

Introduction

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1. The publication on *Cromohs* of Carlo Ginzburg's lecture "Some Queries Addressed to Myself"¹ and of his essay "Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today",² which formed the basis of one of the central discussions at the first edition of **InteR-La⁺b** in the first instance affords me the opportunity to thank Carlo Ginzburg warmly for his thoughtful contributions and also to explain the essence of InteR-La⁺b, which Carlo grasped immediately, giving it his full support and also involving some of his junior research associates, who made a remarkable contribution.

2. The first edition of **InteR-La⁺b** (the International Interdisciplinary Research Laboratory of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences and the Balzan Foundation) was held in Rome at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei on 12–13 November 2012, just before the 2012 Balzan Foundation Awards ceremony (Rome, 14–15 November 2012).³ The InteR-La⁺b project arose from a proposal and a draft programme that I submitted to the Balzan Foundation "Prize", which, after its approval, was further refined by the Joint Commissions of the International Balzan Foundation "Prize", the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. With InteR-La⁺b 2012 the three institutions set up a series of interdisciplinary laboratories with the aim of promoting academic and scientific cooperation between "natural" and "moral" scientific disciplines – in their theoretical and empirical aspects – and among researchers at different stages of scientific and scholarly seniority who have previously cooperated in academic initiatives at one or other of the three institutions involved.

3. The basic idea inspiring the initiative is that mutual exchange is mutually productive and beneficial for scientific progress. This aspect was stressed in my opening speech as Chairman of the Joint Commissions, in which I observed – following the view of many others – that ideas migrate along many different paths: across time from one age to another, across space from different countries, across cultural domains. Indeed the migration of ideas is a very complex and not fully understood phenomenon, as it often encompasses many types of transfers – intellectual, scientific and technological discoveries among people in the same age and over different historical periods, thus generating unexpected combinations and

¹ The paper first appeared in *Premi Balzan 2010* (Milan). It was reissued on the occasion of a Balzan Lecture given by Carlo Ginzburg at the Carnegie Institution for Science, Washington, on 5 October 2011, co-hosted with the Embassies of Italy and Switzerland in Washington. This latter revised version has been republished on *Cromohs* 18 (2013), with the permission of the author and of the Balzan Foundation.

² First published in *Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, ed. by Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 97–119. It has been republished on *Cromohs* 18 (2013) with the permission of the author, the editors, and Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

³ <http://www.balzan.org/upload/programmaInteRLab.pdf>

encounters. Creativity is dependent not only on individual research endeavours but also on the interaction with social and cultural life, in which ideas can be absorbed from sources other than one's own specialized field. We then use those ideas consciously or unconsciously as elements of an intellectual and material scaffolding that enables us to tap into unexplored possibilities. All this can be better developed when a community of scholars gathers to discuss a common topic.

4. The structure and founding principles of IinteR-La⁺b are unique, and required a considerable period of time to take shape and come to fruition. The choice was for two full days of work, the first to be dedicated to the Humanities and Social Sciences (or Moral Sciences) and the second to the Natural, Engineering and Medical Sciences. Both days were organized in two sessions. The seminars in the morning concerned theoretical issues, while the ones in the afternoon dealt with empirical aspects. In each session, the invited speaker, a former Balzan Prize Winner, introduced the issue in a presentation, then followed three discussants' responses. The first discussant was a senior scholar, while the other two were young scholars, thus fulfilling the aim of IinteR-La⁺b to foster intergenerational dialogue. To tie things up, a roundtable, coordinated by a chairman, was organized with all the participants (8 academics, 22 young researchers), plus some members of the Joint Commissions and the Balzan General Prize Committee. Papers (either published or unpublished) written by the invited speakers on the chosen issue were circulated among the participants before the seminars in order to facilitate discussion.

5. The invited speaker for the Humanities for the first edition was Carlo Ginzburg, Emeritus Professor of the History of European Culture at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, corresponding member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and 2010 Balzan Prizewinner for the History of Europe (1400–1700). In the morning session, Ginzburg discussed relevant issues examined in the paper “Some Queries Addressed to Myself”, a brief intellectual biography prepared on the occasion of the 2010 Balzan Foundation Awards ceremony held in Rome. The debate, chaired by Marjan Schwegman, Director of the Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies (NIOD) in Amsterdam, Professor in the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University and member of the Balzan General Prize Committee, included contributions from Lina Bolzoni, Professor of Italian Literature at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, Global Distinguished Professor at New York University and member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, and the two junior discussants, both participants in the Balzan Research Project supervised by Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Tarantino (Research Fellow in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions at the University of Melbourne) and Lucio Biasiori (Research Fellow in Early Modern History at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa).

In the afternoon session, entitled “Experiments”, Prof. Ginzburg gave a talk that updated the reflections expounded in both “Our Words, and Theirs. A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today,” a chapter published in *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (2012), and “Schema and Bias. A Historian's Reflection on Double-Blind Experiments,” a *Lectio Magistralis* delivered on the occasion of the Balzan Prize Announcement in Milan in November 2011. The discussion, chaired by Marjan Schwegman, was opened by the scheduled senior discussant, Prof. Paolo Galluzzi, Director of the Galileo Museum – Institute and Museum of the History of

Science. Then it was the turn of the two junior discussants, Tullio Viola, PhD student at the Humboldt University in Berlin, and Matteo Borri, researcher at the University of Geneva and a participant in Paolo Rossi Monti's Balzan Research Project. Both sessions were followed by questions and comments from all the participants of the meeting.

6. The second day of IinteR-La⁺b followed the same format, with Paolo De Bernardis as invited speaker. He is Professor of Physics at the Università La Sapienza, Rome, corresponding member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and Balzan Prizewinner 2006. In the morning session, Prof. De Bernardis provided a tutorial introduction to the main observations supporting the current cosmological model. In the afternoon session, he presented a number of key astronomical observations that have shaped cosmologists' understanding of the universe over different time spans.