

# PHOTOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF EDUCATION: Theoretical-methodological approaches and practical examples in the Luso-Brazilian context

Fotografia e História da Educação:  
abordagens teórico-metodológicas e exemplos práticos em contexto Luso-Brasileiro

Fotografía e Historia de la Educación:  
Abordajes teórico-metodológicas y ejemplos prácticos en el contexto Luso-Brasileño

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the role of photography as *source* and *object* of research in the History of Education, and its contribution to the study of institutions, practices and the material culture of school. It seeks to identify and analyze conceptual and methodological issues involved in the use of images as historical *documents* and *monuments*, and as artifacts endowed with their own specificities, highlighting the challenges and potentialities of their use and theorization in the Social Sciences, Arts and Digital Humanities. Examples of publications or research projects that, in the past two decades, contributed to the creation, digitalization and dissemination of photographic collections or archives for teaching and research in the Luso-Brazilian context, will be presented and discussed.

**Keywords:** Historical Sources; School Culture; Historical Memory; Technology and Education.

**Resumo:** O artigo discute o papel da fotografia enquanto *fonte* e *objeto* de investigação em História da Educação e o seu contributo para o estudo das instituições, práticas e cultura material da escola. Procura-se identificar e analisar algumas questões conceptuais e metodológicas envolvidas no uso de imagens enquanto *documentos* e *monumentos* históricos, bem como enquanto artefactos dotados de especificidades próprias, destacando os desafios e as potencialidades do seu uso e teorização nas Ciências Sociais, Artes e Humanidades Digitais. Serão apresentados e discutidos exemplos de publicações ou projetos de investigação que, nas últimas duas décadas, contribuíram para a criação, digitalização e divulgação de acervos ou arquivos fotográficos para o ensino e a investigação no contexto Luso-Brasileiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Fontes Históricas; Cultura Escolar; Memória Histórica; Tecnologia e Educação.

**Resumen:** El artículo discute el papel de la fotografía como *fuente* y *objeto* de investigación en la Historia de la Educación, y su contribución al estudio de las instituciones, prácticas y cultura material escolares. Identifica y analiza algunas cuestiones conceptuales y metodológicas involucradas en el uso de imágenes como *documentos* y *monumentos* históricos, y artefactos con especificidades propias, destacando los desafíos y potencialidades de su uso y teorización en las Ciencias Sociales, Artes y Humanidades Digitales. Se presentarán y discutirán ejemplos de publicaciones o proyectos de investigación que, en las últimas dos décadas, hayan contribuido a la creación, digitalización y difusión de colecciones o archivos fotográficos para la enseñanza y la investigación en el contexto Luso-Brasileño.

**Palabras clave:** Fuentes Históricas; Cultura Escolar; Memoria Histórica; Tecnología y Educación.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, photography consolidated its status as a documental and documentary source. It became understood not only as a “representation” (more or less artistic) of reality, but as a legitimate “document” of history (Rouillé, 2009). When discussing the new historiographical approaches, the founders of the New History considered objects, cultural practices and images as part of the society’s “heritage” (material, symbolic and imaginary) and, therefore, as essential to historical and social knowledge (Matos, 2010; Vidal, 2017). Men such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Jacques Le Goff are widely cited in the bibliography produced for the last twenty years about the uses of photography (and other iconographic or imagery sources) in the writing of the History of Education (HE), particularly in Brazil (Vidal & Abdala, 2005; Sonego, 2010; Abdala, 2013; Ciavatta, 2023).

In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, photography and other visual artifacts (engravings, posters, films) came to be seen as a legitimate means of accessing the past, offering clues about the world's visions, power relations, cultural norms, social practices, symbolic codes, values and ideologies of those who produced them, and about the narratives that they aimed to build or conceal (Chartier, 1990; Burke, 2001, 2004). Photography's relevance in education was also widely recognized, with the introduction of audiovisual technologies as a teaching aids, and with the incorporation of new perspectives and methodologies on the role of image – and of image technologies – in the consumer society and in the fabrication of the modern “gaze” (Cuban, 1986; Sicard, 2006).

In the 1970s, Susan Sontag (1979, p. 3) observed: “photographs are perhaps the most mysterious of all the objects that make up, and thicken, the environment we recognize as modern.” By that time, our fascination with photographic objects (and with photographic practice itself) had reached the height of its popularity and democratization. Since then, our addiction and obsession with photography has not ceased to enlarge, and we have never stopped seeking formulas, recipes, conventions and methods to produce it, read it, store it, remind it, forget it, consume it, trade it. Photography (and also cinema) was not only one of the most successful technical instruments ever invented by modern society, it was effectively the great creator and curator of the Western culture's imaginaries and standards of visuality, since the late 19th century (Crary, 1990; Sicard, 2006).

In a scenario where dominant narratives tended increasingly to erase or silence important aspects of collective memory, photography emerged as a powerful means for preserving the historical memory of certain social groups or individuals traditionally relegated to the margins of history, thus also becoming an “eyewitness” of the processes of sociocultural change and educational transformations that shook the “grammar of schooling” in the twentieth century (Burke, 2004; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). In the 1990s, the streams of New History and the new Cultural History expanded the concept of *source*

and contributed to “school culture” taking a prominent place within the historiography of education (Viñao, 2012; Paulilo, 2019). Some historians of education were then starting to look, more systematically, at the artifacts of “visual culture” (photography, cinema, works of art, monuments, architecture) as *sources* and *objects* of study (Mietzner, Myers & Peim, 2005; Possamai, 2007).

In the early 2000s, photography was particularly productive in educational research, drawing attention to the conditions of teaching and learning, and to a multiplicity of ethical, aesthetic, ethnographic and emotional dimensions that were not visible from other documentary sources (Depaepe & Henkens, 2000; Cabeleira, Martins & Lawn, 2011; Dussel & Priem, 2017). Under the auspices of the cultural, visual, pictorial, iconic and material *turns*, in the last twenty years a growing number of studies have explored photography (and its potential uses) in the field of history, memory, heritage and school culture, distributed into five privileged thematic areas: 1) school architecture; 2) school archives, libraries and museums; 3) pedagogical objects, practices and rituals; 4) printed, iconographic or audiovisual materials; 5) school subjects and communities (Yanes-Cabrera, Meda & Viñao, 2017; Salas & Gómez, 2018; Alegre et al., 2019; Allender et al., 2021; Madeira, Cabeleira & Magalhães, 2022).

However, the use of photography as a *source* and *object* of study was accompanied by mistrust regarding the epistemological status of images. Since the *cultural turn in history*, several scholars in the field of photography have begun to demystify the vision rooted in the belief of “photography as truth” or “reflection of reality as it is” (Rouillé, 2009, p. 36). By contesting the epistemological superiority of photography against other iconographic sources, the approaches of Cultural History and Visual Culture eventually contributed to hinder the relationship of historians with images in general (Fischman & Sales, 2014).

This article seeks to identify and discuss some of these contradictions and findings that permeate the uses of photography in HE, highlighting theoretical-methodological approaches and practical examples in the Luso-Brazilian context. The main purpose is to systematize the contributions of *the most recent past* in HE research, at a time when the field of education is itself being reconfigured (and, to a large extent, disfigured) by the *digital turn* of the last five years, and by the emergence of new technologies, environments and ecosystems generated and managed by Artificial Intelligence (IA) – and whose actual impacts and effects in HE research we are not yet in a position to discuss or understand.

Let’s say that the discussion about photography in HE faces unprecedented challenges and evident paradoxes. Today, the importance of photographic and audiovisual (or multimedia) collections and archives for historical and educational research, as well as the need for its digital management and preservation, is undeniable. In a world increasingly mediated by image technologies and dominated

by digital platforms, visual and iconographic analysis has become central to various fields of knowledge. Despite the visual centrality of digital technologies and platforms, it is also noticeable the devaluation to which the “sciences of the image” and “visual and multimedia literacy” have been voted in educational and academic contexts, and in scientific publishing networks themselves. Herein the paradoxical situation: we live in a “visual civilization” that takes for granted, or almost completely ignores, the visual dimension of knowledge and the historicity of its own vision (Crary, 1990; Sicard, 2006; Elkins, 2008).

After reaching its peak between 2000 and 2022, the enthusiasm of educational historians for images seems to be fading away, given the increasing complexity of historical work in virtual environments, in which sources, objects and methodologies for historical research are increasingly circumscribed by the technical and epistemological possibilities prescribed by the Digital Humanities and Data Science (Drucker, 2021). In a socio-technological context increasingly saturated *with* and *by* images (static and moving), photography has become a mere consumable, a product of power relations and economic interests that permeate our ways of looking, seeing and learning through digital platforms. On the other hand, it can be a proof of resistance in face of the monolithic and hegemonic powers of an imperialism of the image (vulgar and vulgarized, simulated and dissimulator, manipulated and manipulative, biased and bias generator) that today proliferates in social networks and online platforms empowered by Artificial Intelligence (IA), and that make of ‘fake news’ and ‘deep fake’ their universal language and currency of exchange on a global scale (Newman, 2024).

This article examines the use of photography in HE in the past two decades, highlighting the contribution of images not only to the understanding of educational processes and institutional dynamics, but also to the production and dissemination of historical-educational knowledge, itself, in the present. The most recent research in HE in the Luso-Brazilian context will be addressed here, taking into account the crucial role played by photographic images and digital technologies in the cultural turns and educational transformations that have been taking place for over a century, but also in the revolution that has been operating in our ways of documenting and archiving school memory. The aim is to demonstrate how photography, far from being just a static and monumentalized record of the past, or a techno-bureaucratic-expressive fetishe exacerbated by current societies obsessed with their own self-documentation, can function as a dynamic tool for the historical analysis of the present.

## IMPACTS OF THE VISUAL OR PICTORIAL TURN IN THE FIELD OF HISTORY OF EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSES, LOCAL APPLICATIONS

Visual Culture was established as a disciplinary field between the mid-1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, when its process of academic institutionalization took place in various countries of Europe and the Americas (Fischman & Sales, 2014; Schiavinatto & Costa, 2016). Born from the meeting between History of Art and Cultural Studies, Visual Culture would eventually help to establish the field of Visual Studies as a cluster of arts, sciences, technologies and other disciplines that took *the visual* as *source and/or object* of study, in the specific context of emergence of new digital technologies, and its impact on the visual field (and visuality). In *Picture Theory* (1994), W. J. T. Mitchell launched the terms of a debate that would shake the anglo-saxonic academic world, and which would extend over the next decade under the aegis of the *pictorial* or *visual turn* in the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities.

Organized according to the model of Anthropology – more than according to the traditional model of History and its related disciplines (art, architecture, cinema) – the “interdisciplinary project” of Visual Culture was received with a mixture of euphoria and indignation within the intellectual and expert circles of the field (Krauss & Foster, 1996). Many argued, then, that Visual Culture was “excentric” or even “antagonistic” to the currents of the New History – with its respected historiographies and sociologies, and with its “semiotic imperatives and models of *context* and *text*”. In addition, many feared that the so-proclaimed *interdisciplinarity* would come only to legitimize the image as a mere product and “ghostly projection” of virtual environments and, on the other hand, to impose an hermenêutic paradigm in which the “originality” of the image would dissipate in-between “psychoanalytic and media discourses” (Schiavinatto & Costa, 2016, pp. 15-16).

Beyond the discussion on the uses of images as a source and historical evidence in education – which was already gaining momentum since the late 1980s, under the influence of Social History and Visual Sociology – the new theories and theoretical-methodological approaches boosted by Visual Culture re-centred the debate around the image (in particular photography), giving rise to important contributions in the field of HE, which multiplied since the 2000s (Prosser, 1996; Margolis, 1999; Fischman, 2001).

In the community of educational historians, discussions around the uses of photography emerged based on the precedents established by several studies published in the journal *Histoire de l'Education* (1986), and extended at the 20th International Standing Conference of the History of Education (1998), which focused attention on the role of the “visual” in the “making of the educational space throughout history” (Depaepe & Henkens, 1998). The following year, the book *Silences and images* was published (Grosvenor, Lawn & Rousmaniere, 1999) and, right

afterwards, the journal *Paedagogica Historica* dedicated a special issue to “the challenge of the visual in the history of education” (Depaepe & Henkens, 2000), and the journal *History of Education* published a series of articles on the “problems and opportunities” brought by the image to educational research (Grosvenor & Lawn, 2001). These incursions would be further developed in a seminal book dedicated to the *Visual History of Education* (Mietzner, Myers & Peim, 2005).

The authors whose contributions were pioneer in this field tended to prioritize the photographic image. Their influence propagated into various European and Latin American countries: Portugal (Nóvoa, 2005; Burke & Castro, 2007), Spain, Argentina, Mexico (Funari & Zarankin, 2005; Dussel & Gutierrez, 2006; Salas & Gómez, 2018; Pozo & Braster, 2020) and Brazil (Gomes, 2003; Lins, 2014; Ciavatta, 2023). After 2010-11, attention tended to move to approaches of the photographic image which valued it not only as a *source* or *representation*, but also for its methodological potential (Margolis & Rowe, 2011; Warmington, Van Gorp & Grosvenor, 2011). In such line of development, photography and audiovisuals gained particular prominence in the historical rescuing and (re)construction of “local” memories of schooling (Alegre et al., 2019; Madeira, Cabeleira & Magalhães, 2022).

Now, the focus of the debate is not so much on photography understood as a documentary *source*, but on the specification of theoretical approaches and demonstration of methodological procedures for the analysis of visual resources (Dussel & Priem, 2017; Salas & Gómez, 2018), as well as on the creation of digital archives for the Visual Public History of Education (Cabeleira, 2022; Bandini, 2023). In fact, the HE research produced in the past two decades denotes the impacts of the *cultural, pictorial and digital turns* on the ways of thinking and writing “*about* and *with* images” (Cabeleira, Martins & Lawn, 2011, p. 487; Dussel & Priem, 2017, p. 641). For a large share of researchers rooted in different interdisciplinary backgrounds, the incorporation of themes and materials associated with Visual Culture in the field of historical and educational research, has effectively contributed to the expansion and diversification of their *sources* and *objects* of study, and to the reassessment of the relations between images and the policies of historical memory, as well as to the exploration of analytical methodologies that extrapolate the old tendency of using visual artifacts as if they were mere “illustrations” or appendices of texts (Meneses, 2003; Molina, 2015; Allender et al., 2021; Madeira, Cabeleira & Magalhães, 2022; Ciavatta, 2023).

In general, and despite the different views and different practical (or local) applications they might propose or assume, the investigations produced for the past two decades tend to acknowledge that “an image is never a simple reality”, and that the incorporation of Visual Culture in educational research is not exempt from difficulties, which start, from the outset, with numerous epistemological and methodological problems raised by its approach (Schiavinatto & Costa, 2016, p. 11; Fischman & Sales, 2014, p. 425). Far from imposing “a prescription on how to use such

images”, what many of these works show are possibilities of researching the educational field through photography, considering that it is always the object of a “historical construction,” more than a simple “evidence” (Molina, 2015, p. 465).

## PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

For a long time, the use of images remained an object of analysis reserved for the History of Art (Schiavinatto & Costa, 2016, pp. 12, 53). Due to a lack of interest or competence, historians of society and culture tended to neglect iconographic sources, while relegating them “to museographic scholarship or aesthetic commentary” (Cecatto & Fernandes, 2012, p. 5).

Until the 1980s, images had not reached the status of historical source. Not even photographs. Also in teaching, images have been generally used as illustrations or memory aids in the acquisition of contents. One might even say that a certain “positivist rancor” still persists in our historiographic and educational practices (Ciavatta, 2023, p. 16). In this junction of History and Education, the image appears almost always in the background, as a minor and servicial instrument of the Sciences and Literatures. Historians like Peter Burke (2004, pp. 12, 17) speak of an “invisibility of the visual” in historiography, motivated by the “overvaluation of written sources”, but also because “Western school culture” is mainly rooted in “writing and orality” (Cecatto & Fernandes, 2012, pp. 4-5). Hence the importance of addressing the issue of visual culture and visuality from its connection to educational contexts.

Much has been written about the ‘unpreparedness’ and ‘visual analphabetism’ of historians in dealing with images. In the specific case of photographs, this problem is greatly accentuated (Fischman, 2001; Burke, 2001, 2004; Moraes & Alves, 2002; Oliveira, [2002]; Gomes, 2003; Meneses, 2003). It is not uncommon for historical studies to use photography without overcoming the mere illustrative aspect of the information collected from other sources, and without contributing to inquiries concerning the visuality of images. In trying to escape this trap, several studies and authors have taken photographic images as a research *object*, focusing on the methodological and analytical challenges related to its uses (Possamai, 2007, pp. 8-9; Paulilo, 2019, pp. 2-3).

Thanks to the contributions of the New History, Cultural History and Visual Culture, and to a vast literary heritage that took *the visual* as an *object of study*, we are now aware of the “photographic trap” that makes us believe in visual records as if they were “reality duplicated” (Scott, 1999, p. 9). We also know the difference between *picture* and *image* – the visual “object” itself, and its “medium” (Mitchell, 1994) – and we know that none of them is a flat or simple reality. As Berger (1972), Crary (1990)

and Sicard (2006) have shown us, our eyes and our ways of seeing have been shaped over the centuries by technological devices and educational institutions (Cabeleira, 2022, p. 234). Or, as Susan Sontag once said: more than a static image or visual content, photography is both a “grammar” and an “ethics of seeing” (1979, p. 3).

It should be stressed that the academic discussion on ‘how to deal with images’ has been dominated by the influence of the 1960s and 1970s semiotic thinking. Even at a time when semiotics was losing its status as a pilot-science, the legacy of its school remained present in the next paradigms: Cultural Studies, Media and Intermediality Studies, Digital Humanities. Given the advancement of digital and algorithmic cognitive capitalism, this influence remains noticeable in the analysis of visual sources that take as their starting point the idea that images are visual signs that can be “read”, that is, they are treated as “elements that refer to something else” (Baetens & Surdiacourt, 2012, p. 590). Hence the constant need to attribute them “speeches” and “narratives,” and to promote “intertextualities” and “dialogues” between various sources (iconographic, verbal, oral, literary) that may help to “trace meanings” and to find “tracks” or “evidences”, in the absence of which the image is nothing but a “fragile” or “mute” source (Molina, 2015: 459-60; Sonego, 2010, p. 115).

In Ítalo Calvino’s words: “around each image, others lurk” (1990, p. 104). But it is also true that “one picture can contain enough information to convey many sentences” (Oates & Reder 2010, p. 447). The “polysemy of the visual message” always poses many problems, besides raising suspicions that, behind the surface, other realities quite different from that which the image gives us to see as appearance, hide (Molina, 2015, p. 460). Hence the need for “historical-social and cultural contextualization” (Sonego, 2010, p. 115). Jean Paul Sartre stated that “one can never learn from an image what one does not know already” (Purgar, 2015, p. 145). And this is a true statement, most of the time. Especially when we use images to demonstrate, or illustrate, a truth that we already have as certain and known. In other words, it becomes inevitable (and honest) to recognize that, most of the time, what the historian does with the images is “to seek to establish the meanings that can be compatible or not with the general plan that he/she would like to give to [his/her] History” (Calvino, 1990, pp. 104-05). What should be emphasized, however, is the *performativity* and *plasticity* of images, especially when they connect with memory and forgetting (Cabeleira, 2022, p.235).

In fact, one of the most neglected issues, by historians of education, regarding the use and methodological approach of photographic images (or others), is the visual specificity of these objects. Seeking to interpret, give sense and meaning to what is visible in the image, we often disregard its visuality, and even its aesthetics and poetics. The analysis of the photographic image in HE requires an attentive and informed look at the visible elements in the image, as well as the visual elements that compose it: the characters portrayed, and the spaces represented, are often the result of a certain angle of vision from which composition, colors and shapes create their

own atmosphere. In addition, it is important to consider how these visual elements interact and communicate with each other, and how photographic elements (the frame, the focus) influence the observer's perception. Visual analysis should be combined with a critical analysis of the conventions, protocols, precepts and prejudices (cultural, social and technical) of representation that have influenced the creation and consumption of certain images at a certain historical moment. Not forgetting that the whole image is always a product of "a choice" among other possibilities (Mauad, 1996, p. 7).

Photographs can be used to build an official HE narrative, but can also be silenced when they do not correspond to dominant versions of history, or when they do not offer unequivocal "readings" and "interpretations". This duplicity of photography as a "weapon" of memory or oblivion – the analogy between the camera and the "machine gun" is well known (Sontag, 1979, p. 117) – is fundamental in HE studies, in which images can reveal not only the legitimization processes of educational practices, but also the forms of resistance towards the "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

No one can deny that school and mass education have acquired a tentacular and colonizing power in every part of the world where its grammar has been imposed since the mid-nineteenth century. And such colonizing power manifests, itself, in its visual grammar: all classrooms around the world are practically the same.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, all of us – students, teachers, researchers – know abundant examples of classroom photographs and educational scenarios which are all very similar, repetitive, monotonous, regardless of the place where these photographs were taken.<sup>2</sup> We could even talk about the ability of photographs to produce "historical amnesia" (Tröhler, 2020, p. 3) – through excess, repetition, redundancy.

## THE VISUAL GRAMMAR OF SCHOOL: PRACTICAL EXAMPLES IN THE LUSO-BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

Many academic works produced in the last two decades in Portugal and Brazil have focused on the analysis of various functions of photography as a testimony and record of school daily life, document and official representation of the school. The history of school institutions has effectively been the one that has benefited the most from the use of photography as a means to record the architecture, the environment

<sup>1</sup> See the photographic reports: "15 'vintage' photographies that celebrate school" (Brady & Carvalho, 2024), "Photographers gather to register classrooms around the world" (30/09/2015: <https://shorturl.at/HXkmp>).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the photography: "In Casa Pia de Lisboa, a mute-deaf classroom. Belém", 1922. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo (<https://digidarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=8084930>).

and the educational spaces, allowing the analysis of their transformations over time (Moraes & Alves, 2002; Bencostta, 2005; Paulilo, 2019). Within the studies that can be framed into the history of the “material culture” of schooling, architecture has been the privileged photographic object (Nóvoa, 2005; Catrica, 2006; Mauad, 2015; Alegre et al., 2019; Oliveira, Oliveira & Costa, 2014).<sup>3</sup> When we think of a school, the first image that most probably comes to our mind is that of a building (Funari & Zarankin, 2005, p. 135).

Also the history of pedagogical objects and practices has been told from photographs illustrating the relations between teachers and students, focusing on pedagogical materials and giving rise to numerous analyses on school dynamics and disciplinary control practices. The classroom and the spaces for recreation and social life have all been the main *locus* from which the (i)materialities of school have been observed (Souza, 2001; Abdala, 2013; Prates & Teive, 2015; Chaloba, Bencostta & Silva, 2018). Several initiatives for the creation of school and educational museums (both physical and virtual) stand out, based on studies that explore their role in the renewal and innovation of teaching methods (Barausse & Possamai, 2019; Mogarro, 2022). Other studies address the history of pedagogical objects and technologies from the point of view of their relevance for an “archaeology” and an “anthropology” of the relationship between the school culture and the schooling processes, highlighting the role of school archives and museums in this enterprise, but also their connection to the “history of the school industry” and the commercial dynamics that, in the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, transformed the school into a “suis generis market” and made the teacher a “client” (Vidal, 2017, p. 55).

The history of the pedagogical or didactic uses of the image and, in particular, the use of photographs in the classroom context to support the teaching of disciplinary content and curriculum subjects has also been approached with some frequency, especially in studies leading to obtaining professionalization, and in the teaching of History (Gouveia, 2020; Pereira, 2018; Campanholi, 2014; Silva & Soares, 2024). The contributions of photography and visual history have also been discussed through the analysis of textbooks (Mauad, 2015) and school manuals (Morais, 2008; Carvalho, 2011; Mauad, 2015). In these documentary collections, we can find diverse images (from drawings to photographs) that make the history of reading and literacy accessible, but also the way the disciplinary contents and school curricula, their auxiliary technologies and their respective markets were historically structured. There is still much work to be done in this specific area (Warde & Oliveira, 2022, p. 10).

It will not be possible to provide here the inventory, as exhaustive as it would be desirable, regarding the multitude of publications and authors who have been

<sup>3</sup> See the photographs of Paulo Catrica about the *Liceus* (2005: <https://paulocatrica.pt/?p=1030>); the photographs from the collection of Mário Novais / Biblioteca de Arte da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian about *Schools* (<https://shorturl.at/BInwi>); and the photographic gallery from the research project *Atlas of School Architecture* (<https://shorturl.at/3gYnZ>).

treating different research objects based on photography. For the past twenty years, a significant volume of papers published in Portugal – and especially in Brazil – have incorporated the contributions of Social, Cultural, Material, Oral and Visual History in HE, and have sought to renew themes and approaches to the writing of “another history” of institutions and school subjects. This has resulted in investigations focused on issues related to documentary criticism and the epistemological status of its sources-objects of study (Nóvoa, 2005; Vidal, 2017; Paulilo, 2019; Cabeleira & Madeira, 2022; Ciavatta, 2023). Several research projects have contributed to locate and catalog new sources, and even to extend the very “concept of source” in educational historiography, namely, through the construction of Visual and Digital Archives for the Public History of Education (Moraes & Alves, 2002; Cabeleira, Martins & Lawn 2011; Cabeleira, 2022).

Although it has not always been possible to go beyond the “effort to give visibility to the specificity of the conformation devices of the school education model” (Paulilo, 2019, p. 3), photography has provided a lens for observing the school infrastructure and socio-cultural transformations that impacted education, and the way these were reflected in the photographic images themselves. The schools of the early twentieth century, in Brazil and Portugal, were rudimentary spaces, with austere environments and focused on the disciplines of the body and soul. Over time, changes in educational philosophies and public policies began to be reflected also in school architecture, which began to incorporate new pedagogical concepts, such as the valorization of the learning environment, the decoration and personalization of the classroom’s interior, and the inclusion of spaces for social interaction and recreation increasingly wide and diverse (Souza, 2001; Nóvoa, 2005; Abdala, 2013; Chaloba, Bencostta & Silva, 2018; Baldez, 2022). In most cases, photographic images are essential to understand these changes, as they allow us to observe how the classrooms and the school’s own physiognomy have been structured over the decades, how teaching methods were reflected in the furniture arrangements, and how the school environment gradually became a space of socialization and acculturation (Almeida, 2011; Patrício, 2018).

In Portugal, for example, the images of the democratic school (1974) are, in many cases, similar to those inherited from the school of the Salazarist dictatorship, since the 1940s (Ramos et al., 2016). We see how the New State school went on surviving, decade after decade, even at a time when the education system expanded, diversified and democratized (1980 and 1990’s). It was not until the 2000s that the primary school building and classroom changed. Even the secondary schools that began to function in the 1970s and 1980s were themselves installed in former Seminars, Colleges, or Technical-Industrial Schools (the latter had been inherited from the late nineteenth century, or had been built from the scratch during the 1950s). The first initiatives towards distance learning – *telescola* – and the creation of Preparatory Cycles in the 1960s and 1970s, have introduced a remarkable pedagogical

and social innovation, resulting from the political will to modernise the teaching practices through audiovisual technologies, in order to bring the school closer to the labour market (Beja et al., 1990, 1996; Nóvoa, 2005). All these images show us how architecture and design historically conditioned the teaching processes and methods, but they also show us how those tended to be conditioned by these, and how the multiple spaces and times of the school have been accumulating and overlapping, instead of being replaced or surpassed (Madeira, Cabeleira & Magalhães, 2022).

Some authors in the Luso-Brazilian context have highlighted the role of photography as a document (and monument) of resistance and struggle against the silencing of the schooled subject. One of the most significant aspects of photography in HE is its potential to give voice (and serve as a witness) to social struggles and resistance to hegemonic educational models. Photographs of popular education movements, of schools in contexts of exclusion or segregation, and of students and teachers involved in struggles for educational rights offer us ‘insights’ about local educational contexts and environments that have often been marginalized in official narratives. Although less studied and represented in HE, these images function not only as historical documents of the past, but also as manifestations of resistance, affirmation and (re)construction of identities (Freitas, 2011; Mattos, 2011; Muller, 2014; Madeira, Cabeleira & Magalhães, 2022; Ciavatta, 2023).

Many of these works deal with “the problem of memory”, using the photographic document to fill the silence of other sources. We know, moreover, how school photography has contributed to crystallizing habits, protocols and conventions of representation (socially acceptable and culturally selective), through which the umbilical connection between the processes of schooling and the “political function of photography” was institutionalized in the construction of the “social imagination of the school” (Paulilo, 2019, pp. 11-12).

## PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS AND DIGITAL ARCHIVES FOR THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

Since the 1990s, the new Cultural History has driven an impressive volume of studies and interpretive approaches that would produce lasting effects on educational historiography of the following decades, changing the practices, sources, objects and problems of historical research. The analysis of educational phenomena and contexts is no longer limited to their protagonists (and to the political-economic macrostructure that supported them), as attention has shifted towards the “anonymous” subjects and the “school day-to-day” (Fernandes, 2010). The documentary collection of this new Cultural History has expanded and diversified into “uncountable matterials” (Warde & Oliveira, 2022, p. 9). Large historiographic projects have been launched (both in Portugal and in Brazil), with the purpose of

producing primary source inventories and guides. Examples of these projects were the “analytical repertoires” of the pedagogical and educational press (Catani, 1996) and the inventory of regional “photographic collections” (Almeida, 1995). In addition to these *visual corpus*, many photographic images have been rescued and recovered from illustrated magazines, albums and official reports (Possamai, 2007, p. 5; Andreotti, 2006, pp. 9-12).<sup>4</sup>

In many ways, the historiographical renewal and the extension of the notion of *source* has promoted and prestidged “the efforts to convert the dead archive of schools into an historical archive”. Several initiatives aimed at inventorying materials previously neglected by traditional historiography (photographs, iconographic documents, school journals, notebooks and works produced by students) have led to new documentary collections, but also to the appreciation of the “notion of school document” and of the “place of the subject” in the production of the historical memory of school (Paulilo, 2019, pp. 10-11).

However, several researchers have been reporting on the difficulty involved in working with sources that document the school routine: “everyday objects, which are essential to the schools’ functioning, require a greater cataloging effort” (Warde & Oliveira, 2022, p. 10). Furthermore, for the past twenty years, computers and the Internet have revolutionized the forms (and formats) through which researchers in the Social, Human and Educational Sciences can access or produce their sources. In this digital age, we face a paradoxical reality: due to a lack of space, “many assets of historical value are simply discarded” in schools, while the “quantity” of digital documents increases at an unprecedented scale. On the one hand, schools have no “tradition of archiving documents” about their own “collective memory” and, on the other hand, the importance of safeguarding documentation that “registers” the everyday of schooling is usually not recognized (Fernandes, 2010, pp. 1063-64).

Along with document disposal practices, new digital technologies have been (re)configuring the very *notion of archive* and the forms of preservation of historical memory. This simple fact is, in itself, a *politics of memory* that affects the way the school institution is seen and remembered. In turn, this massive digitization of our personal and social lives poses numerous challenges to the practice and craft of the historian of education. To think *with* and *about* images or photographic collections is to bring to the fore the issue of the *digital archive* while wondering about ‘how’ and ‘why’ certain images have survived to the present day, while others have not. This was, precisely,

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<sup>4</sup> See: “Catálogos e guias de fontes,” *Modos de Fazer Educação na Bahia no passado e no presente* (Blog do GPEC: <https://shorturl.at/0SvoC>).

the starting point for a research project hosted by the University of Lisbon, that produced a Digital Archive and a Virtual Museum of Education in rural areas.<sup>5</sup>

In the digital age, much of what is the potential for the access and use of images for research purposes is conditioned by the implementation of controlled vocabularies and systems for the aggregation, cataloging and identification of digital objects (including data and metadata), while counting on more or less sophisticated infrastructures and interoperability networks that allow the search and finding of digital resources dispersed across multiple digital platforms (see, for instance, the case of ROSSIO Infrastructure).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the preservation of photographic collections in a digital format implies a continuous work of contextualization and tracking, so that the processes of reproduction and manipulation to which the image has been subjected in time, and in the various spaces or supports through which it has circulated (printed and digital publications, etc.) are known.<sup>7</sup>

At a time when image generation and management in virtual environments has become accessible to almost everyone, technology gives to any minimally proficient user the right to claim for him/herself the status of photographer or documentarist. The very notion of documentation is complexifying as automatic programs and algorithms become increasingly efficient in dismissing human intervention. In fact, the digital power is strongly attached to images and visual objects. The impact of these technologies on collective memory is largely due to the power of attraction that photography exerts on the attention of users, often relegating to the background the narrative or story that these images tell. The digital environment converts all memory into a photo, only to then replace it with another. The same is saying that our imagination of *future pasts* (Koselleck, 2004) will be essentially modelled by the technologies of the image. They have became the privileged site for the production of historical memory and, paradoxically, for the acceleration of “historical amnesia” (Tröhler, 2020; Cabeleira, 2022). Memory is, today, an ephemeral thing, subjected to continuous *upgrades*, like any *app*. As Thomas Elsaesser once said, it is very likely that the only story of which our culture will have some memory in the future, will be that which is produced by the Internet (2013, p. 218). Especially now, that we have at our disposal AI platforms capable of generating images *on-demand*.

<sup>5</sup> *Memórias Resgatadas, Identidades (Re)construídas / Rescued Memories, (Re)Constructed Identities* – MRIR (IEUL, 2019-22: <https://shorturl.at/gkrlg>, link to the project’s website: <http://memorias.resgatadas.ie.ulisboa.pt/>).

<sup>6</sup> Nova University of Lisbon, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (<https://rossio.pt>).

<sup>7</sup> For example, see the image in the Lisbon Municipal Archives: “Primary school, classroom” [19-], authored by the photographer Alberto Carlos Lima (1872-1949), which appears accompanied by the following publication note: “NÓVOA, António, Evidentemente: histórias da Educação. 1º ed. Porto: Asa, 2005. ISBN 972-41-4214-0” (<https://shorturl.at/zgf4S>).

## FINAL REMARKS

For the past twenty years, a growing number of historians have begun to integrate theoretical and methodological approaches from Cultural Studies and Visual Culture in the specific field of HE (Cabeleira, Martins & Lawn, 2011; Dussel & Priem, 2017; Salas & Gómez, 2018; Pozo & Braster, 2020). Despite these remarkable efforts, most of them have remained faithful to a monolithic approach of visual sources as “illustration” or “complement” of information extracted from other textual sources (Mietzner, Myers & Peim, 2005; Cabeleira, 2022). It is also notorious the posture of alienation or reserve in relation to the debates around the “epistemological value of images” in educational research (Fischman, 2001, p. 28). Rarely have images been used as an *object* of study in themselves, which reveals their systematic and transversal undervaluation within different academic traditions, theoretical orientations and research methodologies (Prosser, 1996; Fischman, 2001; Margolis & Rowe, 2011).

A portion of such distrust in *the visual* by historians stems from “poststructuralist and postmodern theoretical approaches” that, in recent decades, have questioned the epistemological value of photography, since it is itself the subject of procedures (technological and ideological) of distortion and manipulation. All of this has been translated into a generalized disposal of photographic images, either due to theoretical or ideological prejudices, or due to methodological and empirical insufficiency. The use of images in HE research is often “synonymous with loss in intellectual quality and rigor” (Fischman & Sales, 2014, p. 425).

One of the most significant contributions of the literature produced in the Luso-Brazilian HE context, concerns the attempt to develop new methodologies for image analysis that also include its *non-representative* dimension, that is, its aesthetic and poetic dimensions (Meneses, 2003; Catrica, 2006; Barausse & Possamai, 2019; Madeira, Cabeleira & Magalhães, 2022; Ciavatta, 2023). On the other hand, in the wide volume of works that mobilize photography as a *source* of study, there is a noticeable tendency to divert attention from the approach of issues related to the accessibility and sustainability of visual records and archives in the digital age, and the ways in which the digitization and platformization of our collective existence is producing effects on the relationship of historians with these visual sources, and with their own craft.

Photograph has been the great responsible for the virtually infinite multiplication and magnification of images and visual objects that today flood and saturate our visual field. Since 1839, the large imagetic repository has not stopped increasing, and there is little left these days that has not already been transformed into a photograph – as Susan Sontag observed in the 1970s. The worldwide dissemination of the Internet in the 2000s only reinforced this reality. However, since then, we have been delegating to machines (and to their powerful *software* and *databases*) the task of retaining the world in a head that is now in the *clouds*. The Internet and, above all, the mega digital repositories and search engines (Wikipedia,

Wikimedia, etc.) are today the great reservoirs and providers of our photographic imagination. It is therefore important to reflect on the relations between photography, education and research in this post-truth world where the fictions that constitute our identity, our existence and our own humanity, are increasingly far from the image of what we were in the past.

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