created in 1882, which captured several images of the same object in order to analyze its movement. Marey's research had led him to create chronophotography, a process for analyzing movements through their sequential records<sup>16</sup>.



Étienne-Jules Marey, *Chronophotographic gun*, 1882. Musée des arts et métiers.  
Photo: Jean Claude Wetzel. Public Domain.

The photographer as a hunter therefore, is someone who lurks in wait for his prey to appear. The furthest reaching repercussion of this is to be found in Cartier Bresson's (1908-2004) essay *The Decisive Moment* (1952)<sup>17</sup>. But who had photographic equipment? Who were these men (it is necessary to consider here the gender marker excluding women and races other than white) who could go out with a camera in their hands, recording the world and the people around them? How was this done? Who has the rights to these images? How do we discuss photographers and their subjects at this historical moment? These and many other questions that could be asked and all would lead to the same place: imperialist power. Azoulay (2019) in his book *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism* points out that even before the discovery of photography as a technology, a certain flash of thinking established the concept of the 'imperial shutter'. It came into operation in 1492 when the first vessel financed by the Spanish government under the command of Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) arrived at the island of Guanahani, which he renamed San Salvador. The

<sup>16</sup> Aquino (2016) presents other equipment, such as *Thompson's revolver* (1862), the *Photo-Revolver de Poche* (1882), *L'Escopette* (1888) and the *Hythe Mk III Camara Gun* (1915).

<sup>17</sup> The idea of the 'decisive moment' always presents the photographer as someone able to anticipate an event, who lurks in wait for the ideal moment to get a 'good' picture:  
[https://digitalphoto1sva.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/cartierbresson\\_the-decisive-moment.pdf](https://digitalphoto1sva.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/cartierbresson_the-decisive-moment.pdf).

function of a camera's shutter is to control the duration for which the sensor/film will be exposed to light. This makes it possible to have a more or less defined, frozen or blurred image, and determines its legibility. "The shutter is synecdoche for the operation of the imperial enterprise altogether, on which the invention of photography, as well as other technological media, was modeled."<sup>18</sup> (Azoulay, 2019, p. 2). 'Potential history' is a practice through which it would be possible to unlearn the imperialism that shaped the societies of colonized countries, founded on exploitation, expropriation, genocide and constant symbolic violence<sup>19</sup>.

At this point I can turn to that part of the text in which Ginzburg deals with something which directly involves photography and the development of a technology of the visible, establishing the face of crime: the Bertillon system. Wind (*apud* Ginzburg, 1990, p. 97) reports that

Morelli's books look different from those of any other writer on art; they are sprinkled with illustrations of fingers and ears, careful records of the characteristic trifles by which an artist gives himself away, as a criminal might be spotted by a fingerprint... any art gallery studied by Morelli begins to resemble a rogue's gallery.

If, as I have already said, medicine is the area in which the truth is specified and criminology is born from this, it is worth pointing out, as Coli (1996) described it, that "Morelli's method does not foresee a detective organization, but a police organization. The photos he accumulated have the character of a systematic filing system similar to the scientific methods of anthropometry and even fingerprint identification". This passage implicitly cites Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), who created a system which consisted in producing anthropometric files with front, side and back facing photographs of people plus data including body measurements, and Francis Galton (1822-1911) who invented fingerprinting. Although not cited, it is salutary to remind ourselves of the violence of *L'Uomo Delinquente* (1876), by Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), in which the definition of crime is biologized, removed from the field of law, making those people considered criminals a human subtype. This type of research reiterates the insistence on visual technologies of control applied with undue force by the colonial authorities in invaded territories<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The figure of speech known as a synecdoche which the author uses exposes a complex mechanism with a quantitative function – the parts in the place of the whole and vice versa, which is a clearly visible structure in the process of colonization.

<sup>19</sup> I would prefer not to go into a discussion regarding the right to use images involving the production, circulation and distribution of photographs of war zones and people exploited in the colonies, but recommend *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), also by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (1962-). The right of a photojournalist, for example, to use images of conflict without the authorization of the people photographed, even if they are not published, or to disseminate recognizable photographs of the dead, ignoring the civil right reserved to their families, is no less problematic than the tourist photographers who visit families, rites and the social events of populations to which they do not belong and use their images without consent. For the reality of colonial violence, see: Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (first published in 1961).

<sup>20</sup> In the criminal area there is the racism tied to facial recognition technology, as shown in Itana Alencar's report for the G1 news portal about the Public Security Department's introduction of this tool and how it led to a black man being held prisoner for 26 days: <https://g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2023/09/01/com-mais-de-mil-prisoos-na-ba-sistema-de-reconhecimento-facial-e-criticado-por-racismo-algoritmico-inocente-ficou-presos-por-26-dias.ghtml>. There is also the report of the Center for Studies of Security and Citizenship (CESeC)'s Network of Security Observatories in Rio de Janeiro, produced in 2019 when the tool had been in use for five months in that state:

The Morellian method (as all the others) was based on the supposed neutrality, which never existed, of a procedure considered infallible due to its objectivity. Coli (1996) questions the infallibility of Morelli's method, pointing out that the figure of the connoisseur is anointed by intuition and is, therefore, someone necessary to the art market: "or, in other words, the art historian should remember that the rigor of reasoning is as important as the violin and cocaine for Sherlock Holmes' deductive processes". The author's acidity in pointing to the violin and cocaine is at the heart of the discussions of psychoanalysis and the coca administered by Freud to his patients<sup>21</sup>. Music, I would venture to guess, refers to the poetic role of the fabrication of reality or the fictionalization of the real (as Rancière, 2004, p. 38, said, "the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought"), without which the real itself would not exist. It is a point intended to upset the fundamental security of a method which was proposed to be infallible and, worse, impartial. This 'guaranteeism' may be the face of many sub-areas of medicine (and medical thinking more generally) even today. The visual evidentiary paradigm of photography, together with the imperial shutter, led to the invention of The Bertillon system, fingerprinting and Lombrosian criminology.

Fingers and ears, which were important details for Morelli, provide the title of Lissovsky's article, *O dedo e a orelha. Ascensão e queda da imagem nos tempos digitais* (1993), in which the author writes: "photography had found its vocation in the moral history of the world: detecting and defeating crime". At this point, Lissovsky was discussing the autorecognition of the miscreant faced with his own portrait, and goes on to ask: "how can we force autorecognition if the more the archive grew, the more it hid the pictorial answer to this question?" (Lissovsky, 1993, p. 60). Ginzburg himself points out a methodological error in Bertillon's concept: "the main defect in Bertillon's anthropometric method was its purely negative quality. It permitted the exclusion, at the moment of identification, of individuals not corresponding to the data, but not a positive verification when two identical series of data referred to a single individual"<sup>22</sup> (Ginzburg, 1990, p. 120). This error leads Lissovsky (1993, p. 71) to the incisive but lucid observation: "victims of their own effectiveness, the fingerprinting and Bertillon systems postponed, perhaps forever, the discovery of their own meanings and *raisons d'être*: the true archives of the law were

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[https://cesecseguranca.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Rede-de-Observatorios\\_primeiro-relatorio\\_20\\_11\\_19.pdf](https://cesecseguranca.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Rede-de-Observatorios_primeiro-relatorio_20_11_19.pdf). And the project, *Tire Meu Rosto da Mira* (Get My Face out of your Sight) mobilizes civil society to completely ban the use of facial recognition for public security purposes precisely because of its racist character: <https://tiremeurostodasumira.org.br/>. Instagram: @meurostonão. We should remember that this whole structure employs machine learning, for whom and in which way it is made, whether promoting more prejudice or simple maintaining it. See the following two texts: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/02/04/137602/this-is-how-ai-bias-really-happens-and-why-its-so-hard-to-fix/>; <https://tarciziosilva.com.br/blog/visao-computacional-e-racismo-algoritmico-branquitude-e-opacidade-no-aprendizado-de-maquina/>

<sup>21</sup> See Decio Gurfinkel's article, *O episódio de Freud com a cocaína: o médico e o monstro* (2008): <https://www.scielo.br/j/rlpf/a/BxsvwKrNPXjzxKvpgwJcmHw/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ginzburg's statement is based on two different studies cited in his footnotes as follows: A. Lacassagne, *Alphonse Bertillon. L'homme, le savant, la pensée philosophique*; E. Locard, *L'oeuvre d'Alphonse Bertillon*, Lyon 1914 (taken from the «*Archives d'anthropologie criminelle, de médecine légale et de psychologie normale et pathologique*», p. 28).

lawless archives”. This has always been the case and it reproduces a chain of prejudice, racism and eugenics instrumentalized by means of photographic identification. The sick, like criminals, have determined gender and racial identities.

In December 2022, Thiago Torres, a social sciences student at the University of São Paulo and social media influencer who discusses racism and gender issues, had his photograph published in a kidnapping case<sup>23</sup>. This clearly demonstrates how the evidentiary paradigm present in photographic technology works within the development of the colonial enterprise, and the maneuvers and models with which society and the state continue to make use of the imperial shutter. Thiago reports being warned of what had happened by a lawyer friend, who was analyzing the kidnapping case and recognized his photo on the list of suspects, and posting immediately on his Instagram account, @chavosodausp. 02<sup>24</sup>. This case proves how the archive initially managed by Bertillon and constantly updated over the centuries seems not to have resolved its principal flaw: it allows two individuals to be distinguished at the time of identification (A is not B), but it is not efficient enough to demonstrate that two identical series of data refer to the same individual (B is B, for example). I am reminded at this point of another identity recognition system produced by the police, made public in the series *Vulgo* (1998), part of the ongoing project *The Universal Archive*, by the Brazilian artist Rosângela Rennó (1962-):

in 1995, Rosângela Rennó learned of the existence of a large number of glass photographic negatives in the State Penal Academy. In May of that year, the artist requested permission to access this archive with the aim of restoring, organizing and, later, using the images from these negatives in her work. Initially, the request was denied based on a regulation that protects the identity of inmates and their families for a period of one hundred years. Rennó, however, obtained authorization in February 1996, after discovering that some of these images had been published in a treatise on criminology. (Melendi, 2022, p. 112)

While for Bertillon the ear was an elementary marker of identity, for Galton it was the fingerprint (it is worth repeating that for Morelli the author’s identity was in the fingers, ears and even nails). In this series by Rennó we can see the police attempt to create an identification archive based on the spiral patterns in the hair on the inmates’ heads: “the ACADEPEN photos seem to be a supposed attempt at a physiognomic or phrenological study. Since no swirl is the same as another, they could constitute a defining trait of individual identity”, explains Melendi (2022, p. 114-115). Rennó’s images, as well as her other research for *The Universal Archive*, lead us to reflect on the very notion of an archive, which, for Azoulay (2019, p. 43),

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.geledes.org.br/chavoso-da-usp-tem-foto-colocada-em-album-de-reconhecimento-de-suspeitos-da-policia-civil-surpreso-e-sem-entender-diz-estudante/>; <https://mundonegro.inf.br/chavoso-da-usp-tem-imagem-colocada-em-album-de-reconhecimento-de-suspeitos-da-policia-civil-sem-entender/>; <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2022/12/22/chavoso-da-usp-tem-foto-colocada-em-album-de-reconhecimento-de-suspeitos-da-policia-civil-surpreso-e-sem-entender-diz-estudante.ghtml>.

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/CmeFEhIOlX/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CmeFEhIOlX/?img_index=1).

“is a synergetic machine of imperial violence through which this very violence is abstracted and then extracted from the passage of time. Imperial archives continued to be established, under the same guise of neutrality, after the end of empires, now necessary for progress.”



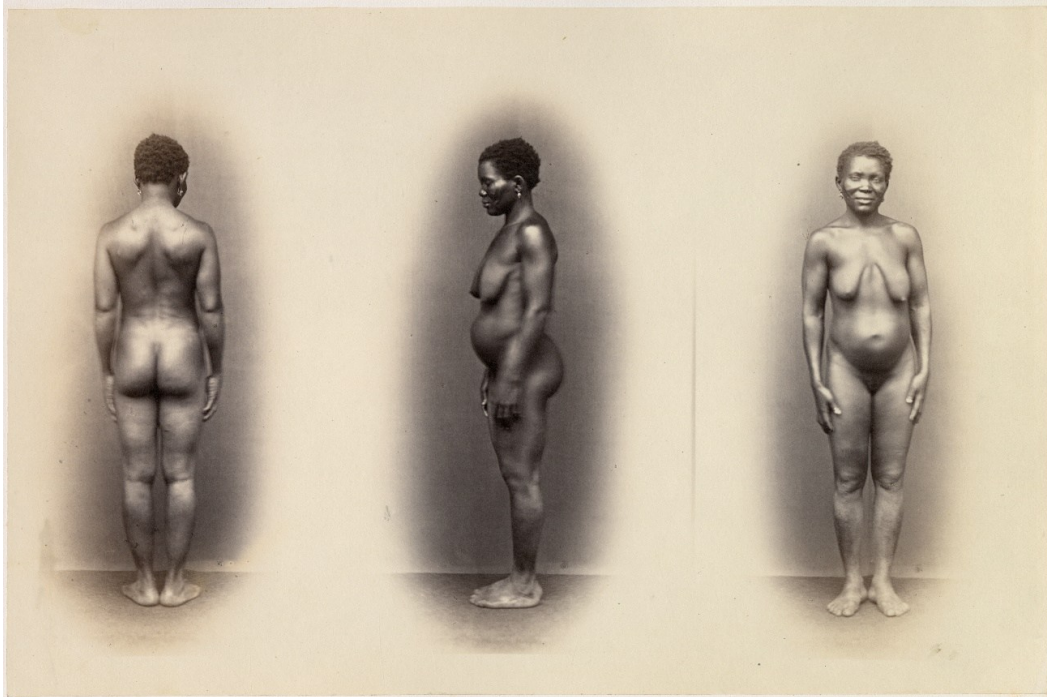
Rosângela Rennó, *Whip*, 1999-2001.  
Da série *Vulgo [Alias]*, 1999-2003.  
60,3 x 43,1 cm.  
Laminated Cibachrome print from an original  
in the Museu Penitenciário Paulista.  
Courtesy of the artist.  
Reproduction prohibited.

And, on the subject of archives, there are also the photographs of Théophile Auguste Stahl (1828-1877), taken at the request of Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz (1807-1873), during the Thayer Expedition (1865 and 1866), “a North American expedition with approximately fifteen members, among them his wife and assistant, Elizabeth Cabot Cary Agassiz, the geologist Charles Frederick Hartt, the illustrator Jacques Burkhardt, and the apprentices William James and Walter Hunnewell” (Miranda, 2017, p. 21), the aim of which was to acquire images of groups of black and mixed-race inhabitants of Brazil in order to refute the advances of Darwin’s work on evolution in his book *On the Origin of Species*. There is no point in going into the details of Agassiz’s thinking, nor how he managed, with the help of the Emperor Dom Pedro II and the bourgeoisie, to conclude a creationist project founded on the will of the Christian god<sup>25</sup>. Today, the photographs from this expedition are in the collection of the

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 2 of Cecília Luttembarck de Oliveira Lima Rattes’ Masters’ dissertation, *O negro e o mestiço brasileiro sob as lentes racialistas da Expedição Thayer* (2010) which was defended for the post-graduate program



Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University<sup>26</sup>. Stahl's approach to photographing people apparently became a standard in the field of medicine, where until the 1990s similar photographs were produced of all endocrinology patients: front, right side, left side and back views (although Stahl took only three: front, side and back).



Auguste Stahl, *Back view, profile and front view of a black woman*, Rio de Janeiro, 1865. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 2004.1.436.1.165. Reproduction prohibited.

Unlearning imperialism in practice, requires artists, researchers, teachers and other professionals to adopt a critical and revisionist stance at all levels. I might dare to think that microhistory itself could be a way for this revision to take place, and I have begun to think of artistic production itself as a microhistory. In this sense, I would point to the work of Rosana Paulino (1967-) in which she makes critical use of Auguste Stahl's photographs – and other visual elements of colonial violence – to draw attention to the absurdities of the evidentiary paradigm at the service of the imperial shutter. In *A Permanência das Estruturas* (2017) we see two photographs with a left side view of a black man (one of them divided into two sections

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in history at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Humanities of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG): <https://repositorio.ufmg.br/handle/1843/BUOS-8R9MKN>.

<sup>26</sup> In 2019, Tamara Lanier sued Harvard University as a result of recognizing her great-great-grandfather, Renty, and his daughter, Delia, in photographs belonging to the *Peabody Museum* collection. She won damages for the undue use of the pictures of her ancestors, but lost her action to take possession of them from Harvard in 2021. For the 2019 case, see: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/harvard-sued-shamelessly-profiting-images-slaves-claim/story?id=61828467> and for the judge's rejection of her claim to take possession of the pictures in 2021 on the basis of Harvard's legal possession of them, see: <https://apnews.com/article/connecticut-lawsuits-slavery-massachusetts-united-states-6721e6fdd6236f004928f22f88501b4e>.

with the upper part placed top left and the lower part placed bottom right) and one with a back view, while the one with a front view has been blanked out in a nod to the historical erasure, at first symbolic but later physical, caused by death; a hunting scene with three dogs chasing another animal – perhaps a sheep – on ceramic *Azulejo* tiles; two different views of a human skull; the plan of a slave ship and two pieces of fabric with the same dimensions on which the title of the work can be read in various sizes.



Rosana Paulino, *A Permanência das Estruturas*, 2017. Digital print on fabric, cut out and sewn. 93 x 110 cm, Museu de Arte de São Paulo. Courtesy of the artist. Reproduction prohibited.

Paulino's work appeals strongly to questions of memory, especially to the memories of a colonized country, the history of which – including that of art – is constructed on hegemonic bases determining which facts it is important to narrate, disseminate and catalogue, which objects need to be archived and what meaning is to be attached to them and who can tell the stories and build the paths to truth:

“How can you do an entire art course with your back to the country?”, she asked herself. According to Paulino, the curriculum was designed according to the criteria of hegemonic art history — Western, European, white, male. With few exceptions, black

or indigenous art appeared only as folklore. There were no black people among her classmates or teachers either, which led her on a solitary search for references, some of which she found in the library at the School of Communications and Arts (ECA) in São Paulo. “I first found myself as a black woman in the book *A Mão Afro-Brasileira*, when I was a student,” she says, referring to the catalogue of the pioneering exhibition held at the *Museu de Arte Moderna* in São Paulo in 1988. (Reina, 2018)

Western history seems to have been constructed in its entirety from the replication of the same thing. The same people, the same men, the same honors, generations of the same families – always white people. A copy in every corner of the world to ensure the permanence of the structures.

Photography, like other techniques which came before it, can be copied indefinitely. Spread by the thousands with analogue technologies and now over the internet (even the rules of algorithms are founded under the gaze of the imperial shutter), it has always reached various social strata. Here the concept of copying functions directly (not metaphorically): it is something to be multiplied in itself, while maintaining its characteristics. I am not thinking about the difference between imitation and original, because authorship is of little importance (although it was to Morelli), but rather reproducibility in the strict sense (aura apart). That brings me to the story of *Bartleby, the Scrivener, A History of Wall Street*, by Herman Melville (1819-1891), published in 1853. In this short story, Melville creates a character who begins working in a law firm as a copyist. At a certain point in the book, Bartleby refuses to copy any more. According to Deleuze (1997, p. 83), “the formula I PREFER NOT TO excludes all alternatives, and devours what it claims to conserve no less than it distances itself from everything else. It implies that Bartleby stop copying, that is, that he stop reproducing words; it hollows out a zone of indetermination that renders words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum within language [langage].”

Perhaps this is the void faced by Ginzburg and his microhistory project and, by extension, his evidentiary paradigm, since the great difficulty is to resolve the greater or lesser centrality of the individual in each discipline: “the more that individual traits were considered pertinent, the more the possibility of attaining exact scientific knowledge diminished” (Ginzburg, 1990, p. 111). This type of conflict, it seems to me, principally affects indirect disciplines, and is a little distant in certain respects from photography, which is a descendant of and direct substitute for the truth of nineteenth-century book culture. A culture in which a thing could not be itself and another at the same time. The mixed reality which Tisseron (2009) claims existed through the images themselves did not therefore fit into the discussions on photography of the time. In his article, commissioned and written for the exhibition *A Invenção de um Mundo* at the *Itaú Cultural* in São Paulo, which featured a selection from the collection of the *Maison Européenne de la Photographie* (MEP-Paris), the author points out the recurring contradiction between photography’s speech and its visual practices. While the discourse emphasizes and

guarantees the truth, the practice (not on all sides) questions reality and fictionalizes it. Since encyclopedic book culture (and it is well known that the encyclopedia is yet another of imperialism's epistemological devices) became the holder of the truth and its tentacles extended through time up to the present, in a variety of spaces, which were once physical but are now virtual, it has become difficult for deniers, fascists and extreme conservatives to detect falsifications. Their problem still lies in the same vexed question of the Bertillon system and its failure to distinguish A from B.

'I would prefer not to' can be read as an expression of imperialist unlearning, nullifying the law itself by acting within it: contrary to what is widely believed, "Bartleby is not the patient but the doctor of a sick America, the medicine-man, the new Christ or the brother to us all." (Deleuze, 1997, p. 103).

Photography as a technology was gestated and maintained under the pillar of the imperial shutter, but many artists and researchers have long refused in different ways to submit to an unquestioning obedience, although its copy still persists. This persistence can be found in the reflection of Evgen Bavcar, in his essay *Um outro olhar* (2003). In it, Bavcar, a blind photographer, draws an analogy between the ways in which vision has been constructed in Western culture and the myths of the Cyclops, Ulysses, Oedipus, Tiresias and Argus. The Cyclops' monocular vision is what prevents him from distinguishing between name and thing, something Ulysses is able to do with his normotypical binocular vision. That is how he escapes from the giant, by claiming to be called 'Nobody'. "With Ulysses, vision linked to knowledge emerges; he sees what he knows, and nothing more. The same certainly happens to the Cyclops, except that, not knowing how to look, there is no differentiated thought, and so he must always look at the same thing." (Bavcar, 2003, p. 136). This is what Azoulay (2019) urges us to unlearn: normotypical, homogenizing vision, just more of the same. Therefore, "accepting blindness is to admit the world of objects which manifest their materiality through the shadows which assure them a tangible reality, beyond the absolute transparency of the all-visible" (Bavcar, 2003, p. 141), especially when this 'all-visible' comes from technical images.

Ginzburg claims that before the evidentiary paradigm there was a Galilean model based on studies in which everything, including the manifestations of nature, had a mathematical structure, and experience itself, under mathematical control, was used as the criterion of truth. Contradicting Galileo however, he goes on to state that history was never to become a Galilean science and gives linguistics as another example of this rupture:

Galileo forced an unpleasant dilemma on the human sciences: either assume a lax scientific system in order to achieve noteworthy results, or assume a meticulous, scientific one to achieve results of scant significance. Only linguistics has succeeded, during the course of the present century, in escaping the quandary, subsequently posing as a more or less finished model for other disciplines. (Ginzburg, 1990, p. 124)

A key issue is the paradigm shift in thinking about history, in the way it is understood and discussed, both academically and philosophically. The contribution of language and culture to the so-called 'linguistic turn' is essential to understanding how this transformation occurs after the transition from existentialism, with Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) to structuralism, with Louis Althusser (1918-1990). It should be noted here that the long-standing ambiguity of the term 'history', as something in movement (called lived history) plus its interpretation (the history of knowledge), is an important element of this and the basis from which linguistics plays a preponderant role. The way of perceiving history, making it known and treating it has thus presented itself in various forms, from Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1976), through Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Gilles Deleuze (1901-1981) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984)<sup>27</sup>. (Roiz, 2009, p. 590)

In *History, Rhetoric and Proof* (1999), Ginzburg explains why he sees linguistics as the one science to have avoided the Galilean dilemma. By directly comparing rhetoric and proof, and basing himself on Aristotle to revisit the controversy that for centuries provided an "image of rhetoric, as a technique based first of all on emotions and only marginally on the scrutiny of proofs" (Ginzburg, 1999, p. 63), he perceives how the linguistic turn (to him, a rhetorical turn) of the 1960s achieves the counter-position of rhetoric and proof. This implies that "we can compare those narratives to mediating instances between questions and evidence, instances that deeply (although not exclusively) affect the way in which historical data are collected, discarded, interpreted – and then, of course, written" (Ginzburg, 1999, p. 101). In short, the political and cultural discomfort to which Ginzburg directs his reflections resides precisely in the observation that the supposedly civilized and developed countries ended up committing the greatest and most nefarious acts of barbarity, such as the Holocaust and the extermination of entire civilizations in Africa, the Americas and also in Australia. He therefore suggests, using Benjamin's maxim, the need to "brush history against the grain", that is, to learn to read testimonies backwards, against the intentions of those who hegemonically produced them (Roiz, 2009).

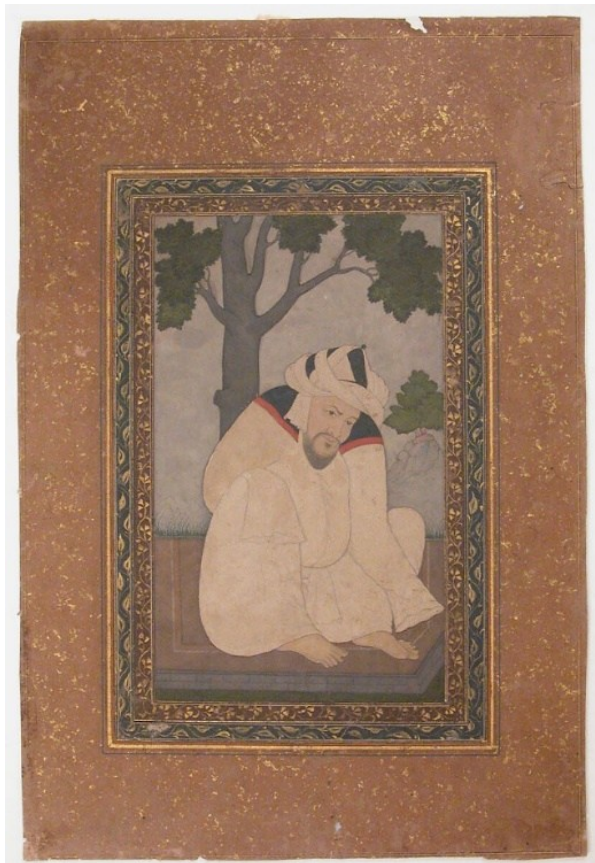
At the end of *Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm*, Ginzburg (1990, p. 125) describes *firâsa* as "the ability to pass, on the basis of clues, directly from the known to the unknown... *firâsa* was none other than the instrument of conjectural knowledge". For centuries Sufis were a mixture

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<sup>27</sup> From decolonial studies in various different fields, I would add the authors: Franz Fanon (1925-1961), Aimé Césaire (1913-2018), Albert Memmi (1920-2020), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942-) and the South American subaltern scholars, Edgardo Lander (1942-), Arturo Escobar (1952-), Walter Dignolo (1941-), Enrique Dussel (1934-), Anibal Quijano (1928-2018) and Fernando Coronil (1944-2011) who formed the Modernity/Coloniality group; Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914-1977), Conceição Evaristo (1946-), Silvio de Almeida (1976-), Azoilda Loretto da Trindade (1957-2015) and Leda Maria Martins (1955-) from Brazil; and the term contra-colonial studies, coined by Antonio Bispo (1959-), nicknamed Nego Bispo, in his book *Colonização, Quilombos: Modos e Significações* (2015). There is also the radical black North American theory associated with Hortense J. Spillers (1942-), Sylvia Wynter (1928-), Saidiya Hartman (1992-), Fred Moten (1962-), Denise Ferreira da Silva (a Brazilian professor at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice at the University of British Columbia), Frank B. Wilderson III (1956-); and to cite a few names from the field of gender and sexuality studies which greatly amplify the practice of unlearning imperialism.: Paul B. Preciado (1970-), Jota Mombaça (1991-) and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004).



of wandering monks, adventurers and beggars. “Sufis, consider the search for self-knowledge and a constant questioning leading to an understanding of the divine to be really necessary. So, *firâsa* makes it possible to doubt oneself and everything besides” (Leandro; Passos, 2021, p. 10). In any case, Ginzburg associates himself superficially with the concept of *firâsa*, which connects directly to Allah, without adequate consideration of the various aspects of religiosity linked to Sufism<sup>28</sup> within the Islamic world. For Ginzburg (1990, p. 124-125), “No one learns to be a connoisseur or diagnostician by restricting himself to practicing only preexistent rules. In knowledge of this type imponderable elements come into play: instinct, insight, intuition.” Perhaps he lacked a little foresight here due to a certain enchantment arising from the concept of *firâsa* itself as a state of deep knowledge originating in the ability to penetrate the meaning of existence. When considering the “low intuition” present in *firâsa*, which “binds the human animal closely to other animal species” (Ginzburg, 1990, p. 125), he also does so without adequate problematization.



Portrait of a Sufi,  
first quarter of the seventeenth century.  
Thought to be from Bijapur, Deccan, India.  
Ink, gouache and gold on paper.  
Dimensions: 39 x 26.3 cm (total)  
and 13.5 x 22.5 cm (painting).  
Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

On the other hand, if “operating with *firâsa* is to realize that there is space in the narration for contradictions”, as Leandro and Passos (2021, p. 11) state, one can look at Ginzburg’s

<sup>28</sup> See Mário Alves da Silva Filho’s Masters’ dissertation, *A Mística Islâmica em Terræ Brasilis: o Sufismo e as Ordens Sufis em São Paulo* (2012) mentioned in Delano de Jesus Silva Santos’ article, *A espiritualidade de Maomé no Sufismo*: <https://seer.pucgoias.edu.br/index.php/caminhos/article/view/6956/3975>; and Carlos Frederico Barboza de Souza’s article, *O Sufismo como dimensão mística do Islã*: <https://periodicos.pucminas.br/index.php/horizonte/article/view/528/555>.

observation with a certain positive balance. In their article, *The Evidentiary Paradigm for the Analysis of Narratives* (2021) they unravel imponderable structural, isomorphic and image-filled elements to understand the construction of narratives by analyzing educational processes. It is interesting how they elaborate a referential framework with the narrative at its center, surrounded by all of these elements plus *firâsa*. Within its ambit we can read: “acute awareness of the researcher’s ignorance; to strip oneself of preconceived formulations, abandon prejudices, search for the key to interpretation, the unknown that suggests the dialogue, the need for the source to be sui generis, to be startled – to find habits strange and, finally, to identify conscious allusions and lapses” (Leandro and Passos, 2021, p. 25) or, in the words of Ginzburg (1990, p. 96) “to break out of the fruitless opposition between “rationalism” and “irrationalism”. Overcoming this confrontation seems to be the great difficulty in unlearning imperialism and, consequently, dismantling the insistent copy by means of which the identity of a sick or criminal person continues to be that which has been marginal to the Eurocentric system from the beginning of the colonial enterprise.

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