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Abstract:

Digitization has usually been considered a facilitator of what has been called "big" history. While digital history projects increasingly make good and sensitive use of individual and granular records and use them to bring human complexity into a larger analysis, the digitization of published material and archives have mostly been discussed by historians in aggregate: they are valued chiefly for their ability to give us "big data" about phenomena in the past. Yet for those interested in questions and methodologies of microhistory, biographical history, history from below, and other kinds of what we might call "small" history, the digitization of archives and individual records is an equally transformative development. This article will examine the way that digitization has changed how historians discover, concatenate and communicate small stories in their narratives and arguments. I will consider the practice and the ethics of telling and digitizing individual histories and suggest some different ways of dealing with the new boundaries—and boundlessness—that the "mass digitized turn" throws up, particularly for historians working in the period after 1800. Finally, amidst an increased emphasis on digitization and big data in the field of history, I want to

assert the continuing power of all kinds of small histories to explain the past and to connect it to our present, and ourselves.

Article:

“The Emmet’s Inch, The Eagle’s Mile

Make Lamé Philosophy to Smile”

-William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence”

Digitization has usually been considered a facilitator of what has been called “big” history. While digital history projects increasingly make good and sensitive use of individual and granular records, and use them to bring human complexity into larger analysis,¹ the digitization of published material and archives have mostly been discussed by historians in aggregate: they are valued chiefly for their ability to give us “big data” about phenomena in the past.² For most historians, digitization means that we can see connections, trends, change over time, and potential causations more quickly, more completely, and more convincingly than ever before. We can write longer histories, broader histories. Digitization is reconfiguring the work of historians who work on big questions in the long durée.

Yet for those interested in questions and methodologies of microhistory, biographical history, and other kinds of what we might call ‘small’ history, the digitization of archives and individual records is an equally transformative development. With digitized historical records now numbering in the billions, and with increasing sophistication of search technologies and machine learning, we have more and more ability to know the lives of individuals in history, even those who were humble, marginal, and obscure. We are facing a deluge of easily accessible, easily connectable, individuated human records, and with it a serious, if largely unacknowledged, challenge to the previous methods we have used to keep the boundlessness of history in check. As Lara Putnam points out in a recent article, while digital historians have been reflecting on how digitization changes the way we research and communicate history for some time, the reality is that all historians have had their work transformed by digitization. Putnam’s path-breaking article traces this transformation and the serious problems it creates in transnational history, and she argues that “theorizing this mass ‘digitized turn’, is urgent.”³

This article will contribute to Putnam’s urgent call for a more carefully theorized “mass digitized turn” by thinking about my own border-crossing research: a global

microhistory of sex trafficking told through the stories of individuals connected to one transnational case of “white slavery” in 1910. I will examine the way that historians have used small histories and have incorporated individuals into their narratives, and suggest how digitization can change how historians discover, concatenate and communicate small stories. As a historian writing from the perspective of someone not trained in “digital history”, I will consider the practice and the ethics of telling and digitizing individual histories and suggest some different ways of dealing with the new boundaries—and boundlessness—that “the mass digitized turn” throws up, particularly for historians working in the period after 1800. Finally, amidst the increasing emphasis on digitization and big data within the field of history, I want to assert the continuing power of all kinds of small histories to explain the past and to connect it to our present, and ourselves.

The Oldest Narrative Trick of the Bourgeoisie

“The whore and gambler by the state

Licensed weave that nation’s fate”

-William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence”

We frequently turn to William Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence” when we cast about for metaphors for microhistory. “To see the world in a grain of sand”, goes the oft-quoted first line. It appears to simply and concisely capture the popular methodology of asking big questions of small things.⁴ However, this metaphor fails to adequately capture not only debates within the practice of microhistory itself, but also the way in which Blake’s metaphors and paradoxes that pepper the original poem speak to much wider methodological issues within history.⁵ Blake’s poem—originally a series of couplets written in no particular order—is also deeply concerned with the ethics of the way we treat the voiceless and the powerless; the tensions between different scales and experiences; the juxtaposition of knowledge and ignorance, and the interconnectedness of the world. A starving dog seals the fate of his master; grief is entangled with joy; the emmet—an old word that my grandmother still uses for an ant—can see an inch; the eagle, a mile.

The question of the “emmet’s inch” is an enduring one, affecting social and cultural historians who identify as microhistorians, as well as those who do not.⁶ How do we answer

big historical questions using (in the case of microhistory) one individual (or one event, or one small town), when we know that the individual herself—the “exceptional normal” person who tells us about their wider world—could never see beyond their own experience?⁷ How do we explain large historical trends while also keeping individual agency in sight?⁸ How do we turn the small examples we deploy in social and cultural history into evidence for wider trends? And, as microhistorian Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon asks, should we do such a thing? Or does making our individuals into exemplars—grains of sand—in which we can ‘see the world’ do a disservice to them; does it mean that social history has failed in its fundamental aim “to make ordinary people the subject of history on their own terms”?⁹ Magnússon argues that the only way forward is to “singularize” our accounts of people in the past and to stop trying to contextualize them, to make them part of a “bigger picture”.¹⁰

Jill Lepore examines this debate in a different light when she contrasts microhistory and historical biography, arguing that where microhistory sees its subjects as worthy only in that they are exemplary, historical biography is drawn to them for their singularity.¹¹ This perspective is further developed in work on “the biographical turn” in history, but for the most part history and historical biography are seen as separate projects.¹² Historical biography also continues to choose for its subjects those who, if not always famous or well-known, have left significant sources behind.

The recent turn to global or “far reaching” microhistory has renewed debates about our narrative tricks and devices for those who are thought to be largely unknowable. Tonio Andrade sees the early modern Chinese farmer he writes about as an accident of the historical record, a “fly pressed between the pages” of a history written by the more powerful, and goes on to reiterate the farmer’s insignificance except when seen as part of a bigger account: “his story is useful not so much because it is significant in itself but because it offers a glimpse into another world.”¹³ Jean-Paul Ghobrial sees a problem with this technique. “In our rush to populate global history with human faces”, he writes, we risk making them “little more than panes of glass through which to view the worlds in which they lived.”¹⁴ The problem global microhistory faces is compounded by its sheer scale: how do we do justice to the emmets of the world on their own terms, but also engage in analysis that speaks to the wider historical concerns of global history?

The debate over the way we can use individual or small stories to find answers to wider historical questions continues to animate microhistorians, but these debates reach well beyond microhistorical or biographical methodologies. Indeed, it is for this reason that the article bears the subtitle ‘small history’ rather than “microhistory” in a digital age. In all

social and cultural history, the quest to restore agency to and understand the experience of individuals and groups in the past is in tension with the desire to understand larger historical processes and structures. And whether they are the focus of the research or the subject of an illuminating paragraph, individuals, in the hands of most historians, become devices; cyphers; symbols of wider concerns; windows through which we view their worlds.

Prostitutes, the subject of my own research, seem to be particularly susceptible to this allegorisation. To Blake, the state-licensed “whore” “weaves the nation’s fate”; to historian William Lecky the prostitute was “the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of her people”.¹⁵ For a much later historian, Timothy Gilfoyle, prostitutes are “metaphors of modernity”.¹⁶ It is an apt description. One does not have to read very far into the historiography to see that prostitution, and trafficking as well, tends to be viewed as a symbol of supposedly larger or wider issues: the control of women’s sexuality, the growth of the bureaucracy of crime control, the regulation of public health and public space, the encroachment of modernity, the rise of internationalism, the battles of feminism, the practise and impact of colonialism.¹⁷ Of course, prostitution is not the only phenomenon about which such things might be said. Caroline Steedman wryly refers to this technique as “the oldest narrative trick of the bourgeoisie: to evoke the sufferings of the poor to tell some other kind of tale”.¹⁸

More significantly for the case I am making here, when the social experiences of women working in the sex industry are discussed within histories of prostitution, this becomes the defining category through which the individual who we have plucked from the archive is understood. Historians have routinely claimed that women who sold sex were not necessarily defined by their prostitution, that they were other things: community members, domestic servants, migrants, mothers, daughters, and lovers.¹⁹ And yet, in every account we have of them, they appear primarily, usually *only*, as prostitutes. This is true whether the subject is examined microhistorically or in a longer or larger context, and extends to many other histories of criminals, the poor, and other marginalized people. They are viewed through the category that the archives (and subsequently we) have assigned them.

I am as guilty of this as anyone. I first introduced the people about whom I am now writing a global microhistory through a brief anecdote in my first book. In a few short pages, I relayed a story about two “notorious traffickers in women”, whose real names were Antonio Carvelli and Alexander Di Nicotera, who both came from northern Italy. These men had gotten their start pimping in Australia and New Zealand, and in early 1910 had recruited three teenage girls from France, and one from New Zealand, to sell sex on the streets of London

and Buenos Aires. They did so with the help of two women who had worked for them as prostitutes in the antipodes. The two men were prosecuted as “white slavers”, imprisoned for six months, and then deported to Italy. Their two female accomplices steamed out of London and escaped arrest. The four young women were repatriated to France and New Zealand. I ended the chapter with a brief vignette about Lydia Harvey, the youngest victim, on a steamship bound for Wellington: it was the last glimpse I caught of her in the archive. Overall, this anecdote helped to narrate and evidence a chapter that was primarily concerned with the way in which foreign prostitution and sex trafficking was defined, policed, and experienced in London in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰

When I first told Lydia Harvey’s story in a few short pages, it was to evoke her extreme suffering at the hands of her trafficker so that I could tell a tale about the way that migrant prostitution was policed in London. I still stand by my arguments, of course: Harvey’s story does encapsulate the way that the modern State, purportedly so concerned with protecting victims of trafficking, was more inclined to punish them instead. But it was also a narrative trick. Concerned with promoting this argument, I held the fragments I knew about her life (gleaned from the police archive file in which I found her) hostage to the narrative I needed to construct. In one sentence, I catapulted her from the year she was born into the job at which she was working when she was recruited into sex work. The rest of her story was centered entirely around this experience. When her ship left the East India Docks in November of 1910, I did not follow her. In my story (and it was *my* story) she became one of the many “prostitutes” whose brief anecdotes enriched the analysis and (I hope at least) added meaningful details to a book that was “about prostitution”. Throughout the book, other women like Harvey appeared and then disappeared in similar ways; here as an example that proved a rule; there as an exception to a trend.

I did this, and most social and cultural historians do similar things, in part because I believed that there was little more I could discover about these women; that I had caught a “glimpse” of a marginalized person who was “caught like a fly” between the pages of a larger archive. In her book *Imperfect Histories*, Ann Rigney notes the importance of anecdotes in communicating the unknowability of history, especially when discussing the vast majority of people who have left few, or no, ego documents behind. These people, as Rigney points out, “can only incidentally be revealed, in a negative way, by anecdotes or *faits divers* in which the normally hidden routine is for some reason disrupted and hence recorded. The ‘glimpse’ becomes a methodological principle”²¹

Our ability to discover anything at all about the obscure, humble and marginalized individuals in the past inspires fascination. As John Arnold writes, “there is little more seductive in social history than the promise of access to the ‘voices’ of those normally absent from the historical record.” But this fascination, this seduction, always exists in productive tension with our *inability* to discover everything about them. “About Menocchio we know many things,” Ginzburg writes in that famous work of microhistory, *The Cheese and the Worms*. “About this Marcato, or Marco—and so many others like him who lived and died without leaving a trace—we know nothing”.²² “Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Hu,” writes Jonathan Spence in another example, “is that we know anything about him at all”.²³ The boundlessness of the past has always been kept in check not only by the boundedness of the archive and library, but by our own cognitive and physical abilities to identify, search, collect and connect records. This, argues Rigney, is where history meets the sublime—where historians admit the limitations of their ability to know, comprehend and represent a boundless past. So, what happens now that our ability to chase so many people out of the bounded archive has become so much greater, faster, and finer grained?

Running the Whole Universe through a Machine

“Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour”

-William Blake “Auguries of Innocence”

Proving, perhaps, that historians make for terrible prophets, Lawrence Stone wrote in his seminal 1979 article “The Revival of Narrative” that “we all know of the doctoral dissertations which languish unfinished since the researcher has been unable to keep under intellectual control the sheer volume of print-out spewed out by the computer...One clear conclusion is surely that, whenever possible, sampling by hand is preferable and quicker than, and just as reliable as, running the whole universe through a machine.”²⁴

Cliometrics—the technique, lampooned here by Stone, of using computer algorithms to analyse quantitative historical data—has faded into historiographical obscurity (or, at least, into economics departments). But nearly forty years on from the time of Stone’s article, the fact that computers make it is quicker and easier to find and process large amounts of historical data can surely brook few arguments. Making at least some use of digital and computational resources for history has become the status quo, for established researchers

and graduate students alike, and increasingly for undergraduates as well. It has, in Putnam's words, become "easy" and "quotidian".²⁵

The developments over the past four, let alone forty, years are dizzying. Digitized printed primary sources—books, pamphlets, periodicals—now number in the billions. Closely related is the mass digitization of newspapers: from Australia and New Zealand's immense digitization of almost all their national and local newspapers, to the creation of digital archives for individual publications (most famously and problematically, *The Times*).²⁶ The digitization of manuscript, unpublished, and unprinted archival material is following hot on the heels of these initiatives. The greatest push has been the digitization of what we could characterize as individuated archival records: birth, marriage, and death registrations; immigration records, criminal records, and other similar material that are searchable by name. A growing number of for-profit, non-profit, and academic initiatives are digitizing specific collections, such as the Old Bailey Online, which hosts almost 200,000 trial records. Ancestry.com, the private company that runs the world's largest genealogical database, boasts twenty billion individual records, with two million being added to the site every single day. This site is joined by many others: Find My Past, Family Search, Find a Grave, and more, which together make up what is increasingly being referred to as "the family history industry".²⁷

The digitization of sources, coupled with new technologies with which to process, interpret and communicate them, is transforming the way we do history and the kind of history we can do. And yet, Stone's comments about the challenges of keeping this kind of data under "intellectual control" remain apt. Even the most technophile writer on digital history often refers to the feeling of having a vertiginous number of sources at their fingertips. Google's mass digitization of printed material has meant that even historians and classicists who worked with a (relatively) limited source base find themselves asking "what do you do with a million books?"²⁸ Individual researchers are daunted by their "10,000 digital notecards", lost in "a sea of information", searching "a digital haystack", dealing with "gaps of excess", and with—a compelling term coined by William Turkel—"an infinite archive".²⁹ As Daniel J. Cohen argued in a recent *Journal of American History* Interchange on digital history, "It is now quite clear that historians have to grapple with abundance, not scarcity."³⁰

For most historians who consider these issues, confronting abundance has meant thinking big. "What is desperately needed," wrote Armitage and Guildi in their provocative *History Manifesto*, "is a training capable of weaving [data] together into one inter-related

fabric of time.”³¹ Digitization, for them, is a tool best used in service to big history and the “long durée”. While digital historiographers acknowledge that data does not always need to take the form of statistics or quantitative research, their focus is still on big history.³² There is a call for new techniques of “distant reading” of an enormous number of sources to replace the “close reading” of a limited number of sources, and for a new “hermeneutics of data” in history that experiments with novel ways of communicating big and abundant data to audiences.³³ Digital history, claim its advocates, also calls into serious question the most common ways that historians have been using small stories. “Digital history and the abundance it tries to address make many historical arguments seem anecdotal rather than comprehensive,” commented Steven Mintz in the *Journal of American History* discussion. The ability to quickly find thousands of stories has made the selective use of anecdote and example intellectually dubious.³⁴ Some have passed over close reading altogether. Harking back to the cliometrics of several decades ago, a group of evolutionary biologists, social scientists, and computer scientists (among others) devised a project they called “culturomics”, in which algorithms used google Ngrams and other digital book resources to process enormous amount of data to analyse cultural and social trends over time.³⁵

This, and other forms of “cultural analytics” have many historians raising their eyebrows. Tim Hitchcock, who was one of the lead historians on two of the most successful and ambitious archive digitization projects in the past decade, remains sceptical and reflective about big data’s potential. As he argues in his critique of “Culturomics”, many digital scholars have fallen victim to the “Casaubon delusion”; and believe, like George Eliot’s tragic figure, that they can create a new “Key to all Mythologies”. More broadly, Hitchcock worries that a discourse of digitization that focuses solely on “big data”, pushes out humanist perspectives in favour of social scientific ones.³⁶ Like Putnam, he feels that historians need to be far more reflective on how digitization is changing the way we work, and far quicker to defend our particular and humanist way of understanding the past against the tide of cultural analytics. Long before the advent of digital methods, Ginzburg and other microhistorians argued that historical query is not particularly well suited to big data—it is an epistemology that values “richer knowledge in which instinct and intuition are at work”.³⁷ And yet, there is still a prevailing sense that without “big” history, all we have will be “trivial history” made from (now digital) “trifles”.³⁸

The conversation grows ever more urgent. Gaps of excess, scarcity, knowability, and representability are being dramatically reconfigured, virtually daily, by digitization projects. This has allowed “culturomics” to spot sweeping trends, but just as—if not more—

importantly for historians, it has also given us the tools to create, in Hitchcock's words, "a more useable history from below made of lives knowable only through small fragments of information", because it allows us to find out so much more information, so much more quickly. Means we are able, as Hitchcock puts it, to "radically contextualize" individuals by exploring the multiple archival contexts in which they appear or are represented. Using different kinds of data and more data, we can tell fuller stories about people who have previously been considered lost, virtually unknowable, glimpsed fleetingly, invisible to history.³⁹

Menocchio, in Ginzburg's words, was "a dispersed fragment, reaching us by chance, of an obscure and shadowy world".⁴⁰ For modern historians especially but increasingly for early modern ones as well, digitization means that the origin of these fragments has changed. Some of them still reach us, that is, find their way to the archive, by chance. But others—especially the individuated records upon which my new project rests—reach us because of systematic efforts on the part of the modern state to count, monitor, and register every individual in their jurisdiction and beyond. They reach the digitized archive again not by chance, but through the careful, systematized, but still biased and uneven process of digital resource creation. And they reach us—the make their way to our computer screens—because of search algorithms, a far more sophisticated fragment-catching net than historians have ever before had at their disposal. Digital history illuminates small details within complex contexts at great speed.

We catch many more glimpses. We can see more traces. It means we can find more clues. We do not have more information—the gone is still gone—but we have more access to that information, and thus more potential to have knowledge. It is simply not enough to say that digitization allows for a historical research that is bigger, faster, and finer grained, as though this will just augment the kind of history already being done. It is crucial for historians to start thinking more carefully about the relationship between the data and sources now digitally available and way we use evidence to tell the stories of individuals and groups in the past. Whereas we could once attempt to radically contextualize those who had serendipitously left some meaty trace behind we can now, if we are modernists, do it for a much larger portion of the world's population. The potential to be able to place individuals within the fuller context of their own lives is being dramatically improved and we must prepare to be more regularly astonished at the people who we will be able to find in the past.

A global history of sex trafficking in six lives

I first found the people whose lives I am writing about together in a court room, at a trial that was the denouement of the criminal investigation that forms the bulk of MEPO 3/197, a Metropolitan Police File on the trafficker Antonio Carvelli's activities in London in the spring of 1910. Scanning this original file for clues that could lead to other sources about them, I have been able to reconstruct their lives, and the story of their involvement with trafficking, before and after the spring of 1910. There was the trafficker himself, Antonio Carvelli, born in Turin in 1879, who worked as a musician, a translator, and as a shipping agent, while also defrauding and exploiting young women. He was joined by his wife and accomplice, Veronique White, an Australian who left home at nineteen, travelled the world by steamship, and worked in the burgeoning global sex trade. There is also Lydia Harvey, one of his young victims, who had agreed to join the Carvellis in Buenos Aires, because she had "always wanted to travel".⁴¹ These individuals' stories are set alongside those of PC William Mead and PC George Nicholls, the men who arrested them in London, Eilidh MacDougall, the woman who ran the refuge to which the victims were sent, and William Coote, the moral reform campaigner who mobilized the case to press for legal change.⁴²

For each of these individuals, the case, and trafficking itself, meant something dramatically different, and I resolved that writing the story of the Carvelli case from each of their perspectives would be the best way to build an argument that purposely destabilized the meaning of "trafficking" by examining it within other personalized experiences of migration, exploitation and work. Writing this global microhistory has involved using the various techniques of historical biography, and, not least, family history, as I scour ancestry websites, piecing together traces of the lives of my individuals. I deploy nominal record linkage made possible by digitization to follow them beyond (before, after, alongside) the archive file in London in which I first found them. The very recent mass digitization of primary sources—census and immigration records, newspapers, criminal records, and more—is what makes this approach possible. This is, perhaps, a slightly controversial statement, because these methodologies, and these sources, are in many ways no different from the way microhistorians have been working for years. And yet, I would never have considered—nor been able to—write the book I am writing even ten years ago.

When I resolved to chase my historical actors off the archive page upon which I first found them, I had no idea how much or how little I would be able to find. Some of the clues were found in traditional archives in a traditional way—a family address discovered on a

crumbling sheet of paper in the Turin state archives, for instance, that was located using a hand-written index.⁴³ Others were discovered through various kinds of digital sources and databases: this is especially true of the wide use I've made of digitized newspapers that are—with significant shortcomings—character searchable. I found the trafficker Antonio Carvelli and his accomplices in archive files from Australia and New Zealand that had not only been digitally catalogued, but also scanned and available online and accessible anywhere.⁴⁴ I charted his various incarnations through advertisements, society pages, and crime reports in Victorian and Western Australian newspapers that had been digitized by Australia's Trove project. From my home in Cambridge, I watch him get arrested for stealing a violin in Sydney in 1901.⁴⁵ From my office in London, I see him offer Greek and Latin lessons in Perth in 1906 and win a bocce game in Fremantle the following year. I can hear the banter between him and his rival that was reported in full by the local sports correspondent; I can imagine the taste of the claret and frittata they enjoyed after the match.⁴⁶ Without this resource, in order to learn how his life as a criminal was fundamentally entangled with his endeavours as a businessman and his experience as an Italian émigré, I would have had to go through hundreds of issues of over twenty different newspapers issue by issue. I would have had to do this in person at each individual state archives, searching for material that would never have been indexed, all the while without knowing whether I would find anything at all. It would, in sum, have been impossible. Or as Putnam puts it, “for the first time, historians can find without knowing where to look.”⁴⁷

Even more impossible would have been my search for Carvelli's wife, who had not been arrested during the 1910 investigation (she had slipped out of the country with her pet parrot and another young woman in tow). She was known in this case only by her pseudonym and left no significant presence in the original archive file. I was not sure I would be able to find her at all. But after I discovered her real name by puzzling through a mis-transcribed online marriage certificate, I was able to start to connect her string of pseudonyms and global travels. Propelled by the power of her unique name after she had married, I was able to use ancestry.com's digitization of Australian and New Zealand immigration records, as well as New Zealand's Papers Past project to chart Veronique Carvelli's movements around the world for three decades (newspapers reported shipping information daily in this period, including passengers who alit at various ports).⁴⁸ Zooming down to the most micro of levels on ancestry.com, I could see the original scanned passenger manifests and note who she was travelling with—often her husband, passing by a different name.⁴⁹ The time and money these

searches through British, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and Italian records would have cost me would have made this unfathomable without digitization.

But most of my clues and glimpses came not purely from traditional sources, nor purely from digitized ones, but from the combination of both. Digital searches across multiple library and archive platforms in various countries meant that I could identify faint trails of breadcrumbs that I could follow into physical archives, allowing me to take what would have once been a very time-consuming and expensive risk—checking “just in case”—with substantially more chance of finding something. Had my online searches of the digitized birth records of her potential siblings and one oblique mention of a truancy charge in in the *Oamaru Mail* not suggested to me where I might find Lydia Harvey’s father, I could never have justified travelling to the New Zealand National Archives in Dunedin to scour the magistrates court records of her hometown in the 1890s. The massive public and private investment in digitization reduces the individual investment and risk-taking required to write about marginalized lives.

Ginzburg and other microhistorians tend to describe their practice as “the intense study of a few revealing documents”, and even iconoclast microhistorians like Magnússon claim that it is only possible to write microhistories about individuals using a cache of good ego-documents.⁵⁰ I disagree. Digitization means that my book project can rest on the intense study of hundreds if not thousands of documents, which on their own usually reveal extremely little. Digitization provides innumerable amounts of what Giovanni Levi has called “disorderly evidence for the words and deeds of daily life”⁵¹ It means that I am able to write microhistories of individuals in the absence of ego documents: only one of my historical actors, the moral reformer William Coote, left any sort of biographical or ego-document behind. Of course, this means that these stories will lack interiority and voice, those coveted sources that have been used to bring the long dead to life. But they will not lack richness, detail, context and agency. Most of all, these digitized sources allow me to write about these people as complex individuals rather than as brief examples for the first time.

The voicelessness of the sources I am using means that Lydia Harvey remains an absence, just the same. I cannot know what she thought or felt. I am almost certainly missing some important relationships in her life: friendship, for example, so often escapes the historical record. But I can see her in myriad contexts: sneaking out of her boarding house’s bedroom window and heading to downtown Wellington at night; standing on board the SS *Rehuens* enroute to Buenos Aries; travelling to Australia as a mariner’s wife; struggling for breath in an emergency influenza hospital. Again, historians have used such methods before

with physical records. When trying to imagine her indentured great grandmother's journey from India to Guyana through only scant sources, Gaiutra Bahudar wondered "if I draw an imaginary line from moment to moment...from glimpse to glimpse...will her shape emerge?"⁵² Assuming the sources are there in the first place, digitization provides the means to triangulate them rapidly, overlaying tiny details and glimpses like computed tomography scan, to build a picture of someone who never attested for themselves. It helps me narrow the space from which Lydia Harvey is missing until it almost takes her shape.

This process cannot happen without a two-tiered approach. One of Putnam's major critiques of our use of digitized technology in transnational history is the way that it allows us to find out without going anywhere, without encountered real spaces and real people, and without gaining any real depth of local knowledge. There was no need for me to go to Australia, New Zealand, or Italy, technically speaking. Digital technology meant that archive files could be ordered and, for a fee, delivered to my inbox. Skype calls could have enabled me to speak to experts. Google earth could have helped me trace old addresses. And yet, my research experiences there were irreplaceable online. Only by walking through the streets could I appreciate the palimpsests of cityscapes and the embodied sense of being somewhere: the cool breezes on Oamaru's beach; the heat and humidity of a Newcastle autumn. But even here, digitization gave me more transparencies to overlay: I could carry a tablet through the streets of Wellington, matching modern streets with those at the turn of the last century; seeing where old buildings used to be. In Melbourne, I charted the way a suburb expanded, in Turin, the way a family flat near the (then) new railway station was converted to a hotel. A kind of historical augmented reality, if you will.

All this has allowed me to build a radically contextualized picture of people about whom I thought I'd only ever catch fleeting glimpses. This methodology produces a social history that examines themes and people beyond conventional frames of reference, beyond the way in which the bounded archive forces us to label them "according to their conduct", or the category under which they had been filed.⁵³ Digitization takes a key tenet of microhistory, and arguably history more generally, that "life has never been straightforward and simple truths should be regarded with suspicion" and follows it to a newly possible conclusions.⁵⁴ Of course, I still had to decide which narratives to tell and how, but it was easier to make this complicated, to cast a wide net, to see the way that individuals defy (and often also comply) with categorizations and metanarratives.

The more common way to fill in the blanks in the life of a mostly unknown historical actor is to use the generalization, or proxy, method. If I did not have any other details, I could

say that Veronique Carvelli probably got involved in prostitution because she was from a poor family, had poor social support, and had a strong aversion to domestic service: most women who sold sex shared these experiences.⁵⁵ But this time, I do have the details. I can scour the Melbourne newspapers for information about her family; I can use google earth to examine the street where she grew up, facing one of Melbourne's finest parks; I can even use an online real-estate listing to see the rooms in her remarkably well-preserved late-nineteenth century family home, "Trafford". Using digital resources paired with long, hot walks around East Melbourne, I learned that Veronique was from a well-off and close family, grew up in a well-appointed house, never worked as a servant, and returned to live near her brothers and sisters at the end of her life in a leafy upper-middle-class neighbourhood. So much for generalization.

This failure of conjecture means that my stock character—the migrant prostitute—becomes a real person, with all the complications, contradictions, and idiosyncrasies human beings bring. Being able to find these details for many, many more people than we ever have before means that saying "we cannot know" and "we can only glimpse" loses methodological and rhetorical power. It is a useful technique, as I've noted; one that keeps the boundlessness of history in check and that justifies our tendency to write about individuals within the category or theme we have put them in (because it is where the archive has put them) and to use them as an example to evidence a wider trend. But this synecdoche of historical narration, as Hayden White would put it, needs to be reexamined.

We can now easily chase many people out of the archive, or at least, from one kind of archive into another, in which they appear under different categories. Antonio Carvelli appeared in the first archive file I found as a pimp and trafficker; he appears, much more briefly, in another (the Victoria Public Record Office record of incoming passengers) as a young émigré and opera singer.⁵⁶ Lydia Harvey appears in this same file as a destitute and ill young woman soliciting on the streets of Piccadilly; but in another place (the digitized newspaper from her hometown of Oamaru), she smiles on stage after winning a silver purse in a local beauty contest. In my first book, Lydia Harvey was deployed as symbol of one facet of prostitution. The irony of this became acute for me as I learned more about her life and discovered she had spent longer as a photographer's apprentice, a hospital matron, and a wife engaged in "domestic duties", than she had spent selling sex.

The speed at which I can now deploy traditional microhistory methodologies means that this method can be done not just for one but for (in the case of my book) six people. It allows me to construct a prismatic view of a complex phenomenon, to write a kind of history

in the round. I can massively expand the synchronic and diachronic connections between people, places and experience; an ability that makes digitization, as Putnam notes, particularly important for transnational and global historians. In this way digitization could enable a different kind of “total history”, one that does not seek one true, capacious story but captures as many competing stories as possible.⁵⁷ In other words, microhistory using digital research methods makes it easier to produce the kind of microhistory that Magnússon controversially calls for—singular accounts of individuals on their own terms. But it also means that we can still respond to larger challenges of significance, metanarrative, and big historical questions because it allows us to produce, quite quickly, relatively speaking, a collectivity of stories that help explain the big picture not by being exemplars of it or cyphers for it, but by being (in their number, their detail, and their connectivity) significant components of it.⁵⁸ When a phenomenon can only be fully explained by examining the small stories that defined it, or were defined by it, then those stories become significant, in and of themselves.

The age-old question of how to link small stories to a wider context is also being reshaped by digitization. Digitization complicates Revel’s “jeux d’echelles” by making it far easier to switch incrementally between scales of enquiry and perspective. When I go to place the small story of my historical actors into a wider context, the scales at my disposal have multiplied and the speed with which I can assess them has accelerated. To contextualize individuals, we can now not only consult more general accounts of the place they lived or the experience they had. Rather, we can now see what thousands of others like them were doing at the same time, chronologically and spatially. For instance, to understand what Veronique White was doing in Leonora, Western Australia during the later years of the gold rush (I found her here via Australia’s Trove project), I do not just read books about prostitution on gold rush frontiers (though of course I do this too). I can easily, and quickly, add another layer first: that of the town of Leonora itself, whose local newspapers have all been digitized and provide a guide to day-to-day life in this goldfields supply town in the early 1900s. I can examine all the brothels that were operating there and the women who worked in them; the aboriginal families and the Japanese migrants who lived as their neighbors on the same street; the debates in the raucous town halls about them. While discovering this kind of context was always possible, the time it would have taken for the sake of a few paragraphs of final text would have made the endeavor preposterous. Digitization provides us with a macroscope, as Tim Hitchcock describes, which, to disambiguate, is not the opposite of a microscope. The macroscope cannot only see big things, but rather has an infinite focus—it can show us the

very tiny and then show us where the tiny is in relation to the big, all within the blink of an eye.⁵⁹

No wonder vertigo appears to be a common sentiment amongst historians working in the digital age. “The [microhistorical] perspective contains something dizzying,” write Sabina Loriga in her work on biography and microhistory. “The work of contextualization appears inexhaustible (every space and all time refers to another space and another time).”⁶⁰ Loriga identifies two major issues that arise when we attempt to come to terms with this boundlessness. The first—the attempt to tell the “average” biography—is, as I hope I’ve shown, not of as much concern when one sacrifices a quest for “representativeness” for a quest for complication and multiplicity. But the solution to the first only makes the second—the desire to tell everyone’s biography—more acute. As Loriga puts it, this is a “utopian dead end” that will merely create a map of the world that is the same size and shape of the world itself. “We have to accept the circular nature of knowledge”, she writes, “to understand the whole, we have to understand the parts, but to understand these, we have to understand the whole.” In this, the digital microscope represents a crucial tool in the historian’s arsenal, that, if carefully configured, can help to reshape the way we think and work.

It is time to make the most of that opportunity, but in doing so we must, as microhistorians and transnational historians, attend to Lara Putnam’s enormous caveat about the pitfalls of “the mass digitized turn”. Who stands in the digital shadows? She insists we ask. Why are we finding what we are finding when we type into the search boxes? What does it leave out? What does it make possible, what does it discourage? And what gets lost when data becomes so accessible? Historians have long noted the risks of decontextualization that digitized archives create—we can’t see the files before and after the one our search engine spits out to us, we don’t appreciate the original order of things; we can’t be surprised by the other things we find in the box. Historians talk about reading against the grain of an archive or, as Marisa Fuentes does, along the “bias grain” in order to interrogate the way that it was created in the first place.⁶¹ But the digitization of individuated records—such as the ones on Ancestry.com upon which my book’s research so depends—erases the archive altogether, reducing resources created at particular moments by particular structures of power to a giant digital treasure hunt for hidden people. It may also help us forget that this treasure hunt itself comes with its own contexts, power structures, and ethical implications.

Historical Rescue Work

“A Truth that's told with bad intent
Beats all the Lies you can invent”
-William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence”

One of the six people in my microhistory is Eilidh MacDougall, an early social worker whose job it was to take statements from any victims of white slavery or sexual assault—including Lydia Harvey—who passed through Metropolitan Police station doors in the early twentieth century. She also ran a safe house where the victims in the Carvelli case were sent. The daughter of a prominent barrister, MacDougall came from a long and diverse tradition of “rescue work”, which ranged from the work of women religious in Magdalen asylums to “outdoor relief” workers who would speak to women they considered to be at moral risks in the streets, offering them support, advice, and potentially work in domestic service.⁶² Most rescue workers had at least two things in common: the desire to rescue women from a life of degradation and moral turpitude, and a lack of inclination to ask the women themselves if they needed rescuing.

Rescue is a metaphor often found in works of social history and microhistory. We return again and again to E.P. Thompson's exhortation to rescue the poor and marginalized from “the enormous condescension of posterity”. “The stories [historians] tell”, writes Joan Scott, “can make the difference between immortality and oblivion”; the historical equivalent, it seems, to salvation and damnation.⁶³ Carolyn Steedman claims that “if you have made a life for the dead and gone, then they can see you.”⁶⁴ Mark Salber Philips sees E.P. Thompson's initial plea for historians to “rescue” people in the past as part of the process of history becoming “the scholarship of truth and reconciliation, offering the dignity of narrative as compensation for lifetimes of oppression and exclusion”.⁶⁵ John Brewer has characterized the telling of small stories as doing “refuge” history, in which “the pleasures...derive from a sense of belonging, of connectedness.”⁶⁶ John Arnold is critical but sympathetic to this process whereby the historian seeks to rescue or resuscitate “the vibrant and empathetically appealing voice of a real, living individual”. It is, he admits, “a desire, ultimately, to cheat the silence of death”.⁶⁷

In this, historians have something in common with the group of people for whom most of the digitized, individuated records that I am using were created: family historians and genealogists. The yearning for knowledge about the history of our families is a new way of

reasserting family bonds, argues Deborah Cohen; a way to counter the fragmentation of families past and present.⁶⁸ This is a driver behind the world's largest non-profit genealogical database, run by the company FamilySearch, and owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The Mormons who run FamilySearch do so because they believe that the preservation of the family (conservatively conceived)—past and present—is a sacred mission, but their over 100 year-long dedication to genealogy is also related to their belief in “baptism for the dead.”⁶⁹ The Church insists that the dead are free to reject the baptism from “the spirit world” in which they reside, and that “the names of the deceased are not added to the membership of the church”. They are, however, added to FamilySearch.com.⁷⁰

I am often struck by the disconnect of using family history methods to research my book, each time ancestry.com asks me if I would like to add Antonio Carvelli, the pimp and trafficker to whom I almost certainly have no relation, to “my family tree”. Indeed, there are few refuges or comforts in my story.⁷¹ The stark fact is that one of my main characters defrauded a 17-year-old girl, coerced her into sex with him and with other men, and imprisoned her, first in a gonorrhoea and syphilis-ridden Buenos Aires brothel, then in a cabin of a transatlantic steamer, and finally in a north London flat. Another character, that 17-year old girl herself, in the rare moments that she speaks (under duress) into the archive, explicitly says that she wishes she could undo what had happened to her, that she wants to erase her experience of trafficking: “I wish I had never met them,” her witness statement concludes.⁷² Setting aside the potential performance of the deposition, I feel it is fairly safe to say that Harvey did sincerely wish to completely put her experience behind her. She successfully maintained her pseudonym when she returned to New Zealand, and her real name was never reported in the press. It is quite possible that even her husband never knew what had happened to her. Meanwhile, here I come, ready to rescue her from the condescension of posterity.

The word “rescue”, used so often in writing on finding the voices and actions of “forgotten” or “invisible” people in history is particularly striking in the context of prostitution. I recently, rather jarringly, realised that I could be said to be part of the “rescue industry”, much maligned by sex workers past and present.⁷³ Like these self-appointed saviours, I am marching into a situation that I do not have the full resources to understand, with my own agenda. Like William Coote, the early anti-trafficking campaigner from the wrong side of the Strand who used stories such as Lydia Harvey's to gain access to the drawing rooms of the rich and eminent, I am writing this story, at least partially, for my own

benefit. Like rescuers of prostitutes in the past and today, I have not asked Lydia Harvey whether she wanted to be saved.

Family history, like the rescue industry, is also big business. Their merchandise is the lives of the lost, marginalized, forgotten; their marketplace is the digital environment. Ancestry.com, the world's largest for-profit genealogical database, is an enormous company with many subsidiaries in countries around the world, and over a dozen spin-off products such as AncestryDNA and FindAGrave.com. In the first quarter of 2017, the company posted \$850,000 USD in profit, up 25% from the previous year. On Black Friday, 2016, they sold AncestryDNA kits to 560,000 online shoppers, about 15% of whom went on to subscribe to the database, pushing this number over 2 million.⁷⁴ And while companies like Ancestry and Find My Past, another for-profit genealogy database, commodify the search for small stories, many other companies use these small stories in their merchandizing. The easily accessible and publicly available records of individuals, especially their criminal records, have become useful marketing tools. For instance, 19 Crimes Wine, an Australian vintner, proudly displays the nineteenth century mugshots of convicts on their labels. "Our red blend bears the same traits as those banished to Australia," they explain. "Defiant by nature, bold in character. Always uncompromising." "Join the banished", the website invites its visitors, evoking the sufferings of the poor to sell some other kind of tale.⁷⁵

Historians also commodify individual lives. We use them to "tell some other kind of tale", in books and articles that feed into our academic appointments, our promotions, and, if we are lucky, our publishing revenue. Like family history, we also seek to find comforting connections and inspirational individuals in the past.⁷⁶ Alain Corbin is one of the few historians to have pondered this ethical issue in his microhistory, a biography of an unknown nineteenth century man from a small village in North West France. "May he forgive me for this fleeting resurrection, and for the various ways in which reader may, because of what I have written, imagine the man he was," he writes on the final page.⁷⁷ But of course, Corbin's "unknown", being dead, isn't able to forgive anything. Indeed, we frequently imagine our relationships with the dead-and-gone as bilateral, but most of the time, between historian rescuer and passive (aka, dead) historical subject, the relationship remains one-way. In Lydia Harvey's case, I am very struck by the unreciprocal and unreconciled intimacy of the archive.⁷⁸ I can scrutinize her, know very intimate details about her life, and she can never do the same for me, no matter how much of myself I pour into investigating her. In John Arnold's view, the historian isn't—or isn't always—a rescuer, so much as an inquisitor; a golem-builder; and even, provocatively, a necrophiliac.⁷⁹

Digitization compounds these old ethical and methodological issues and presents new ones. Because it enables us to construct the lives of marginalized people so much more easily than before, it also means that we are more inclined to use them and expose them in our histories. Indeed, we are now more likely to “rescue” the poor cottager than say, the census enumerator who first rendered him visible. We are more likely to give the biographical details of a prostitute than the policeman who arrested her, as though her past history is more important to her getting arrested than the police man’s past history is to arresting her. This is one of the reasons why my history of trafficking’s six lives includes those of the arresting officer, the rescue worker, and the anti-trafficking campaigner alongside the criminals and the victims.

Microhistorians have always been committed to, as Giovanni Levi puts it, “the search for a more realistic description of human behaviour...which recognizes [people’s] freedom beyond, though not outside, the constraints of prescriptive and oppressive normative systems.”⁸⁰ But no matter how many sources we digitize, the vast majority of these will still be created by the powerful, and the vast majority of *these* will still be created by the state which, even in its most innocuous record keeping mode is still exercising “biopower”.⁸¹ It is no coincidence that historians who have thus far made the most creative use of digitized records to recreate “micro-studies” have been historians of crime, and historians, therefore, of people who were surveilled, interrogated, punished, and controlled more than average.⁸² We need to remind ourselves—and make an effort to explain to others—that these individuated records that are being used on a daily basis to write academic and family history are themselves part of a wider industry of outing and deploying the dead for multiple purposes. So much of the family histories into which we delve hungrily from our living rooms are the traces that past state surveillance has left behind. We are seeing through the eyes of institutions which demand us to be legible: to know what we are called, when we get born, where we get taught and where we labour, who we marry, when we bear children, when we move, when we want, when we get sick, when we die, and where our remains are put afterward.⁸³ These traces of lives that now crowd the internet did not come our way by chance, and finding them is not a happy accident, but rather both are products of past and present political, social and economic power.

We also deploy them, without much reflection, to reconstruct the lives of the dead and gone. Did they want to be “radically contextualized”? Perhaps we can assume that a person who has published their own writing, especially writing about their life, wants to be remembered, but can we make the same assumption for the legions of the unpublished dead?

Those who, because they were legally compelled to do so, had their marriage registered or their sea voyage surveilled. Those whose criminal records were, as far as they knew, to be kept tucked away in a police station drawer. Those whose names were briefly mentioned in newspapers that—they thought—became the next day's kindling. Can we assume that these people, ripped from the dark everworking chaos of the past and entered onto genealogical and historical databases, want to be there? And even if we ourselves are ever so careful with these sensitive and precious fragments of lives; digitization makes them available to the scrupulous and unscrupulous in equal measure. The digitized dead are deployed to sell products, to promote tourism, to illustrate click-bait BuzzFeed lists.

Taking it as a given that all people want to be remembered by academic, westernized history—want to have their name digitized for the good of future generations on some passenger manifest or on some wine bottle or in some book—is a grandiose assumption.⁸⁴ This, surely, is another way that posterity can condescend. Despite the dramatic rise in our conceit, as we digitize and catalogue individual lives at a pace never seen before, the truth is that some people simply have no desire to be saved by the sacred waters of history. Lydia Harvey's mother may have been one of them: despite it being mandatory in New Zealand, she seems not to have registered her daughter's birth.

There are other problems, too. Digitization is also uneven temporally speaking. Of course, the period before the modern empire and state—and its surveillance and record keeping—presents fewer opportunities for the kind of digitization that would allow nominal record linkage about individuals, but there is also less investment in such digitization projects, not least because they are of less interest to family historians. And while this is slowly changing, digitization has also added to a much older problem, as Lara Putnam clearly demonstrates: a long-standing “chasm” in which people of colour, indigenous peoples, people from the global south, and colonized peoples remain the most archivally unknown and simultaneously in the present day, have fewer access to digitized resources. What is more, as Amy Stanley points out in her article on early modern maidservants, digitization could mean that the very thing that used to make people more difficult to find—mobility—now renders them far more visible than someone who stayed put.⁸⁵ “The records of human social life now captured in the digitized world tell us so much about so much that we might forget to remember the systematic absences within them”, writes Putnam.⁸⁶

This inequality of digitization lies at the heart of my project. Were it not for the massive digitization of most (but not all) Australian and New Zealand newspapers, my project would never have gotten off the ground. These newspapers have been so thoroughly

digitized because they are the cultural heritage of affluent, western nations who have the will and the resources to undertake such a project. Because of the thirst for family and community history in white settler nations, they also have a wide user base. It was this settler colonialism, and Lydia Harvey's Anglo-whiteness, that meant her case garnered the attention of reformers and saw increased effort on the part of the police in her own time: she was, in other words, the quintessential "white slave", an ideal trafficking victim. Similarly, it was Antonio Carvelli's foreignness as a continental European, in an era that racialized and stigmatized Italian migrants, that produced the heightened newspaper coverage about him, both before, during, and after the trafficking prosecution in London. There is a connection between the contemporary inequalities that brought this case to light, in other words, and the layers of financial privilege and historical investment that are at work in the mass digitization projects that make them visible to me in the present.

Jill Lepore calls the negotiation with the ethics of telling intimate stories about people who have no ability to consent "tricky work", where the historian must be "nosy to the point of invasiveness".⁸⁷ Salber Philips writes that historical 'sentiment also carries possibilities for facile pathos, or even more disturbingly, for a kind of fellow-feeling that becomes the cover for respectable forms of learned voyeurism.'⁸⁸ These ethical quandaries become more acute when we recognize that we are often trying to rescue the doubly, even triply, silenced and marginalized from our own positions of privilege and our own ideas about the importance and manner of remembrance. As Gyan Prakash puts it, following Spivak, this kind of historical rescue can be a "disfiguring liberation" done to appease "Western notions of sovereignty and free will".⁸⁹

We all need to be careful with glimpses, even when, as now, they have gone from being precious and rare to being innumerable and quotidian: especially then.⁹⁰ Being careful can include thinking more deeply about the effect our categories have upon our interpretation of individual lives. It can encourage us to question whether we are using stories as mere illustrations, narrative tricks, or whether they help us do justice to the complexity of the matter we are communicating. If Salber Philips is right, and the "dignity of narrative" can be a kind of truth and reconciliation for those on the hard end of history's injustices, then being careful means thinking about how a such an individual might choose how they would like their dignity restored; and admitting that it would likely not be by appearing in our books as a "thief" or a "prostitute". It ought certainly to prompt us to probe more deeply into the lives of the people we deploy as examples: for the first time, a few quick searches in the digital

environment can often add nuance and humanity to a name, a label, and an anecdote from an archive file.

There is, of course, a limit to how careful we can be if we still wish to write a kind of history that isn't contributing to the "desertification" of the past, as Sabina Loriga puts it. If we still want real people to cross the stages of our historical narratives, we must accept that this brings with it all sorts of tricks and problems. I certainly have not overcome these ethical, methodological, and theoretical issues in the history that I am trying to tell. I remain a trafficker in other people's stories.

While this article has direct implications for those who write microhistory or use its techniques, it has been my intention to show the possibilities and challenges for all historians who use small and individual stories—as examples, vignettes, anecdotes, evidence—to think about what digitization means for the way we research and write. It is to especially encourage modern historians to reassess the "glimpse as methodological principle" when we deploy individuals as brief examples because, or so we claim, we cannot know any more. Simultaneously, it is to argue that we must not let digitization become easy and quotidian: we must recognize that this far reaching new technology requires new methodological conversations

I have also argued that, considering this newfound ability for our historical actors to so easily slip out of the bounds that our categories put on them, we need to rethink categorization and the ethics of this practice. It is fundamentally unavoidable in most histories (even frequent in microhistories) but this should not mean we should be complacent or cavalier about it. I am not necessarily advocating a 'singularization of history' *in toto*, but I am certainly advocating a clearer recognition of our practice. Part of this means recognizing what we are doing in an ethical sense: we must all see our use of digitized sources and our deployment of individual stories as, in Marisa Fuentes' words, "a methodological *and* ethical project".⁹¹

We also need to be vigilant about the grain of the digital archive. We need to reflect on the structural inequalities of digitization and work toward redressing them. We need to do our best, as historical professionals, to make sure that amid the flurry of easily accessible digital sources about past people that the public remains profoundly aware of the "experience of uncertain knowledge"⁹². Users of digital resources need to understand the inequalities and

power structures that built the archive; both the original archive—the passenger manifests, school records, census returns, and many more—and the digital one into which these records are being poured. We need to recognize the power structures of digitization itself, what this means for data, both from the past, and when today’s present becomes the past. Indeed, as the private company ancestry.com collects more and more of the DNA of those who want to know “where they come from”, a new kind of biopower is being built. These companies sell genetic information on to pharmaceutical companies and other industries interested in genomic data, and almost all retain individuals’ DNA samples into perpetuity unless asked to delete and destroy them. Of course, much of this information will become invaluable to future scientists, social researchers, and historians: we will have very accurate maps of human migration, we will know more about potential bone marrow donors, we will better understand epidemiological problems.⁹³ Yet, in this age of information at the most microscopic of genetic levels, it is ironic that people’s quest for their own small story sees them join an immense database from which all sorts of big stories will be told—and sold.

And what remains? The story best suited to capturing the minute fractures in this power, to articulating the way individuals move within and between its networks, is still the small one. Indeed, care and attention to our small histories is important because they are, now more than ever, a political project. Social history has been accused of fragmenting over the past few decades. Where it used to seek sweeping explanations for huge social phenomenon over long periods of time it now concerns itself with individual experience and small time-frames; with explorations of race, gender, class, and sexuality; with differences of meaning, cultural understanding and identity. With this, argue its detractors, not least the authors of the heavily critiqued *History Manifesto*, it has lost its ability to offer meaningful explanations for matters of consequence in the world today.⁹⁴ It is becoming increasingly clear that the push-back against this supposedly fragmented social history is part of a wider and troubling trend in popular culture that seeks to denigrate the postmodern politics of identity and diversity. Historians are faced with a unique task in an era that has created and digitized so many individual records, and yet where the political climate demands increasingly unitary and simplified metanarratives of the world in which we live and lived. What social historian Nicole Eustace wrote over fifteen years ago in the *Journal of Social History* about the importance of having “more stories, not fewer” seems more pertinent today than it ever has been.⁹⁵

The authors of the *History Manifesto* hold that it is “big history” backed up by big data that is best suited to political endeavours. Historians, they argue, ought to be writing

long-durée, ambitious, “good, honest” history that “would shake citizens, policymakers, and the powerful out of their complacency.”⁹⁶ Yet, it is the small stories that make people connect with history in the first place; it is the constant reiteration of the fundamental and idiosyncratic humanity of the past through story that inspires us to learn more of them—and bigger ones too.⁹⁷ If it is the big-story historian’s job to shake complacent policy makers, it is the small-story historian’s job to convince people that the small stories from the past that have moved them are unfolding in myriad ways today as well; to encourage their sentiment to become conscience. Big history might ‘shake’ citizens; but small history makes them.

There is a power in complexity and imperfection; in showing, through histories of individual lives, that our understanding of a phenomenon such as sex trafficking simply cannot ever be complete or monolithic, nor can our response to it be. Thanks to digitization, complicating stories has gotten much easier. We have more power to deploy individual stories, to find exceptions, to disrupt stereotypes, dismantle tropes, question stock characters, and challenge assumptions based on big data. We need to reassert, with renewed confidence, the importance of small history.

¹ “Convict Lives”, *The Digital Panopticon: Tracing London Convicts in Britain and Australia, 1780-1925*, (https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Convict_Lives [accessed 11/1/2018]). See also Tim Hitchcock’s critical reflections about digitization and small data that have appeared on his blog, *Historyonics*, <http://historyonics.blogspot.com/> [accessed on 14/6/2018]

² Anne Helmreich, Tim Hitchcock, and William J Turkel, “Rethinking Inventories in the Digital Age : The Case of the Old Bailey,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 11 (2014): 1–25; Alexis Weedon, “Digital Resources and Quantitative Research,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15, no. 2 (2010): 287–91; Toni Weller, ed., *History in the Digital Age* (London and New York, 2013); Daniel J. Cohen et al., “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 442–51; Kristen Nawrotzki; Jack Dougherty, *Writing History in the Digital Age*, 2013; Adrian Bingham, “The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians,” *Twentieth Century British History* 21, no. 2 (April 5, 2010): 225–31. Or, they are discussed as a part of a larger conversation about communicating history to the online public. Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, “Making History Online: The Collins Matthews Lecture for the Public Understanding of History,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (2015): 75–93.

³ Lara Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast,” *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (2016): 378, 389.

⁴ Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London, 2013), 5.

⁵ For a clear and rich explication of these debates, see the co-authored book *What is Microhistory* in which Sigurður Gylfi M Magnússon and István M. Szijárto present their differing answers to this eponymous question in two separate sections of the book. Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*.

⁶ Lara Putnam, “To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (2006): 615–30; Matti Peltonen, “Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro–Macro Link in Historical Research,” *History & Theory* 40, no. 3 (October 2001): 347; Chuanfei Chin, “Margins and Monsters: How Some Micro Cases Lead to Macro Claims,” *History and Theory* (October 2011): 341–357.

⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi, and Anne C. Tedeschi, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 33.

⁸ Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 21.

⁹ Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, ““ The Singularization of History “: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge,” *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (2014): 701; 712.

¹⁰ Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 5–8.

¹¹ Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2001): 144.

¹² On the biographical turn in history, see especially Sabina Loriga, “The Plurality of the Past: Historical Time and the Rediscovery of Biography,” in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, ed. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma (London, 2016), 31–41; Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, “The Life Is Never Over: Biography as a Microhistorical Approach,” in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, ed. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma (London, 2016), 42–52. See also Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, eds., *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Lewiston, New York, 2013).

¹³ Tonio Andrade, “A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory,” *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 575.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul A Ghobrial, “The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory,” *Past & Present* 222, no. 1 (2014): 58–59. For a wider discussion on the problems of transnational and global history and the mass digitized turn, see Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast.”

¹⁵ William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (New York, 1869), 282.

¹⁶ Timothy J Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity,” *The American Historical Journal* 104, no. 1 (1999): 117–41.

¹⁷ See for instance Donna J Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (London, 1991); Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Basingstoke, 2011); Judith R Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, 1997); Stephanie A Limoncelli, “The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Traffic in Women, 1875-1960” (Berkeley, 2007); Daniel Gorman, “Empire, Internationalism, and the Campaign against the Traffic in Women and Children in the 1920s,” *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 2 (2008): 186–216; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (London, 1995); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2003); Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge, 2009); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago and London, 1990).

¹⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester, 2001):102.

¹⁹ Judith R Walkowitz and Daniel J Walkowitz, ““We Are Not Beasts of the Field”: Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts,” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 3–2 (1978): 73–106; Anne M Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-1890* (Urbana, 1985); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1919* (Baltimore and London, 1982); Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*; Julia Ann Laite, “Taking Nellie Johnson’s Fingerprints: Prostitutes and Legal Identity in Early Twentieth Century London,” *HIStory Workshop Journal* 65 (2008): 96–116.

²⁰ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*.

²¹ Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, New York, 2001):108.

²² Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, (Baltimore, 1991): 182.

²³ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (London and Boston, 1988): xv.

²⁴ Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present* 85 (1979): 11.

²⁵ Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast,” 379, 383.

²⁶ Richard Abel, “The Pleasures and Perils of Big Data in Digitized Newspapers,” *Film History* 25, no. 1–2 (2013): 1–10; Bingham, “The Digitization of Newspaper Archives.”; Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁷ Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: The Things We Try to Hide* (London, 2013): 241–49.

²⁸ Gregory Crane, “What do you do with a Million Books?” *D-Lib Magazine*, 12, 3 (2006) np.

(<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/march06/crane/03crane.html> [accessed 15/1/2018] Cohen et al., “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” 455.

²⁹ Ainsley T. Erikson, “Historical Research and the Problem of Categories: Reflections on 10,000 Digital Note Cards,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Kristen Nawrotzki and Jack Dougherty (Digital Culture Books, n.d.); Katherine Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, “Creating Meaning in a Sea of Information: The Women and Social Movements Web Sites,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Kirsten Nawrotzki and Jack Dougherty (Digital Culture Books, n.d.); William J. Turkell, “Methodology for the Infinite Archive,” *Digital History Hacks*, 2006, <http://digitalhistoryhacks.blogspot.co.uk/2006/04/methodology-for-infinite-archive.html> [accessed 15/1/2018].

³⁰ Cohen et al., “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” 455.

³¹ Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2014): 112. For the strong criticism this book received, see David Armitage and Jo Guldi, “The History Manifesto: A Reply to Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015): 543–54. See also a series of blog posts from the Modern British Studies group at the University of Birmingham, “Responding to the History Manifesto,” <https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/responding-to-the-history-manifesto/> [Accessed on 14/6/2018]

³² Frederick W. Gibbs and Trevor J. Owens, “The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Kristen Nawrotzki and Jack Dougherty (Digital Culture Books, 2013).

³³ While they concede that “historians need not treat and interpret data only for rigorous hypothesis testing. This is another crucial difference between our approach and the approaches of the cliometricians of the 1960s and “70s”, Gibbs and Owens do not really expand on the way that data can be used in ways other than identifying big trends (be they cultural, social, economic, etc). Fred Gibbs and Trevor Owens, “The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing” in *Ibid.*

³⁴ “Hypotheses based on a limited number of examples, as many dissertations and books still are, seem flimsier when you can scan millions of books at Google to find counterexamples.” Stephen Minz in Cohen et al., “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” 456.

³⁵ Jean-Baptiste Michel et al., “Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books,” *Science*, December 16, 2010.

³⁶ Tim Hitchcock, “Culturomics, Big Data, Code Breakers and the Casaubon Delusion”, *Historyonics Blog*, 19 June 2011, <http://historyonics.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/culturomics-big-data-code-breakers-and.html>; Tim Hitchcock, “Big Data, Small Data, and Meaning”, *Historyonics Blog*, 9 November 2014,”

http://historyonics.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/big-data-small-data-and-meaning_9.html [Accessed on 15/1/2018]

³⁷ Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 20–21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ Tim Hitchcock, “Voices of Authority: Towards a history from below in patchwork”, *Historyonics Blog*, 27 April 2015, <http://historyonics.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/voices-of-authority-towards-history.html> [accessed 15/1/2018] and Hitchcock, “Big Data, Small Data and Meaning”.

⁴⁰ Carlo Ginzburg, cited by Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 3.

⁴¹ “Witness Statement of Lydia Rhoda Harvey, 13 July 1910, London, The National Archives, MEPO 3/197

⁴² Tim Hitchcock, “Big Data, Small Data, and Meaning”, *Historyonics blog*, 9 November 2014,

http://historyonics.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/big-data-small-data-and-meaning_9.html

⁴³ Informazione Varie, Cara-Cav; Questore di Torino, 1898-1906, Turin, Archivio di Stato di Torino, box 175. With many thanks for Archivist Silvia Corino at the Archivio di Stato for help with the translation and orthography.

⁴⁴ “Cellis and Berard—white Slavery Suspects,” Canberra, Australian National Archives, 1926/20254

⁴⁵ *Evening News* (Sydney, NSW), Thursday, 2 May 1901, p6

⁴⁶ For the Greek and Latin lessons, see for instance *The West Australian* (Perth, WA), 19 November 1904; for the bocce game see *Daily News* (Perth, WA), 30 September 1907

⁴⁷ Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast,” 377.

⁴⁸ Marriage certificate of Kerinique Sarah White (sic) and Antonio Alfredo Carvelli, 1910, New Zealand Marriage Index, folio 1004; ‘shipping: Port of Wellington—arrivals”, 15 August 1921, *New Zealand Herald*

⁴⁹ “Veronique Carvelli and Jose (Giuseppe) Ferrero”, SS Borda—Names and Descriptions of Alien Passengers Embarked at the Port of London, 17 February 1927, ancestry.co.uk

⁵⁰ Edward Muir and Guido Ruggerio, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore, 1991): x; Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 123.

⁵¹ Giovanni Levi, “The Uses of Biography,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Lewiston, New York, 2013): 62.

⁵² Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Chicago, 2013): 63.

⁵³ Magnússon and Szijárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 153.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁵ Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, chap 2: Selling Sex.

⁵⁶ Carvelli, Antonio, Ship: Karlsruhe Arrival Year: 1900; Arrival Month: May; Age: 19; Gender: -; Origin: -; Master: Oessleman, E; Origin port code: F; Fiche number: 340; Page of list: 4 Series Inward Passengers Index, Victoria Public Record Office, Melbourne, Australia

⁵⁷ John Brewer reflects on this in “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” *Cultural and Social History* 7 (2010): 87–109.

⁵⁸ Hitchcock and Shoemaker’s book *London Lives*, which seeks to “radically contextualize” a series of people who lived in London in the early modern and modern period using both digitized and analog sources, is an example of how this might be done. Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Shoemaker did, however, bemoan the way in which the publisher, Cambridge University Press, seemed unwilling or unable to really explore the potential of digital history to link this radical contextualization to the sources that made it possible. Robert Shoemaker, “The Future of the eBook”, *History Matters Blog*, <http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/future-ebook/> [accessed on 14/6/2018]

⁵⁹ Hitchcock, “Big Data”, *Historyonics Blog*

⁶⁰ Sabina Loriga, “The Role of the Individual in History: Biographical and Historical Writing in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Lewiston, New York, 2013): 90.

⁶¹ Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016): 9.

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- ⁶² On rescue work and rescue workers, see for instance Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London, 2000); Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge, 2007).
- ⁶³ Joan W. Scott, 'storytelling,' *History & Theory* 50 (2011): 204.
- ⁶⁴ Carolyn Steedman, "On Not Writing Biography," *New Formations* 67, no. 15 (2009): 24.
- ⁶⁵ Mark Salber Phillips, "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Sentimental History for Life," *History Workshop Journal* 65, no. 1 (2008): 55.
- ⁶⁶ John Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," *Cultural and Social History* 7 (2010): 89.
- ⁶⁷ John H. Arnold, "The Historian as Inquisitor: The Ethics of Interrogating Subaltern Voices," *Rethinking History* 2, no. 3 (1998): 382.
- ⁶⁸ Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets*, epilogue.
- ⁶⁹ "About Family Search", <https://familysearch.org/about>, accessed on 13/09/2015. See also "Why do Mormons Perform Baptisms for the Dead?" Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Website, <https://www.mormon.org/faq/baptism-for-the-dead>, accessed on 13/09/2015 [accessed on 15/1/2018]
- ⁷⁰ "Some people have misunderstood that when baptisms for the dead are performed, deceased persons are baptized into the Church against their will. This is not the case. Each individual has agency, or the right to choose. The validity of a baptism for the dead depends on the deceased person accepting it and choosing to accept and follow the Savior while residing in the spirit world. The names of deceased persons are not added to the membership records of the Church." <https://www.lds.org/topics/baptisms-for-the-dead?lang=eng> [accessed on 15/1/2018]
- ⁷¹ For more critique on the concept of "refuge" in microhistory, see Filippo de Vivo, "Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale: A Response," *Cultural and Social History* 7 (2010): 387–97.
- ⁷² Lydia Harvey Witness Statement, London, The National Archives, MEPO 3/197
- ⁷³ On the current "rescue industry", see for instance Laura Maria Augustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets, and the Rescue Industry* (London, 2007).
- ⁷⁴ "Ancestry.com DNA database tops 3m sales", *Forbes*, 1 October, 2017 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/miguelhelft/2017/01/10/ancestry-com-dna-database-tops-3m-sales-rise-to-850m-ahead-of-likely-2017-ipo/#e9c9d0f13b3d> [accessed on 15/1/2018]
- ⁷⁵ *19 Crimes Wine Website*, <http://19crimes.com/> [accessed on 15/1/2018]
- ⁷⁶ Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much," 138.
- ⁷⁷ Alain Corbin, *The Life of an Unknown: The Rediscovered World of a Clog Maker in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 2003), 212.
- ⁷⁸ I am grateful to Seth Koven and Lynda Nead for their discussion about this at a recent seminar focussing on Koven's new book, Seth Koven, *The Matchgirl and the Heiress* (Princeton, 2015).
- ⁷⁹ Arnold, "The Historian as Inquisitor: The Ethics of Interrogating Subaltern Voices," 385.
- ⁸⁰ Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (London, 1991): 94–95, 107.
- ⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1976): 139–40.
- ⁸² Anne-Marie Kilday and David Nash, eds., *Law, Crime and Deviance since 1700: Micro-Studies in the History of Crime* (London, 2017). De Vivo makes a similar point for the use of juridical records in early modern microhistories. de Vivo, "Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale: A Response," 391.
- ⁸³ Jane Caplan and John Torpey, "Introduction," in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton, 2001), 1–13; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Princeton, 1999).
- ⁸⁴ Steedman, "On Not Writing Biography," 19.
- ⁸⁵ Amy Stanley, "Maidservants" Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia, 1600–1900," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (2016): 437–460.
- ⁸⁶ For more see Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," 393; 400.
- ⁸⁷ Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much," 129.
- ⁸⁸ Salber Phillips, "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Sentimental History for Life," 56.
- ⁸⁹ Gyan Prakash, "Can The 'subaltern' ride? A Reply to O'Hanlon and Washbrook," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 1 (1992): 174.
- ⁹⁰ And, now that archives created by dispossessing power structures are easily accessible, we must teach our students this as well.
- ⁹¹ Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 2.
- ⁹² Magnússon and Sziárto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, 44.
- ⁹³ See for instance <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/cs/collaborations> [accessed on 14/6/2018]
- ⁹⁴ Guildi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*.
- ⁹⁵ Nicole Eustace, "When Fish Walk on Land: Social History in a Postmodern World," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 77–91.

⁹⁶ Guildi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, 116.

⁹⁷ As Hitchcock points out, small stories have also played an enormous part in letting us see the perspectives that have made us question our positivistic narratives of progress and change. “If today we have a public dialogue that gives voice to the traditionally excluded and silenced”, he writes, “...it is in no small part because we now have beautiful histories of small things”. Hitchcock, “Voices of Authority: Towards a history from below in patchwork”