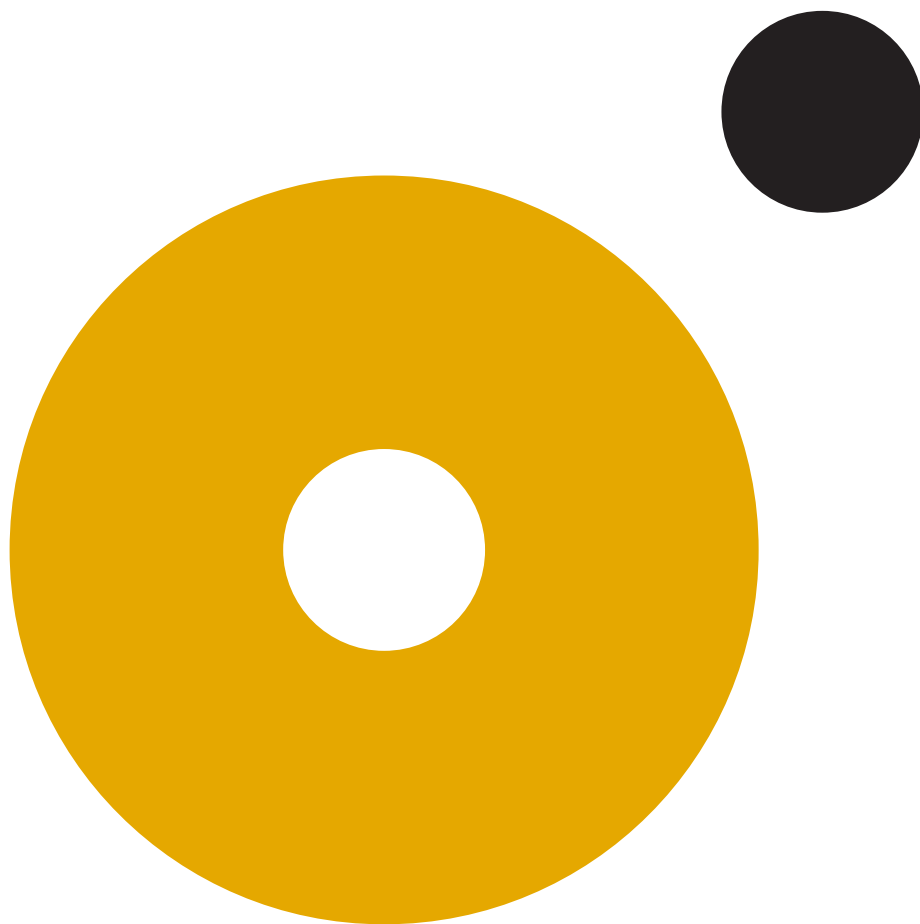


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**




The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani

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These volumes contain the official proceedings of the International Conference «The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation» (Macerata, 12-15 December 2022), organized by the University of Macerata in partnership with the Catholic University of Sacred Heart of Milan, the University of Florence and the University Roma Tre.

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Palazzo Ciccolini – via XX settembre, 5

62100 Macerata (Italy)

info.ceum@unimc.it

<http://eum.unimc.it>

The School and Its Many Pasts

I: The Different Types of School Memory

edited by Lucia Paciaroni

Introduction to the Different Types of School Memory

Lucia Paciaroni
University of Macerata (Italy)

During the first decade of the 21st century, “school memory” became the subject of studies of considerable interest in the field of educational-historical research, both in Ibero-American countries and in the Anglo-Saxon world and, later, also in Italy. Among the historians of education who first began to investigate this theme are Agustín Escolano, Antonio Viñao and Pierre Caspard. Scholars from the Iberian area, in particular, initiated pioneering reflections on the complex relationship between “educational memory” and “school culture” that Dominique Julia had placed at the centre of the historical-educational debate in 1995 and that gave rise to a veritable historiographical revolution that pushed educational historians to investigate a wide range of new sources.

The Spanish scientific community began to investigate in depth the individual school memory, to which Agustín Escolano attributed a central role. According to the scholar, careful and in-depth research on it, and thus on the individual memories of the actors of school life contained in diaries and autobiographies, but also shared through oral testimonies, could reveal the real educational practices carried out in the classroom as well as the school rituals and the disciplining practices used by teachers. This could, therefore, highlight what really happened in the classroom¹.

In recent years, innovative avenues of research have been pursued on the subject of “school memory”: scholars, through the analysis and interpretation of the various forms of school memory, have attempted to investigate the school past in greater depth, in an attempt to decipher that “black box of school” to which educational historiography has referred several times in recent years.

A rather significant occasion for discussion on the topic of school memory was the international symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues”, held in Seville in 2015, at which Juri Meda and Antonio Viñao defined school memory as «the individual, collective and/or public practice of recalling a common school past»². On that occasion, the epistemological foundations of the historiographical reflection inherent to school memory were explored in depth and a first systematic reflection on the topic was draft-

¹ Cf. A. Escolano Benito, *Más allá del espasmo del presente: la escuela como memoria*, «História da Educação», vol. XV, n. 33, 2011, pp. 10-30.

² Cf. J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memories: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, p. 5.

ed, defining some general theoretical frameworks, providing methodological criteria and suggesting possible intersections with the anthropology of education and the sociology of cultural processes.

This meeting marked a significant turning point for educational-historical research: school memory, from that moment on, constituted an interpretative category that drew the attention of educational historians who included it in the historiographical reflection of the educational-historical field on an international level. Italian educational historians have also recently started timely research on school memory considering it in its various meanings. Of particular importance for the dissemination of studies on the subject was the Project of Significant National Interest, “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”³, in which over fifty scholars and young researchers from fourteen Italian universities participated⁴.

On the basis of the new types of sources considered by the scholars and an interdisciplinary methodological approach, the research units involved in the project investigated the models of schooling, teaching, learning and scholarship emerging from individual memories as well as the representation of these models by the information, communication and cultural industries.

At first, as already mentioned, the focus was on individual school memories, i.e., on the self-representation provided by former teachers and former school administration officials, as well as by former pupils within oral and written testimonies. In order to reconstruct school history, educational historians have started to consider new types of sources to analyse the real experiences of its protagonists, going beyond a purely historical-legislative approach. As is well known, studies and research based on oral testimonies but also on diaries, autobiographies and memoirs in general have become widespread, bringing to light many different school histories that tell us the fundamental impact that the exercise of the profession even by apparently “anonymous” teachers had on the lives of individuals and the communities in which they worked.

In recent years, however, educational historians have also begun to investigate the other two forms of school memory, the public and the collective, which, for a long time, were not considered historiographically relevant.

Public school memory consists of the representation of schools and teachers in official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions on the basis of a precise policy of remembrance, i.e., a public use of the past aimed at acquiring consensus and strengthening the feeling of belonging to a specific communi-

³ The Project of Significant National Interest “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)” (prot. no.: 2017STEF2S), of three-year duration, was approved by Decree of the Director General for the Coordination, Promotion and Enhancement of Research of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (no. 226 of 12 April 2019) and, subsequently, admitted for funding by the same Ministry with D.D. no. 984 of 21 May 2019. On the project, see R. Sani, J. Meda, «*School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation*». *Un progetto di ricerca innovativo e a marcata vocazione internazionale*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26.

⁴ The project involved scholars from the University of Macerata (lead partner), the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, the University of Florence and the Roma Tre University, as well as aggregate members from other Italian universities.

ty. Research has thus focused on gravestones, monuments, stamps and coins relating to educators and teachers working in Italian schools of all levels, but also to pedagogues, headmasters, school managers and officials of central and local administrations. This category also includes honours awarded to exponents and institutions in the realm of schools and education. Collective school memory, on the other hand, is made up of the many representations that the cultural industry (literature, film, music, etc.) and the world of information have offered over time of schools, teachers and students themselves. It is, in fact, a «social reconstruction of the past that results from the fusion of the ‘experienced school past’ (recalled by direct participants) with the ‘constructed school past’ (recalled by observers, readers and spectators)»⁵. Scholars then began to investigate the products of the various cultural promotion and dissemination agencies that were capable not only of preserving but also of constructing a shared memory, and then highlighted the fact that the representation of the school on the small and big screen – but also in works of art in illustrations and literary works – has undoubtedly contributed to forming in viewers, observers and readers «*clichés* or, in any case, specific images of our teachers – and therefore of the school – aimed at nurturing and, in some cases, even redefining the collective memory of Italians of the last century»⁶.

As a demonstration of the innovative and thorough research promoted on the topic of school memory in recent years, this publication presents a series of investigations conducted by young educational historians with the intention of contributing to promoting a broad methodological and historiographical comparison on the issues concerning the study of school memory and, at the same time, to initiate an organic comparative reflection on the same topic.

The scholars’ essays were presented at the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation” (12-15 December 2022)⁷, during which historians – from Italy, Brazil, France, Switzerland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Hungary, Serbia and Israel – met. The contributions offer the opportunity to enrich the reflection on the topic, to establish valuable synergies and further forms of research collaboration and to give an authentically international scope to the in-depth study of a strand of investigation – that relating to school memory – which still has many stimuli and suggestions to offer to educational historians. The contributions highlight the heuristic potential of sources such as literary works, films and documentaries and photographs, but also of oral testimonies, diaries, school architecture and furnishings as well as gravestones, medals and awards of

⁵ Meda, Viñao, *School Memories: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit., p. 5.

⁶ P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando editore, 2019, p. 13.

⁷ The contributions were presented at the pre-conference “*Work in progress*”. *Research of Young Scholars on School Memories* on 13 December 2022. For a chronicle of the international conference, see L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, V. Minuto, *The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation. Un recente convegno internazionale di studi*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 1, pp. 509-526.

distinction. The researchers also offer a timely reflection on the reconstruction and enhancement of school memory and the discovery of multiple interpretations of the school past. Indeed, there is no single school past, but there are multiple ones, sometimes non-conforming to historical reality but nevertheless real insofar as they are able to influence the vision that individuals or communities have of that past.

The book, therefore, aims to stimulate new and significant avenues of research so that a real qualitative leap can be made in studies aimed at delving into school memory, and therefore offering a genuinely comparative reading capable of accounting for contexts and scenarios that are not limited to the national or even the continental European sphere, but open to a truly global dimension.

The Future of Memory: Initial Steps in a Research Career and Emerging Historiographical Perspectives

Cristina Yanes-Cabrera
University of Sevilla (Spain)

Introduction

Embarking on a research career is an exciting adventure driven by a personal desire to expand knowledge and delve deeper into a subject. However, it is not without its challenges. The early stages of a research career can be filled with uncertainties. Yet, the effort invested is worthwhile, as young memory researchers represent our future. They are the voices of the present and future, responsible for documenting our educational past, and therefore, they deserve special attention.

This paper aims to highlight this reality, describing the different scenarios involving research in the field of school memory, trying to answer to three questions: What is needed to study in more detail the past of education? How to orient oneself in the study of school memory? What inspires a research approach and what could be the new historiographical perspectives in the study of school memory?

To answer these questions, the first objective is to establish the foundational elements of research and explore the possibilities that can contribute to its success, while acknowledging the inherent challenges in historical research. The second objective is to provide guidelines in the form of a “logbook” for aspiring school memory researchers, forming the basis for their future work. This section will examine crucial aspects to consider when approaching the study of school memory. Additionally, it will highlight the difficulties that may arise along the journey. Lastly, as a conclusion, the article will reflect on future possibilities for studying the past, analysing new and potential perspectives that currently shape the study of the history of education.

The intention of this article is to provide a new roadmap, recommendations, and reflections that can help guide young researchers on their path.

1. *What is required to study the history of education in greater detail?*

Two types of conditioning factors influence research approaches: external and internal. When focusing on internal factors, it is important to recognize that a research career

is not a linear path but rather a curved or circular one, where progress sometimes leads back to the starting point. Within this career, three key factors or pillars are necessary to undertake any research: creativity, rigor, and motivation.

Research stems from a need, a question, a concern, or a problem. It requires a specific order to determine what needs to be done and when. As a subjective process, creativity plays a crucial role in prompting questioning, thinking critically, and fostering curiosity. It is a determining factor in knowledge generation. Additionally, it is necessary to acknowledge that, during the research process, there will be times when control is lost, and chaos must be embraced to recognize the unexpected phenomena that emerge during fieldwork, as Levalle refers to them. In other words, despite having a systematic research methodology, predefined hypotheses, and objectives, the element of surprise is important as it allows us to shift focus from the academic approach and raise new questions that may prompt a reevaluation of our initial research framework¹.

Secondly, the social sciences have long debated how to ensure rigor in qualitative research, given that it involves working with context-bound, local, and situation-bound data sets². Assuming the subjective and dialogical nature of knowledge generation, it makes it difficult to determine criteria of rigour that can be easily accepted as relevant and transferable. But rigour, and more specifically when we enter the study of the past of education, does not only point to techniques and methods, but more fundamentally to questioning the particular features of knowledge generation³, and this question will be highly relevant in the study of school memory, as will be discussed below. Rigour will be defined as the establishment of parameters that allow access to and ensure the credibility, authenticity, trustworthiness and integrity of research outcomes. Research is like exercising a craft, which requires patience and is grounded in practice. Each process is unique, and needs a good companion: a director or mentor with whom to learn and discuss each step, with respect and intellectual freedom.

Thirdly, personal motivation is a decisive element that drives research and gives it meaning. To delve into motivation, two important questions arise: Why pursue research? And for what purpose? Aligning personal desires with these questions serves as an excellent starting point. By making oneself aware of the personal and social context that shapes the desire to study a particular topic, researchers are less likely to be swayed by the allure of those who have been studying the same topics for years.

Regarding external factors, universities are well-known for their functions of teaching, research, culture, and knowledge transfer. In terms of research, various public funding schemes exist, both domestic (through ministries, local or regional governments) and international (such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Cost). These fund-

¹ S. Levalle, *Investigación e imaginación: incitaciones creativas para la producción de tesis en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, «Praxis educativa», vol. 26, n. 3, 2022, pp. 1-19.

² M. Bergman, A. Coxon, *The Quality in Qualitative Methods*, «Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research», vol. 6, n. 2, art. 34, May 2005, pp. 1-20, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/> (last access: 06.02.2023).

³ M. Cornejo, N. Salas, *Rigor y Calidad Metodológicos: Un Reto a la Investigación Social Cualitativa*, «Psicoperspectivas», vol. 10, n. 2, 2011, pp. 12-34.

ing opportunities primarily support the development of R&D projects, training, and the mobility of pre-doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, as well as the acquisition and improvement of infrastructure. Support is also available to encourage collaboration among research teams at national and international levels, along with grants aimed at enhancing interdisciplinary teamwork. However, compared to the experimental sciences, research in history and education is often undervalued in terms of its contributions to society and other fields, resulting in comparably low funding allocation.

Therefore, it is crucial to demonstrate how research in the history of education can be applied to society through national and international funding proposals. Higher education institutions should strive to ensure that teaching and research provide solutions to social, political, economic, and other issues, both within and beyond their spheres of influence, by facilitating knowledge transfer. Social Sciences and Humanities possess the potential to become significant agents of change and drive social transformation⁴. In the context of the history of education, what can researchers transfer?

Within our field, the primary element to transfer is knowledge – specific or general – accumulated through years of research and experience⁵. This knowledge can be transferred through some of these activities that benefit society and different stakeholders:

1. Publication of teaching materials, establishment of educational history museums, advice on the setting up of exhibitions, development of educational activities to interpret the study of the history of education, etc.
2. Participation in agreements and/or contracts with non-profit organisations or public administrations for activities with a special social value.
3. Creation of databases, repositories, software applications and forms of expression or presentation (including photographs, etc.)
4. Publication of research findings (books, book chapters, or papers), dissemination of historical-educational research through audio-visual media, and professional outreach.
5. Creation of international networks to promote, discuss, share and disseminate the history of education research outcomes.

Therefore, a crucial aspect to consider when transferring knowledge from the history of education is to focus on the objectives of the research projects themselves, particularly with regards to the level of reflection and motivation regarding the social and/or economic relevance of the research to be conducted. In other words, researchers should ask themselves: who will benefit from what I know and what I am studying, why is it important, and for what purpose can it be useful⁶. These questions should guide the purpose of studying school memory.

⁴ E. Armendariz-Nuñez, J. Tarango, F. González-Quíñones, *Transferencia de conocimiento en docentes universitarios y su aplicación en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, «Telos», vol. 24, n. 2, 2022, pp. 329-343.

⁵ E. Castro, I. Fernández de Lucio, M. Pérez, Marián, F. Criado, *La transferencia de conocimiento desde las humanidades: Posibilidades y características*, «Arbor: Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura», vol. 184, n. 732, 2008, pp. 619-636.

⁶ Armendariz-Nuñez *et alii*, *Transferencia de conocimiento en docentes universitarios y su aplicación en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, cit., p. 340.

2. *How to orientate oneself in the research of school memory?*

Navigating the universe of school memory is a very enriching, stimulating and constructive experience. However, certain precautions are to be taken. Borrowing from the marine world, two voyages are proposed: knowing how to distinguish and relate memory and history, on the one hand, and questioning why it is relevant to study school memory, on the other. Finally, and almost inevitably, it is necessary to warn of the cautions and risks of approaching its study.

Ramos, in a paper published in 2021, suggested among many other interesting considerations that «memory and history are two dimensions of the same activity, and this activity is historical thinking»⁷. But, although these two concepts are clearly interrelated, they are not the same thing. It is a complex, ancient, constantly evolving relationship, which is at the same time highly topical. Much research has focused on establishing the links between memory and history, with the book coordinated by Pierre Nora, *Le lieux de mémoire*, perhaps being the one that in the 1980s led to a boom in work linking memory and history⁸. From then on, there has been much debate about the possibilities and limitations of making memory a historiographical subject.

The following is a basic (not comprehensive) conceptual approach of the most basic elements in which memory and history converge, as well as the main elements that differentiate them, with the sole purpose of clarifying at all times what we are facing in historical-educational research when we set out to study school memory.

In relation to convergences, both share an ontological dimension because they deal with the same object: the past. Memory and history are *representations of the past*, in the same way that oblivion⁹ and recall are. Both are constructed from the present, have to do with the past and are drivers of the future. And both history and memory share, albeit at different levels, a certain social tension in disputing the spaces and meanings of the past, in defining and considering the interpretations and visions of the past as hegemonic. From this notion, that is, from the meaning given by both memory and history, that the past is continually being constructed and that it is not closed, emanates a note of optimism that both share: «the future is not finished or written: it is human action that drives it»¹⁰.

On the other hand, if we consider the approaches of some authors, such as Philippe Ariès, history would be made up of two spheres: one visible and the other invisible. The first would focus on the study of the history of thought, politics, social relations, literature, ideology, culture, science that is, the domain of clear consciousness. The other, the

⁷ S. Ramos, *Debates sobre la Memoria y la Historia de la Educación en el siglo XXI*, «Social and Education History», vol. 10, n. 1, p. 24.

⁸ J. Aróstegui, *Retos de la memoria y trabajos de la historia. Pasado y Memoria*, «Revista de Historia Contemporánea», vol. 3, 2004, pp. 5-59.

⁹ Ramos, *Debates sobre la Memoria y la Historia de la Educación en el siglo XXI*, cit., pp. 22-46.

¹⁰ E. Jelin, *La historicidad de las memorias*, «Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez», vol. 50, n. 1, 2020, Last update: 15.03.2020, <http://journals.openedition.org/mcv/12902> (last access: 08.04.2022).

invisible, would be made up of that which has been ignored by historians until recently¹¹. This would refer to the area of representations, experiences and lived memories, of what is hidden, of what is secret in the memories of both individual and collective memory, related to the unconscious. Studying memory is making these traces of the past visible. It is necessary to consider memory to write history, but memory cannot be the only source of history¹².

But if we speak about differences, we can say that there is no single memory, we should rather speak about memories in plural, because no society has a single memory. However, it could be said that there is a history in the singular. History seeks to construct itself as a critical discipline focused on the knowledge of human experiences in the past, it is epistemologically considered as a unitary knowledge, whose social processes require a plurality of methodological supports capable of responding to its diverse contents¹³.

Memory is an individual or collective reconstruction of the past; history is a scientific field of knowledge that attempts to explain and interpret facts, processes, continuities and changes in a consistent and logical manner¹⁴. Thus, and connecting this social reconstruction of memory with the social tension for disputing the spaces and meanings of the past, memories of the past are usually represented in strongly confrontational scenarios. It is therefore up to historians to carry out the important task of studying, contrasting and approaching what has happened from a historical research perspective.

On the other hand, history as a scientific-research activity is not identified with memory¹⁵. The historical method calls for knowledge produced based on a systematic and rigorous method¹⁶. The same is not required from the study of memory. Both respond not only to different social uses of the past in terms of the way they are approached, but also in terms of their content and purpose. In terms of purpose, history provides critical knowledge of social experiences and processes in the conviction that human reality is subject to change. Memories are created and constructed as a way of justifying or explaining by a group in order to argue its present without the pretending to conform to critical truth criteria.

¹¹ D. Betancourt Echeverry, *Memoria individual, memoria colectiva y memoria histórica: lo secreto y lo escondido en la narración y el recuerdo*, in R. Ávila Penagos et alii, *La práctica investigativa en ciencias sociales*, Bogotá, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2004, pp. 125-134.

¹² Aróstegui, *Retos de la memoria y trabajos de la historia. Pasado y Memoria*, cit., p. 50.

¹³ E. Manzano Moreno, *La memoria, el olvido y la historia*, in J. Pérez Garzón, E. Manzano Moreno (edd.), *Memoria histórica*, Madrid, CSIC, 2010, pp. 71-96.

¹⁴ A. Viñao, *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42.

¹⁵ A. Viñao, *Presentación*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», vol. 1, 2015, pp. 9-20.

¹⁶ H.I. Marrow, *El conocimiento histórico*, Barcelona, Labor, 1968.

3. *Why studying school memory?*

In this second undertaking, it's important to clarify the significance of studying school memory. To do so, let's begin by defining the concept of school memory.

Viñao and Meda have identified two interpretations of the term "school memory". First, it can be seen as an «individual form of reflection on one's own school experience, independent of self-reconstruction». Autobiographical accounts and narratives, found in sources like diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, and correspondence, are valuable in this regard. Additionally, school memory can be gathered from oral testimonies, autobiographical interviews, life stories, and more, all centered around personal experiences in the social and educational context¹⁷. In all cases, these instruments are centred on our own personal and life experiences and knowledge in the social and school context, which help us to become aware of how we construct and reconstruct our identity¹⁸.

Secondly, school memory can be understood «as the practice of individual, collective and/or public evocation and recreation of a common school past». This would be the representations that individuals, communities and society have constructed and transmitted about the school world through other social and cultural media such as commemorations, literature, cinema, television, the popular press and other informal media, such as social networks, etc. With this, the great challenge will be to arrive at the analysis of «how the perception of the public status of education has evolved, as well as the public image of the school and the education system»¹⁹.

With the concept defined, we can address the question that underscores the importance of studying school memory: why should we study it?

Beyond the evident emotional aspect of memory study, when considering the benefits it provides to historical-educational research, we can outline the following reasons:

- Recovering Forgotten History: Studying school memory sheds light on a neglected, silenced, forgotten, or denied part of educational history that coexisted with the structural aspects. This neglected history deserves attention comparable to educational policies, records, and archives.
- Influence on Identity: Education is an integral part of both individual and collective societal history, contributing significantly to identity formation. Exploring school memory fosters common spaces for sharing experiences and perspectives, reinforcing collective identity through endeavors like scientific societies, journals, conferences, etc.
- Recognition of Overlooked Figures: Studying school memory dignifies individuals who played roles in historic moments often ignored by official history. It offers a platform for those who witnessed educational history to have their voices heard²⁰.

¹⁷ J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

¹⁸ F. Hernández, M. Rifa (edd.), *La investigación autobiográfica y cambio social*, Barcelona, Octaedro, 2011.

¹⁹ Meda, Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, cit.

²⁰ M. P. González, J. Pagés, *Historia, memoria y enseñanza de la historia: conceptos, debates y perspectivas europeas y latinoamericanas*, «Historia y Memoria», vol. 9, 2014, pp. 275-311.

Giving Voice to Artifacts: School materials, images, engravings, and other educational artifacts from specific timeframes offer insights into teaching practices, methodologies, and the daily life of education from diverse viewpoints. These elements are crucial in shaping identities and ideologies.

Broadening Historical Scope: As a source, school memory expands the scope of educational history studies, raising questions that drive further inquiry. Memories can challenge existing historical knowledge, influencing both present and future perspectives.

Enhancing Education: Researching school memory enriches the teaching of history of education, contributing to the development of critical, responsible, and engaged citizens. It also underscores the significance of memory-related institutions like educational museums and commemorations.

Undoubtedly, recovering school memory is a great challenge from the perspective of the hypothesis that the past of education is different from what the official sources have told us, and from the perspective that there is a wide range of opportunities inviting us to debate it and drive joint research by national or international research groups, as well as its development from the academia. But as Primo Levi, a leading scholar of historical memory, warned, we must be cautious in working with memory. Some of these caveats will be discussed below²¹.

In the realm of history, memory can be examined through three distinct perspectives: analytical, critical, and strictly historical. The analytical standpoint regards memory as a resource for research, a means of gathering historical data. The critical perspective delves into the role of history in rectifying erroneous or false memories. Lastly, the historical perspective treats memory as a subject of study and research, focusing on how memory is constructed regarding past events, such as representations of history in literature or film²².

From all three perspectives, the use of school memory has some drawbacks linked to the particularity of the vehicle of analysis. The most representative is the use of memories. In the case of oral or written testimonies, it is true that these memories are a tool for reconstructing the events of the past through a look at the present, but in any case we cannot forget that memory in its essence is an element heavily loaded with subjectivity and with a great symbolic capacity, whether individual or collective. In historical-educational research, we must be extremely cautious about how this part of history is studied and analysed.

Furthermore, Roberto Sani, in relation to the interpretation of historical-educational heritage, warned of the need to place a kind of methodological bias at the centre of reflection, namely in the consideration of placing the emphasis on a precise reference to the historiographical approach, because «only a truly historical reading of school and educational heritage can give us back the most authentic sense of such heritage»²³. As

²¹ P. Levi, *Los hundidos y los salvados*, Barcelona, Muchnick, 1989.

²² E. González Calleja, *Memoria e Historia. Vademecum de conceptos y debates fundamentales*, Madrid, Catarata, 2013, p. 90.

²³ R. Sani, *L'implementazione della ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia: itinerari, priorità*,

scholars of school memory, we cannot stop at the simple act of remembrance. The role of the researcher requires, therefore, to turn memory «into an anonymous memory or objectified memory through historiographical operations»²⁴ that will determine its degree of reliability.

Additionally, it's important to acknowledge that memory is selective and often intertwined with an inclination to forget, dismiss, or overlook. As Viñao aptly notes «what is remembered or preserved is always a tiny part of what happened or was produced»²⁵.

Hence, several methodological precautions should be heeded when exploring school memory. Commencing with the identification of memory as a suitable source, the process demands «comparison, temporal contextualization, relativization, objectification, and the formulation of a discourse grounded in methodology»²⁶. In this endeavor, the role of the educational researcher remains pivotal.

As this exploration draws to a close, it is incumbent upon future historians to chart a new course and steer the course of our endeavors in studying school memory. With this in mind, one last question remains to be pondered: what inspires a research approach and new historiographical perspectives for studying school memory?

4. *Finding Inspiration for Exploring School Memory*

The foundational element that sparks any research endeavour undoubtedly lies in comprehending the existing body of knowledge and ongoing work on the subject. Therefore, to determine the most fitting approach for studying school memory, it becomes essential to read and engage with individuals who have contributed to the history of education in this particular field.

In recent years, an extensive and diverse literature focusing on the study of school memory has emerged, addressing each dimension outlined in the definition, offering insightful and thought-provoking perspectives on the educational realm. Within the domain of History of Education, attention toward studying school memory started to take shape in parallel with the evolution of policies concerning historical memory recovery and the public utilization of history. Simultaneously, there has been an increasing interest among general historians in delving into new historiographical dimensions.

In the context of Spain, this movement was sparked by the discourse surrounding the connection between school memory and school culture, initially introduced by Julia at

obiettivi di lungo termine, in S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla, L. Pomante (edd.). *La Práctica Educativa. Historia, Memoria y Patrimonio*, Salamanca, FahrenHouse, 2018, p. 30.

²⁴ Ramos, *Debates sobre la Memoria y la Historia de la Educación en el siglo XXI*, cit., p. 32.

²⁵ Viñao, *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, cit., p. 21.

²⁶ Aróstegui, *Retos de la memoria y trabajos de la historia. Pasado y Memoria*, cit., p. 35.

the ISCHE in 1993. This discourse was spearheaded by Escolano²⁷ and Viñao²⁸ more than twenty years ago. As these two authors are essential reading for beginners in the study of school memory, and being aware that there are also other works of reference, we will only highlight the publications of the main collective works, mainly in Spain, and focusing on the study of memory from a general perspective, where a researcher can find intriguing ideas for approaching the study of school memory.

The initial collective work in Spain was the monograph that Escolano coordinated on *La memoria de la escuela* in «Vela Mayor. Revista de Anaya Educación» (1997). This work showcased the future of memory by illustrating how narrative practices extend the virtual nature of school memories. Within its twelve contributions, diverse subjects were explored, including the historiographical value of school memory, the post-war school's material and moral environment, lived experiences within schools, the historical omission of women's experiences during the Franco era, school ethnography, and the "ghosts" that haunt the school's history.

Subsequently, the work by Hernández Díaz and Escolano Benito (2002)²⁹ introduced, in addition to the school memory-culture debate, other topics such as: school museums, oral history, life stories and images as sources, and the narrative of the school. The historiographical possibilities of school memory were thus expanded, introducing not only critical analyses of the possibilities of memory, but also other spaces of memory, such as school museums.

While several important works were presented in the ensuing years, a notable collective work emerged in 2011, almost a decade later. This is the publication by Lomas³⁰. This is a work organised around two large blocks: "Education, between memory and oblivion" and "The education of memory and the learning of memory". In this Book, it is worth highlighting the reflection that takes place around the unwillingness to remember and the definition of the "school memory" construct in the field of the history of education. There is also a work on literature in the context of history and school, and a new reflection on women's memory of education.

Subsequently, in 2015, something that could be considered a milestone in the study of the memory of education in Spain took place, namely the creation of the journal «Historia y Memoria de la Educación» as an instrument of scientific dissemination, with a clear international vocation, and published by the Spanish Society for the History of Education (SEDHE). The work of bringing to life the proposal fell to Viñao, who coordinated a commission to draw up the aims and structure of the new journal. The result

²⁷ A. Escolano Benito, *La memoria de la escuela*, «Vela Mayor, Revista de Anaya Educación», monographic issue, IV, n. II, 1997, pp. 7-14; Id., *Memoria de la educación y cultura de la escuela*, in A. Escolano Benito, J. M. Hernández Díaz (edd.), *La memoria y el deseo. Cultura de la escuela y educación deseada*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2002, pp. 19-42.

²⁸ A. Viñao, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», vol. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

²⁹ J.M. Hernández Díaz, A. Escolano Benito (edd.), *La memoria y el deseo: cultura de la escuela la y educación deseada*, Valencia, Tirant Lo Blanch, 2002.

³⁰ C. Lomas (ed.), *Lecciones contra el olvido. Memoria de la educación y educación de la memoria*. Barcelona, Ediciones Octaedro, 2011.

was the launch of a periodical publication that should defend two principles, expressed by Viñao himself in the presentation of the first issue: the title states that

[...] history is made from individual, collective, social and institutional memory, from that incorporated into all kinds of objects and documents, and from that deposited in specific places; and that, in turn, the writing of history, the historical operation, works and (re)constructs such memory.

And, on the other hand,

[...] although history as a scientific-research activity is not identified with memory - nor the latter with the former - it is not possible to make history if it is not based on memory(ies) and without, at the same time, (re)constructing it (them); that is, without creating memory(ies)³¹.

From that moment on, a form of school memory became institutionalised. Sixteen issues have been published since then, where the initiated researchers of school memory can find reference articles.

Following this event, another major proposal came to encourage discussions on the study of school memory at international level, and this was the holding of the International Symposium «School Memory. New trends in historical-educational research: heuristic perspectives and methodological issues», held in Seville on 22 and 23 September 2015. This meeting led to the collective publication *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*³².

This work brings together renewed, new and inviting themes for the study of school memory, such as: postcards, photographs, teachers' diaries, autobiographies, engravings and paintings, institutional publications, oral testimonies, gravestones, cinema and television. All this in an attempt to reveal the *untold* story and to give an account of the image of it that has been recorded in the realities of many different countries. And not only from the experiences or perceptions of school experiences in the individual sphere of the protagonists of the educational process (individual memories), but also as part of a collective experience (collective memory), or through the representations of the school itself promoted by institutions on the basis of a specific memory policy (public memory). All this, in addition, by studying and reporting on the places of school memory (evoking Pierre Nora in his work *Les lieux de mémoire*).

A year later, an additional significant contribution arose from international collaborative networks following an international congress of the GEDHE and CESCO research groups in 2018, held in Palma de Mallorca. This contribution was the collective work by González, Meda, Motilla, and Pomante³³. This volume aimed to share new knowledge and perspectives on various themes, including the material and immaterial aspects of educational practice, texts on educational practice, oral testimonies, visual memory of educational practice, and the challenges of conserving and disseminating historical-ed-

³¹ Viñao, *Presentación*, cit., pp. 9-10.

³² Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit.

³³ S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla, L. Pomante (edd.), *La Práctica Educativa. Historia, Memoria y Patrimonio*, cit.

educational heritage. It also introduced didactic guidance workshops, offering practical approaches for engaging with school memory through oral sources and historical-educational heritage.

Also in 2018 came out the publication by González Pérez³⁴. This work seeks to construct an inclusive historical imaginary that gives a voice back to those who have been silenced, and highlights the presence of their heroes, in an attempt, in the words of the author, «to provide a succinct vision of memory and education, with the political and historical invariant of educational practices». In this work, some attractive themes are addressed, such as the challenges of memory in the educational past and present, memory and education renewal, and politics as an active form of education.

Turning to Italy, the web portal *memoriascolastica.it* is noteworthy. Created as a result of the research project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1961-2001)”, approved by the Ministry of Education of the University and Research in 2019, and made up of several Italian universities and athenaeums in recent years. The project is an important reference in studies of school memory understood as individual and collective practice, and of public memory for the recreation of the educational past, and it focuses on the image of the school imprinted in the collective imaginary, analysing the feelings about school by both individuals and groups of the different social stakeholders.

In recent years in Italy, it is worth highlighting as further collective works of reference with a generalist nature, those produced by the project: the monograph that the journal «History Education & Children’s Literature», devoted to *Memories and public celebrations in education in contemporary time*, coordinated by Meda, Pomante, and Brunelli in 2019; *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, by Ascenzi, Covato and Meda; and *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary* recently published in 2022 by Alfieri and Garai³⁵.

5. *The future of studying school memory holds numerous possibilities for new historiographical perspectives*

All these works give due account of the possibilities that the study of school memory offers to the history of education, and its critical study is necessary to redefine the way of constructing the history of education. Therefore, it could be said that none of the topics that have been worked on in the field of school memory have been exhausted.

³⁴ T. González Pérez (ed.), *Entre el olvido y la memoria. Educación, mitos y realidades*, Valencia, Tirant Humanidades, 2018.

³⁵ J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli (edd), *Memories and public celebrations in Education in contemporary times*, «History Education & Children Literature», vol. XI, n. 1, 2019; A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, eum, 2020; P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando editore, 2022.

To begin with, the very sense that the school past is constructed and changing through memory allows us to continue producing individual and collective reconstructions of the past. But, I reiterate, not through the simple individual or collective evocation of the school's past, but by emphasising its role in the socio-cultural construction and delving into the meaning of the collective representations and imaginaries that have been displayed in this regard. Therefore, the use of oral sources, the history narrated through diaries and memoirs, etc., in spatially and temporally diverse contexts, are categories that should continue to be studied in order to reconstruct the history of education. It would be worthwhile in this area to focus our analysis on other less studied actors, such as the administrative and service staff of schools, the people who ran the schools, or the role of parents in the school environment.

On the other hand, it is necessary to continue delving into the representations of the school past that the cultural industry provides us with, «imprinting indelible stereotypes on the collective imaginary». Works such as that of Borruso (2021)³⁶ on education, memory and childhood, or Alfieri (2019)³⁷ on the images of our teachers through Italian cinema and television, to give just a few examples, bear witness to this. In this field of cultural representations, we cannot ignore the fact that contemporary technologies have for years been favouring the emergence of new models of educational interaction³⁸. It is certainly an emerging field of study, but it would be worthwhile to delve into the universe of social networks to find out what representations are being produced in the school environment.

Educational historiography, on the other hand, evidences that the study of historical-educational heritage has proliferated all over the world, based fundamentally on the recovery and exhibition of the material and immaterial culture of the school through, fundamentally, education museums. Heritage, as Viñao points out, is something valuable that needs to be preserved and protected, it can be applied to an individual and a social group, and it carries with it the fact that it wishes to «become a place of memory and a place to deposit the memory, something to remember that makes us remember»³⁹. For this reason, places of memory continue to constitute subject of study and analysis that is more than relevant in the field of the study of school memory. From this perspective, it is worth exploring not only new approaches, such as the one proposed by Escolano⁴⁰ on the emotions of the subjects in the processes of construction of narrative identity and the new therapeutic perspectives of heritage education, but also in the identification of other places that help us building it, such as the Internet⁴¹.

³⁶ F. Borruso (ed.), *Memoria, infancia, educación. Modellos educativos e vida cotidiana fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, RomaTre Press, 2021.

³⁷ P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019.

³⁸ C. Brooks, C. Gibson, *Professional Learning in a Digital Age*, «Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology», vol. 38, n. 2, 2012, pp. 1-17.

³⁹ Viñao, *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, cit., pp. 17-42.

⁴⁰ A. Escolano, *El giro afectivo en la historia de la formación humana. Memoria de la escuela y emociones*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», vol. 7, 2018, pp. 391-422.

⁴¹ M. Brunelli, *Sapshots from the past: School Images on the Web and the construction of the collective memory of schools*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 47-64.

A further opportunity offered by the study of school memory leads us to broaden the field of study. A new challenge for historians of memory is to take the study of memory beyond the school. Universities, education in non-formal educational settings (adult education, special education, lifelong learning, etc.), open up a universe for the study of memory in the history of education. This would probably lead us to redefine – or maybe not – the very conceptual construct of “school memory”, since it was born and defined around the school as a setting, with “school” being understood mostly as relating to the primary and secondary school years.

Finally, to suggest some further possibilities, in the consideration that there is a historical present based, fundamentally, on the possibility of the confluence of the living memories and the acquired memories of the coexisting generations, it would be worth pointing out other themes that have marked, or are defining, the field of the history of education, for which school memory will be a determining element in its construction. Examples of this would be the school’s treatment of climate change, the war in Ukraine, bullying, or examples such as the great global COVID-19 pandemic, about which our ever-pioneering teachers (as Escolano, 2020) have already ventured to write⁴².

Certainly, there are so many *contents* of school memory that can be studied that we could talk about it for as long as memory, as the brain’s sentinel, allows us to do so. But with the confidence and certainty that the study of school memory is worthwhile, young researchers of the future of school memory should consider that «it is the only paradise from which we cannot be expelled»⁴³.

⁴² A. Escolano, *O COVID-19 e a educación escolar: Unha reflexión desde os estudos de Historia da Educació*, «Revista Galega de Educación», vol. extra, 2020, pp. 53-54.

⁴³ Sentence attributed to the German writer Jean Paul in J.P. Weiss, *In Search of an Identity*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2000, p. 5.

Images of the Changing School in Luigi Comencini's Television Documentary "I bambini e noi" (1970)

Davide Allegra
University of Bari "Aldo Moro" (Italy)

1. «*This place in the sky called Turin*»

During the 1970s, the city of Turin was not only a concrete place, but it also was an intensely imagined place, which lived through the narratives proposed by television, movies, and songs. A place full of implications for the national imaginary, for at least two reasons. First because Turin was home to FIAT; the epicentre of industrial production during the "Italian economic boom" of the 1950s and 60s as well as theatre of conflicts between capital and labour culminating in the so-called "Hot Autumn" of 1969¹. Second because Turin had been, from the mid-1950s onwards, the destination of a massive emigration of labourers from Southern Italy who got visibility and prominence in the workers' struggles of the 1960s², definitely changing the connotations of the Piedmontese capital and turning Turin into the third largest city in the South after Naples and Palermo, in terms of geographical origin of its inhabitants³.

By the early 1970s, the time was ripe for Turin to become a privileged vantage point for observing the country's news. From there, in fact, it was possible to better observe the condition and the lifestyle of the working class transfigured by the experience of the protests as well as to discern the historically complex relationship between North and South, which revealed unprecedented forms of interdependence but also of subordination. Valuable historical evidence of this process is provided by the numerous representations of the city that flourished in the first half of the decade. Such representations help to give an immediately recognizable form to «this place in the sky called Turin» on which Lucio Dalla in the song *L'auto targata «TO»* casts the anguish of a migrant family travelling

¹ Regarding the history of Turin after World War II, see in particular N. Tranfaglia (ed.), *Gli anni della Repubblica*, in *Storia di Torino*, vol. IX, Torino, Einaudi, 1999.

² Compare with what Fabio Levi argues: «The presence of immigrants – especially those from the South – on the Turin scenario began to manifest itself in the mid-1950s [...] until, in the late 1960s and throughout the first half of the 1970s, the new labor recruited from the rest of Italy came to impose itself as one of the decisive subjects of the social clash taking place» (F. Levi, *L'immigrazione*, in N. Tranfaglia (ed.), *Gli anni della Repubblica*, cit., p. 159).

³ P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988*, New York, Palgrave, 2003.

«from Scilla to Turin»⁴. The latter thus turns out to be precisely a «place in the sky», full of nightmares and desires, or the mirror in which to reflect the novelties of a rapidly changing national identity.

Despite the variety of media and registers, the representations of Turin produced in the first half of the 1970s agree on the centrality assigned to a new character in the city life at the time, the worker of southern origin. Dalla refers to it extensively in the trilogy of records made between 1973 and 1976 in collaboration with former partisan, poet, and librarian Roberto Roversi⁵. The latter, who authored the lyrics, well describes the suffering of the youngest workers whose life aspirations clash with the harshness and repetitiveness of the chain work⁶. While, in the dreams of those who leave, Turin is «where there is a mountain / that leads to the moon»⁷, those who arrive often end up feeling enclosed between «bars and chains»⁸ or «alone like a dog in a corner / inside a cellar»⁹, living on the razor's edge between the coveted redemption and the risk of sinking into social marginality.

A seed of hope, which at least partially compensates for the bitterness of emigration, can be found in two splendid almost contemporary movies: Lina Wertmüller's *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore* (1972) and Ettore Scola's *Trevico-Torino. Viaggio alla Fiat-Nam* (1973). Both the protagonists of these two movies are factory workers who meet, outside the factory, two young women from the North with whom they will try out new and unprecedented forms of understanding, both sentimental and political. To portray the picaresque adventure of Sicilian factory worker Carmelo Mardocchio, Wertmüller uses the register of the comic and the grotesque. As the director herself recalls,

the premiere of *Mimi* was held in Turin in a three thousand seat cinema that I think was called "Ideal". We were terribly afraid. The auditorium was full of steelworkers and factory workers, mostly from the South. The lights went out and the screening began. Roars of laughter. *Mimi* had immediately become their hero. [...] Finally relieved of anxiety, we sank into our seats and enjoyed ourselves along with the spectators¹⁰.

Similar effects of truth and recognition are pursued by Scola in *Trevico-Torino*, which however combines fictional elements with documentary ones and won the award given by

⁴ L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *L'auto targata «TO»*, in Idd., *Il giorno aveva cinque teste*, Roma, RCA Italia, 1973.

⁵ The trilogy of records made by Dalla in collaboration with Roversi consists of the following albums: *Il giorno aveva cinque teste* (1973), *Anidride solforosa* (1975), and *Automobili* (1976). Another songwriter who addressed the theme of working-class emigration to Turin is Rino Gaetano, with his 1974 debut album *Ingresso libero*.

⁶ Compare with what Guido Crainz argues: «The professional and cultural potentials and social demands of millions of young people come [...] into explosive contradiction with the exhausting chain work, the daily suffered injustice, humiliation, and discrimination» (G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta*, Roma, Donzelli, 2003, p. 323).

⁷ L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *Mela di scarto*, in Idd., *Anidride solforosa*, Roma, RCA Italia, 1975.

⁸ L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *L'auto targata «TO»*, cit.

⁹ L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *L'operaio Gerolamo*, in Idd., *Il giorno aveva cinque teste*, cit.

¹⁰ L. Wertmüller, *Arcangela Felice Assunta Job Wertmüller von Elgg Espanol von Brauchich cioè Lina Wertmüller*, Milano, Frassinelli, 2006.

the International Federation of Film Critics precisely «for its documentary authenticity in depicting a working-class destiny». Co-author of the screenplay was Diego Novelli, then editor of the communist newspaper «l'Unità» and future mayor of Turin since 1975. He recalls how director Scola first came to Turin with the goal of telling «the story of a boy from his village», Trevico in the province of Avellino, and with a subject of «just a few lines»: «The story of Fortunato, a young southerner, hired by the big factory to produce cars»¹¹.

Entirely original is the portrait of Turin proposed instead by another director coming from the “Italian-style comedy”, Luigi Comencini. If in the 1975 crime thriller *La donna della domenica* Comencini turns his gaze beyond the river Po, which separates the working-class city from the hill, where the factory owners live anything but happily, in the TV documentary *I bambini e noi*, produced by the Italian state broadcaster RAI in 1970, the director tackles the theme of emigration from the peculiar point of view of the migrant children, thus giving voice to the sons and daughters of factory workers such as Mimì or Fortunato. The fifth episode of Comencini's documentary, entitled namely *Papà lavora* [*Dad Works*], opens in Monte Sant'Angelo in the province of Foggia where almost all the children's fathers work far away and ends in Turin where the director notes how «in the fabulous North, differences are consolidated: those from the South remain those from the South and the elderly immigrants live on memories and *nostalgia*»¹². The sixth and final episode, on which this essay will focus, it is significantly titled *Qualcosa di nuovo* [*Something New*] and moves rather from the observation of how Turin has become a city of adoption for the children from the South; «there they want to come forward, despite the barriers, despite the different dialect». Faced with this new reality, Comencini asks: «what does the school want and what can it do?»¹³.

2. In these schools «something new» is going on

In the episode *Qualcosa di nuovo*, Comencini presents its protagonists through a kind of *progressive focus*, revealing an almost narrative approach to the documentary genre which brings this work closer to his fiction movies. Walking along Corso Racconigi, where the Cenisia local market is held, the director notices a banner that reads «The children invite the neighborhood» and asks shopkeepers for more information. Then, Comencini enters the still-empty “Gabrio Casati” primary school, where children will perform in the afternoon. Passing through a heavy iron gate that seems to mark the entrance to a new dimension, he soon realizes that here «things are allowed that are forbidden and not done elsewhere»¹⁴. In the courtyard, he pauses to observe the painted walls and some

¹¹ Novelli's words are quoted in V. Zagarrò (ed.), *Trevico-Cinecittà. L'avventuroso viaggio di Ettore Scola*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2002.

¹² L. Comencini, *Papà lavora*, in Id., *I bambini e noi*, Italy, 1970. In this case, as also in footnotes 13, 14 and 15, the words in quotation marks are by the director's voice-over.

¹³ L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, in Id., *I bambini e noi*, cit.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

objects made by the children themselves, including papier-mâché puppets, collages, and «cheerfully decorated»¹⁵ rubbish bins; these are the signs that herald, with an almost fairy-tale-like pace, that something *extraordinary* is about to happen.

2.1 *The experience of the animazione teatrale*

Franco Passatore was an actor and a theatre director, as well as the creator of an original proposal of *animazione teatrale*¹⁶ for school children in Turin. His figure represents an essential turning point in the documentary, not only because it introduces an important first movement in its quasi-narrative structure, but also because it was Passatore's fame that brought to Turin Luigi Comencini¹⁷, who probably identified with his attempt to give voice to children through theater¹⁸. It is significant, moreover, that Passatore's role as an *animator* of initiatives and projects was acknowledged by the children themselves, as it is clear from reading the class newspapers of those years. In fact, his arrival at school always seems to be accompanied by unexpected and exciting events, such as the visit from Comencini himself with his *troupe*, and this is perhaps why in a child's poem he is suggestively referred to as «the man / of our new game»¹⁹.

The origin of the *animazione teatrale* can be dated back to January 1969, with the debut of the «satirical cabaret show» *Ma che storia è questa?* and the beginning of Passatore's partnership with his fellow performer Silvio Destefanis. The show, produced in collaboration with the Education Department of the City of Turin and performed in fifty elementary schools in the city, had no curtain, no stage and was programmatically open to audience participation. As Passatore himself declares,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ «Animazione teatrale» is the name Passatore himself gave to the original theatrical workshops he held for children from the late 1960s onwards. The proposal was developed practically and then described in F. Passatore, S. Destefanis, A. Fontana, F. De Lucis, *Io ero l'albero (tu il cavallo)*, Rimini, Guaraldi, 1972 and F. Passatore, *Animazione dopo. Le esperienze di animazione dal teatro alla scuola, dalla scuola al sociale*, Rimini, Guaraldi, 1976.

¹⁷ Compare with Fiorenzo Alfieri's memory: «Comencini had heard of Franco Passatore and his workshop activities in schools. He therefore came to film one of his performances at the "Gabrio Casati" school [...]. Two "Nino Costa" classes were performing there, mine and my colleague Ridolfi's. These two classes had been meeting Passatore once a week in the afternoon for some time. Comencini was very impressed by the way the boys and girls behaved and he decided to change the production schedule by coming to see them at their school» (F. Alfieri, S. Della Casa, *La città che non c'era*, Roma, Dino Audino Editore, 2012, pp. 18-19).

¹⁸ Comencini has shown interest in the world of children since his film debut, *Children in the City* (Italy, 1946). For this reason, he has often been referred to by Italian critics as «the children's director». Compare with what the director himself states in his autobiographical work *Davvero un bel mestiere! Infanzia, vocazione, esperienze di un regista*, Milano, Baldini & Castoldi, 1999, p. 122.

¹⁹ Class V A of teacher Daria Ridolfi, *A Franco Passatore*, «Festa», vol. 5, n. 3, 1970 (in Istoretto Archive, Torino, «Tempo pieno» Repository, «Fondo Ridolfi Daria» [IT-C00-FA18127]).

with *Ma che storia è questa?* a new experience has begun for us theater people. [...] We have left the traditional theater environments to go to classrooms, gymnasiums, hallways, refectories, courtyards, that is where school life takes place daily. In the children's environment, where they operate all the time and where it is possible to create a simple and direct relationship, fostering from the very beginning a learning exchange between us and them²⁰.

The encounters arising during the tour of the show and the desire to deepen the relationship with children and teachers led in the following months to the consolidation of «a permanent hypothesis of theatrical and educational research»²¹, through which the former theatre *for* children was gradually replaced by a theater made *with* children, a «theater of life [...] where each individual is author and interpreter of himself and interlocutor of the other»²². After an initial phase of experimentation and study, at the beginning of the 1969-1970 school year, «Centri di ricerca espressiva» [«Expressive Research Centers»] were consequently established at the “Gabrio Casati” and “Nino Costa” primary schools; the centers were so called because they were open to a plurality of expressive forms, which included not only dramatization, but also painting, sculpture, singing, and the production of audio-video content²³. The workshop activities conducted by Passatore and Destefanis involved more than three hundred children and ended in June 1970 with a festival entitled «L'albero più grande del mondo» [«The Largest Tree in the World»], which took place at the “Gabrio Casati” school and was filmed by Comencini whose commentary voice-over observes:

these children's theater is not meant for an audience, it is theater for themselves, theater for those who make it. When children play, they invent characters, situations, but they do it in secret, almost ashamed. Here they come out and play, using rags, cardboard, microphones, and topics provided by adults²⁴.

Interviewed during the festival, the headmaster Gianni Dolino himself confirms the educational purpose of the many activities carried out by the children, who are in the meanwhile busy painting the walls of the school. Dolino will be the future City Councilor for Education of the left-wing council that will govern Turin from 1975, proposing a generalization of the experience of animation, no longer just theatrical, through a project named «La città ai ragazzi» [«The City to the Kids»]²⁵. According to him, expressive activities should be considered a sort of «compensation», both practical and symbolic, offered to the child to reward him/her at least in part for the limitations imposed in

²⁰ F. Passatore, *Teatro nella scuola. Un anno di attività svolta per incarico dell'Assessorato all'Istruzione da Franco Passatore e Silvio De Stefanis*, 1970. This unedited recording was kindly granted by the Passatore family, to whom I extend my gratitude.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² F. Passatore, S. Destefanis, A. Fontana, F. De Lucis, *Io ero l'albero (tu il cavallo)*, cit., p. 11.

²³ The activity of the «Centri di ricerca espressiva» is reconstructed in Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (ed.), *Il lavoro teatrale nella scuola*, «Quaderni di Cooperazione educativa», n. 5-6, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1970, pp. 45-53.

²⁴ L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

²⁵ Regarding the «La città ai ragazzi» project and the educational activities by the city council led by mayor Diego Novelli, see the very detailed book G. Parena (ed.), *La città e il bambino. L'intervento del Comune di Torino sulla scuola dal 1975 al 1980*, Torino, Comune di Torino, 1981.

the context of the industrial metropolis, where otherwise s/he risks living like «a bird in a cage»²⁶. «Compensation» is even more necessary and urgent for those boys and girls from the countryside, whose families in those years came *en masse* to Turin in response to FIAT's production needs.

2.2 *The full-time school*

After showing the experience of the *animazione teatrale*, the narration moves to the far suburbs of Turin, namely to the newly built Vallette district, whose tall council houses were home mainly to workers of southern origin²⁷. «A true ghetto», according to the definition of the same local neighborhood committee, where «there are no libraries, sports or cultural centers» and «the nearest emergency room is five kilometers away»²⁸. Yet right here, where the “Nino Costa” primary school was based and some teachers of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* worked, Comencini would find new signs of *something new*.

On the occasion of the festival organised at “Gabrio Casati”, the director meets a group of children from the “Nino Costa” school who are also involved in the project of the *animazione teatrale* and decides to visit them to spend an entire school day together. Their teachers, Daria Ridolfi and Fiorenzo Alfieri²⁹, helped establish the Turin group of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* in 1964 and have been experimenting with a new full-time school for the past few months. Full-time school is one of the first important novelties which Comencini discusses with the founding teachers; it concretely manifests itself at lunchtime, when the boys and girls of the two classes leave the school, without backpacks since, as they state, «we will be back this afternoon, at half past two»³⁰.

The campaign for full-time school had been launched by the city group of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* since January 1970, when five teachers from two schools, the “Nino Costa” and the “Pestalozzi”, agreed with families and spontaneous neighborhood committees to pursue teaching even in the afternoon, doubling their

²⁶ Gianni Dolino in L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

²⁷ Compare with what Andrea Coccorese reports: «The Vallette hosts a majority of families originating from the South, in particular from Sicily, Apulia and Calabria (out of the first 561 households assigned 82.6 per cent come from the South) and of working-class extraction (in the 1971 census, 76 per cent of those employed were workers while the city average was 54 per cent)» (A. Coccorese, M. Romito (edd.), *Sì, sono delle Vallette, c'hai problemi? Autobiografia di un quartiere*, Torino, Centro di documentazione storica della Circoscrizione 5 della Città di Torino, 2011, p. 22).

²⁸ Comitato di S. Caterina, *Lavoro di quartiere alle Vallette – S. Caterina*, «Cooperazione educativa», vol. 19, n. 6, 1970, p. 5.

²⁹ Daria Ridolfi, teacher at “Nino Costa” until the 1990s, was long active in the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*, of which she was honorary president. Fiorenzo Alfieri was teacher at “Nino Costa” until 1975, when he was elected to the city council in the lists of the Italian Communist Party. He became later city councilor for Youth and Sport in Novelli's council, from 1976 to 1985. On his experience as a teacher, he wrote *Il mestiere di maestro. Dieci anni nella scuola e nel Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1974.

³⁰ Children interviewed in L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

working hours for political reasons and without any pay³¹. Shortly thereafter, in mid-February, the Education Department of the City of Turin intervened by funding full-time education in six schools in the city's suburbs, for a total of thirty classes, thus anticipating and helping to create the conditions for the approval of Law No. 820 of 1971, which established full-time school nationwide.

The primary school acquired a new prominence in the city's public debate, also because of the municipal election to be held in June, and the city council repeatedly claimed its intervention on full-time. The Christian Democrat mayor Giovanni Porcellana even went so far as to state that

in my meetings with teachers, but especially with people in the districts, I realized that unfortunately our school is a class-based school, where the poor man's child is really in an inferior condition compared to the rich man's child. Just look at the number of dropouts in Vallette and Crocetta [Ed. note: the latter is the city's middle-class neighborhood]. [...] A situation that we need to get out of [...] [by] making sure that the school can function full-time³².

These words reveal the surprising hegemonic capacity brought to bear by the promoters of the full-time campaign, who for their part aimed to counter the «class-based selection» operated by the school by exercising what was then called «workers' control»³³. In other words, in a city that had almost doubled its population since 1945 due to internal immigration³⁴, they claimed to find solutions to welcome the children of southern workers to school, who instead were often rejected, placed in the so-called *classi differenziali*³⁵ or involved in after-school activities intended only for the needy, which ended up ratifying their status as social outcasts.

Above all, the after-school institution, which had been established by Law No. 1859 of 1962 on the new Italian middle school with the goal of supporting struggling students, was then widely perceived as inadequate and counterproductive³⁶; this helps explain the sudden success of the full-time school proposal. In this regard, Anna Maria Cappelli³⁷,

³¹ The initial phase of the campaign for full-time school is amply documented in Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (ed.), *Settorialismo*, Conegliano, Edizioni MCE, 1970.

³² Giovanni Porcellana interviewed in *I grandi problemi di Torino che attendono una soluzione*, «La Stampa», 30th May 1970.

³³ Compare with the documentation included in Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (ed.), *Settorialismo*, cit.

³⁴ The data is reported in F. Levi, *L'immigrazione*, cit., p. 163.

³⁵ *Classi differenziali* were special education classes established in the Italian school system at the beginning of the twentieth century. On the correlation between special education classes and immigration in Turin after World War II, see G. De Michele, *Anti-Southern Racism and Education in Post-War Italy*, New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 103-157.

³⁶ See B. Ciari, *Tempo pieno: pieno di che?*, in Id., *La grande disadattata*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1973, pp. 134-149; G. Cives, *Scuola integrata e servizio scolastico*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1967.

³⁷ Anna Maria Cappelli has been active in the Turin group of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* since 1965. She taught at the "Pestalozzi" primary school from 1967 to 1981 and in January 1970 she was among the five teachers who experimented with full-time school on a voluntary basis. In 1981 she was appointed headmistress in San Mauro Torinese, where she remained until her retirement in 2005.

an activist in the early stages of the full-time campaign and a teacher at the “Pestalozzi” primary school, recalls:

When the exit bell rang, two lines were always formed: one line went out and the other went down to the cellars. What was in the cellars? In the cellars was the soup dish for the poor, which were kept until 4:30 p.m. by seasonal teachers³⁸.

2.3 *A cooperative school with an activist imprint*

Upon entering one of the “Nino Costa” classrooms, Comencini immediately notices «a different way of doing school»³⁹ than the traditional one shown in the previous episodes of his TV series. After all, the full-time proposal, at least in the intentions of the teachers who first experimented with it, was linked not only to the idea of a *quantitative* expansion of school hours but rather to that of a *qualitative* change in the way of doing school. It was precisely the desire to renew teaching practices that had been the core around which had been formed the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* in the 1950s; a direct political commitment to the reform of school structures was only made later, after the troubled afterthoughts that followed the protests of 1968⁴⁰.

From the very start, the organization of the classroom as well as the organization of teaching activities reveal to the viewer a school based on the principle of cooperation, both between classmates and between teacher and students. To begin, desks are not lined up in rows, but rather organised in clusters to encourage group work. Next, the teacher does not sit at her desk but moves instead among children thereby facilitating their work. Finally, the teacher corrects but does not punish, because she believes that students’ well-being is a basic condition for learning. It is a conception very far from that of those who, in those years, still used the rod to inflict corporal punishment, as documented for example by teacher Albino Bernardini in his 1976 text *La scuola nemica*⁴¹.

The new school model becomes concretely visible in the eyes of the audience. The director intervenes to highlight and deepen some of its aspects, listening to the voices of the children and questioning the teachers, who are considered as «reflective practitioners»⁴² whose task it is to explicate and motivate their methodological choices. Comencini asks, for example, how the choice of historical topics to be covered takes place and teacher Alfieri clarifies how his working method is geared toward fostering a research attitude in children:

³⁸ A.M. Cappelli, Oral History Interview by Davide Allegra, Turin, 13th October 2022.

³⁹ L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

⁴⁰ An organic and comprehensive history of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* can be found in R. Rizzi, *La cooperazione educativa. Per una pedagogia popolare*, Parma, Edizioni Junior, 2021.

⁴¹ A. Bernardini, *La scuola nemica*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1976, pp. 16-17.

⁴² D. A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*, New York, Basic Books, 1984.

The foundation of our work is conversation. [...] This way the needs for in-depth study arise; they can be historical or geographical, most of the time it is very difficult to distinguish them. Based on these real needs, these interests, documents are sought and topics are further explored⁴³.

At one point in the documentary, the panoramic gaze adopted up to that time is narrowed around a single character, who takes a prominent role. In fact, after discussing with the students of some classes, the director interviews outside the classroom a child originary from Brindisi, whom Comencini will accompany home asking his father for permission to take him to lunch at a *trattoria*. In a story full of intensity and delicacy, the child recalls how in the previous school, where he failed twice, «we never spoke, whoever spoke got a five or a four», while in the new school «the more I speak, the more I can find words»⁴⁴. Through these words the child very effectively summarizes both the method and the purpose of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*'s pedagogical proposal, which has a clear activist imprint and aims to place the creative activity of students at the center of the educational process.

Perhaps the greatest value of Comencini's work lies in his ability to establish an empathetic and confidential relationship with the universe of childhood. As the director himself declares recalling the making of his documentary:

It was like the discovery an unknown continent [...]. One has to venture very cautiously into unknown continents; the subjects are delicate and sensitive, and for a trifle they close in on themselves and give no more truth but only affected attitudes. So it is with children: as soon as they feel that you want to discover their secret life, they shut up like hedgehogs, but if you win their trust, they will be the most generous interlocutors you can find⁴⁵.

Comencini's commitment to listening to and giving voice to children perfectly echoes the linguistic education that the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* drew from Célestin Freinet, which was based on teaching techniques such as free text, class newspaper printing, and inter-school correspondence. Indeed, the pedagogical proposals of both the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* and the *animazione teatrale*, as well as Comencini's own poetics, come together in their attempt to promote public use of language from early childhood. One cannot help but be surprised by the effectiveness with which the children interviewed by Comencini in *Qualcosa è cambiato* take the floor in public, feeling finally empowered to express their own point of view through theater, class newspaper, and even television, thus directly participating in the construction of a public discourse on the issues that concern them most.

⁴³ Fiorenzo Alfieri in L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

⁴⁴ A child from Brindisi in *ibid.*

⁴⁵ L. Comencini, *Davvero un bel mestiere! Infanzia, vocazione, esperienze di un regista*, cit., pp. 122-123.

The Infant School on Set. The Film “Chiedo asilo” by Marco Ferreri and the Educational Imaginary in 1970s Italy

Elisa Mazzella
University of Sacred Heart of Milan (Italy)

1. *The social and school contexts*

The 1960s and 1970s in Italy were characterised by an increasing social turmoil, where the school system was at the core of a large critical reformation movement that sprung from the dissatisfaction towards an institution that was perceived as inadequate to foster a fair growth among the layers of society across the country¹. Such context provided the premises for a series of pivotal reforms, among which the introduction of the state infant school.

The evolution of the Italian infant school, which began in the aftermath of the Second World War, rooted itself in the principles of equal social dignity, democracy and liberty of teaching listed in the Constitution. At the same time, it had to face the «new role of women in society outlined by feminism; non-directive pedagogies; anti-authoritarian and spontaneous turns proposed by educational movements inspired by psychoanalysis and the critical approach to the bourgeois society; the challenges in a globalised, technological society prone to a high degree of symbolization»². Such aspects were crucial in the debate around the role of preschool education. Up to that point, childhood was considered a period of preparation, an interval, where the educational and caring role of parents weighed over the need to open up to the outside world and to learn the basics of knowledge.

At the beginning of the 1970s the Italian politics had to come to terms with the urgent issue of providing a legislative definition to the state infant school. Despite opposing sides, debates and criticism, the law number 444 was approved on 18 March 1968 and marked the birth of state infant school. For the first time the Italian state took over the responsibility of infant education, meeting a growing need that so far had been covered by private institutions. This responsibility was taken over only in part, because

¹ C. Crivellari, *I precari di ieri. I giovani supplenti nella scuola degli anni '70-'80*, in L. Bellina, A. Boschiero, A. Casellato (edd.), *Quando la scuola si accende. Innovazione didattica e trasformazione sociale negli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, Verona, Cierre Edizioni, 2013.

² A. Bobbio, *I servizi educativi per l'infanzia. La scuola materna statale nel secolo del bambino*, in M. Gecchele, S. Polenghi, P. Dal Toso (edd.), *Il Novecento: il secolo del bambino?*, Reggio Emilia, Junior, 2017, p. 398.

private institutions continued to be present and active in this context. The state infant school, not compulsory and free of charge, was born with the objective of promoting the development and education of children between three and six years of age, in view of their passage to primary school and the compulsory education system. This school, created in highly urbanized areas characterised by a considerable increase in birth rates and female occupation, had to remain open for at least ten months a year, with a daily schedule of no less than seven hours.

The *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali* [Educational activity guidelines in state infant schools] written in September 1969, far from being «a detailed didactic grid to be adopted with a rigid and schematic approach»³, focused on the specific educational needs of children that the infant school was called to satisfy. The same Guidelines dated 1958 presented a very different image of the child: a human being that could find his/her identity only with if inscribed within their family, and especially with their mother, lacking any specific intellectual activity. It seems evident that social, cultural and economic transformations between the 1960s and 1970s also changed the perception of children, their needs and educational opportunities in a society that was undergoing a period of remarkable change.

In the first half of the Guidelines in 1969, after the presentation of the objectives of infant school education and of the context in which the school was to operate, the text describes the psychological profile of the child. Special attention is given to the training of female educators, who not only had to possess general cultural knowledge and specific psycho-pedagogical competence, but also had to show self-control, emotional balance and optimism, as well as a natural predisposition to create an empathic relation with the child.

In the second section of the Guidelines were also included specific indications for furniture and equipment, with reference to hygiene standards and health education. For example, special relevance was given to the spaces dedicated to outdoor playtime, to gardening, and other similar activities. In line with the statement that emphasized how the infant school had to be more focused on play than on specific disciplines, the Guidelines did not include programmes of study, yet mentioned some subjects like religious education, affective education, linguistic and intellectual education, free graphical expression and painting, music education and physical education⁴.

Law no. 444 approved in 1968 and the Guidelines of 1969 marked an important institutional and pedagogical shift. The infant school took on a primary social function: all children, without discriminations and respecting the psychological and cognitive development of each individual, could and had to benefit from extra-familial experiences to boost their expressive and creative skills, guided by properly trained educators. It is precisely this shift in the approach to children of infant schools, and broadly to students, brought about a redefinition of the teaching staff. The teaching profession had always

³ G. Cives (ed.), *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai nostri giorni*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999, p. 44.

⁴ Cfr. DPR 10 September 1969, n. 647 *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», Serie generale n. 249 del 01.10.1969.

been put under constant pressure and torn between the two extremes of tradition and innovation. The figure of the authoritarian teacher that imparts culture was put under scrutiny by the establishment of an education system based on multiple standpoints, which determined the need to update their professional competence⁵.

On a final note, it should be mentioned that the Italian school system was characterised by a strong presence of women in the teaching staff. Such phenomenon stemmed from the belief that women were somehow “born” to teach especially children. This belief dated back to the 19th century, where women had to fulfil their mission as saviours for their family, and for society at large. Instruction and education were considered a natural extension of their maternal role, just as all other social care professions that were generally left in the hands of women⁶.

2. Pedagogical aspects

The school image offered by the film and television industry emphasised educational practices, teaching methodologies, values and habits that can often be found in a shared school memory. Many film representations of the male teacher figure focus on primary school. The majority of novels and films narrating the role of male and female teachers concentrate on compulsory school⁷. Two reasons account for a lack of proper representation of the infant school: the first is that nursery schools, which became infant schools later on, were a relatively recent social phenomenon if compared to primary school, the second is its non-compulsory nature.

One of the very few examples of films with the infant school as main protagonist is *Chiedo asilo* [*Seeking Asylum*] released in 1979⁸. The director Marco Ferreri⁹ also directed other awarded films, such as *Ciao Maschio* (*Bye Bye Monkey*, awarded the Grand Prize of the Jury at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival), *Tales of Ordinary Madness* (awarded the David di Donatello in 1982 for best script and best director) and *The House of Smiles* (Golden Bear at the 1991 Berlin International Film Festival).

Ferreri's first cinematic experiences involved the Castilian screenwriter and novelist Rafael Azcona, a collaboration that resulted in the release of three Spanish comedies: *El pisito* (1958), *Los chicos* (1959), and *El cochecito* (1960). Some underlying features were to become a leitmotif in Ferreri's films: a harsh critic of the bourgeois society, sarcasm

⁵ E. De Fort, *Gli insegnanti*, in G. Cives (ed.), *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai nostri giorni*, cit., p. 203.

⁶ Cfr. C. Covato, *Educata ad educare: ruolo materno ed itinerari formativi*, in S. Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, pp. 131-146.

⁷ See P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019.

⁸ For more information on the film, see L. Zambotti, *Chiedo asilo*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/917, published on 25.11.2021 (last access: 05.02.2023).

⁹ See A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, Milano, Editrice Il Castoro, 2004.

and the grotesque. His first Italian feature film was *The Conjugal Bed* (1963), followed by *The Ape Woman* (1964), *Marcia nuziale* (1966), *L'harem* (1967), all depicting marriage as a fight between men and women. With *Dillinger is Dead* (1969) Ferreri opens up to another recurring topic in his production: the solitude and alienation of contemporary human beings in mass society. *Il seme dell'uomo* (1969) is an investigation on the future of society, *L'udienza* (1972) can be interpreted as a harsh critic towards the Catholic world, in *Liza* (1972) an impossible peace is sought. *La Grande Bouffe*, released in 1973, is a ritual of degradation and death through food excess, a topic that obsessed Ferreri to the point that he worked further on it in *Los negros tambien comen* (1988), *La carne* (1991), and in other French documentaries. In *Don't Touch the White Woman!* (1974) the problem of the degradation of urban spaces is addressed, which from a broader perspective represents social degradation. With *The Last Woman* (1976) Ferreri continues his exploration of the relationship between men and women, and the self-destruction of the human being. Also in *Bye Bye Monkey* (1978) the male figure loses its centrality within the couple and in society. At this point, in 1979, *Chiedo asilo* is released. This film is different, with minimal traits of black humour, but imbued with topics already presented by Ferreri in his previous movies. More specifically, there is a critical stance towards social institutions and traditional marriage, and the redefinition of gender in the contrast between men and women.

The film revolves around the figure of the young teacher Roberto, interpreted by a twenty-seven-year-old Roberto Benigni¹⁰. At the end of the 1970s, following the opening of public competitions for teachers at infant schools also to men, Roberto begins his job as first male teacher in Corticella, in Bologna province, at the Bentini infant school. Alberto Scandola, in his book on Marco Ferreri, attentively describes the context in which the school is located: «The Corticella neighbourhood, presented to the viewer through slow panning shots showing apartment buildings, represents the zero degree of History a few miles away from a city that – on the contrary – is full of History, but remains largely invisible to us in this place»¹¹. The streets that Roberto treads every day to go to school are deserted and all alike, no sound is to be heard except for an accordion playing *La Cumparsita*. On the outside, the infant school is plunged into concrete, but on the inside the rooms are very colourful, the music of *La Cumparsita* fades into the voices of the teacher and the children. Thus, the director creates a sharp contrast between the monotony of the environment and the school, a green oasis where children can play, right in the middle of the grey cement of the Corticella neighbourhood. As Alberto Scandola mentions, «it is the duty of pupils in an infant school in Bologna to destroy the script by

¹⁰ Roberto Benigni is an Italian actor and film director. He rose to fame with his role in *Berlinguer, I Love You* (1977) and in *Chiedo asilo* (1979). He began his career as director with *Tu mi turbi* (1983) and then with *Nothing Left to Do But Cry* (1984), where he also acted together with Massimo Troisi. With *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) he won three Academy Awards (best foreign-language film, actor, original score). More recently, Benigni experimented other expressive means, with conferences on Dante that inspired the theatrical show *Tutto Dante* (2006-2007). In 2016 he was awarded the Globo d'Oro for his career together with his wife Nicoletta Braschi, in 2017 the David di Donatello and in 2021 the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement.

¹¹ See A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 130.

filling the school's indoor walls with their unclear and mixed voices, weighted only by the live recording of these sounds»¹².

The young teacher manages to build good relations with his female colleagues right from the beginning, but it is with the children that he successfully creates a special rapport by listening to their needs and triggering the children's hilarity with his goofy behaviour. The pupils appreciate the unusual presence of a man in the teaching staff, especially because he proves to be very active and ready to play with them at any time. On the first day at school, for example, Roberto is waiting hidden in a cupboard for the children to get to class, then he shows his presence by cutting through a drawing that covers a hole in the cupboard. He puts his face through the hole and shakes hands with each child. Roberto introduces himself as "the new female teacher" (6') and later on he would get to school with a fake pregnant belly and asking each child to help him to choose the name for the newborn. The children immediately doubt whatever he says, showing that they have already been instructed towards a clear-cut definition of gender roles, and to differentiate the male body from the female body. In these first scenes the teacher does not offer a defined male identity but welcomes the children's confusion and emphasizes it by adopting female communication standards.

Roberto's educational methods are unconventional and inspired by wild freedom. He builds a confidential relationship with his pupils, sitting among them on the small chairs in the classroom, but also taking them outside the school, for example, to visit a factory where some of the pupils' parents work. The young teacher's teaching approach is innovative, light, spontaneous, based on the experience of things as they come and not on imposed behaviour rules. One of the first scenes of the film is particularly relevant, when Roberto weighs the pedagogy books he studied, he reads their titles aloud (*Experiments on Visual Perception, The Technology of Teaching, From Childhood to Adolescence, Why Teachers?*) and then he makes them fall heavily on the table before choosing to bring with him at school only a recorder and a cassette that he would use to record the naïve and bizarre dialogues among children.

The first child that Roberto gets to know is Gianluigi, a pupil who refuses to speak and eat due to his behavioural difficulties. The two meet while the child is inside a toy house, and the teacher tells him about his own house and invites him over. Since the child does not speak, Roberto asks him if he forces himself to mutism and, as the child keeps his silence, the teacher says «Well, there's really nothing wrong with this» (5'), thus avoiding any judgemental attitude towards the child's behaviour. It is precisely the teacher's empathic stance that he displays from the beginning that allows him to build a trusting relationship with Gianluigi, which survives even when the child is hospitalized due to his health conditions.

Daniele is another "outsider", a young violinist who fled from home that Roberto meets during the end-of-the-year party in the garden. Daniele represents the dissident artist who chooses freedom. Maurizio Grande argues that Daniele, just like Roberto and Gianluigi, tries to find an alternative path to survive the discomfort he experiences in

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

his everyday life¹³. The police, who came to take Daniele back home, seem completely indifferent to the pain that the child is going through, as reflected in the commissioner's comment: «without physical abuse, I can't intervene. To be completely honest, there isn't even a case here» (70'). The teacher's reply makes the police behaviour appear cold and insensitive:

You stay here just a couple of minutes, you make him undress and say that everything is fine, but we've been talking a lot over the past few days. He's not well, he doesn't want to stay with his parents, and we must let him get out of that house. He's literally seeking asylum, you must give me permission to take him out of his house. (71')

Because of this reaction, and for Roberto's past militancy in the revolutionary syndicalism, the teacher is brought to the police station where he is interviewed by the commissioner in the most paradoxical way. This scene, like the reference to the teacher's past, shows the marked ideological attitude of the time. It is common knowledge that, following the students' movement in 1968, rooms and whole school buildings were occupied. This form of protest though did not involve infant schools, but the teacher in *Chiedo asilo* refers to it during an assembly with parents, personnel, and students:

You know what? We're staying here, since we've spent some good time together: we've had food and drinks, we have toilets, beds, more food, women, children, elderly people, living people. We're all staying here, we ask for the Municipality to send us food for the canteen, we have an assembly like this every day, we have dessert and everything is free of charge. The school is occupied. (58')

For the sake of this analysis, it is worth mentioning the production designer Giancarlo Basili's comment on the film. He felt that his work on *Chiedo asilo* was particularly important for him:

He asked us to build this huge character [UFO Robot Grendizer] for a film that he was working on in Bologna, in the Corticella neighbourhood. Roberto Benigni was to be the protagonist. Ferreri wanted to make this huge robot appear outside a nursery school, so together we imagined a 10-metre-high robot. I took care of the whole realization. After that, he wanted me to take care of the whole film. Thanks to *Chiedo asilo*, in 1979, I understood the difference between cinema and theatre, where I came from¹⁴.

The image of the colourful robot among the grey buildings is iconic in the film: the quest for playful and fantastic elements in a society that appears alienated and unable to grasp the spontaneity of children and the games they play. Even the trip that Roberto organizes in a factory (the Montedison petrochemical factory in Ferrara) clearly shows the contrast between the liveliness of children and the place that symbolizes industrialization. Miriam Ridolfi, back then President of the neighbourhood and mother to one of the children in the film, remembers that the film crew was invited to stay inside the school

¹³ See M. Grande, A. Canadè (edd.), *Marco Ferreri*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2016.

¹⁴ F. Brunamonti, *Giancarlo Basili, i luoghi e gli oggetti che fanno la storia del cinema*, «La Repubblica», 27 August 2013.

under condition that everything was to stay as it was: «meaning that Benigni had to be a male teacher among our female teachers, nothing had to be fake and we would have spent that month in our lives together»¹⁵. Miriam Ridolfi also remembers how in the scene where the children must go and see their parents working as factory workers nearby, her son exclaimed: «Where's my mom? She doesn't work here!» (55'), and this reaction was included in the film as evidence of the spontaneity of children that was deeply appreciated during the filming phase.

The second part of the film is staged in Sardinia, near Sassari, in a place that seems lost and isolated from the city and its contradictions. Together with a group of children that includes Gianluigi, Roberto followed Isabella, his life companion, to the place she chose to give birth to the son they were going to have together. The village is inhabited by elderly people, «this is a moment [in the film] that shows the relation with the previous generations in a continuum that also clarifies gender roles»¹⁶. When Isabella is close to giving birth, she is assisted by the elderly people of the small village, once a mining and marine centre. Roberto and the children cannot stay in the room because “it's a matter for women, not for children” (98'), so they all go to the beach. In the end, the film hints at a newly found dimension in complete harmony with nature: Roberto and Gianluigi, who now eats and talks, run towards the sea and disappear from the camera as they go back to the origin of life just as the newborn child of Roberto and Isabella cries for the first time. The sea has a crucial symbolic charge because it «becomes the obsessive landing for all wanderers, the ancestral call that can soothe anguish with the rhythm of the waves silently dissipating on the sand»¹⁷.

Gabriella Seveso provides an interesting view on the comments from the critics reviewing the film on its release. Stefano Reggiani on *La Stampa* writes that «it is a film “with a sussultatory movement” that approaches recurring themes in the director's work»¹⁸. In *Chiedo asilo* there are different themes that Marco Ferreri already explored in his career: the relation between individual and society, the alienation of contemporary human beings, repressive institutions. The child becomes an opportunity to introduce a simple way of life that finds happiness in small things. Even though children are meant to help strict social rules survive, they still represent the inkling of hope. The film expresses the need to rebuild an environment that is able to save and welcome all those who are disoriented by the contact with society, and are subject to fear and pain every day of their life. Despite the fact that the film is seen from a perspective that may seem outdated and far away from today's standards, the polemical intention towards the rigidity of the school institution and of traditional family is clearly expressed. Roberto Benigni, with his typical immediacy and spontaneity, perfectly communicates the shock of the male infant school teacher trying to give simplicity and spontaneity back to children. As Scandola

¹⁵ Benedetta Cucci interviews Miriam Ridolfi, in *Roberto Benigni e i bimbi di 'Chiedo asilo' di nuovo insieme 40 anni dopo*, «Il Resto del Carlino», 16 January 2019.

¹⁶ G. Seveso, *La figura dell'educatore d'infanzia dopo il '68. Il caso del film Chiedo asilo*, in T. Pironi (ed.), *Autorità in crisi. Scuola, famiglia, società prima e dopo il '68*, Roma, Aracne editrice, 2020, p. 335.

¹⁷ A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 127.

¹⁸ G. Seveso, *La figura dell'educatore d'infanzia dopo il '68. Il caso del film Chiedo asilo*, cit., p. 334.

comments, «Benigni's alter ego transforms [...] the four narrow walls of the school in a window open to the world»¹⁹. Roberto the teacher clearly understands the difficulties that children go through when they experience school for the first time, because he feels outside of his comfort zone too, in a school that represents a small version of society. Through his playful behaviour and his extravagant initiatives, he states the impossibility of homogenizing with the common dominating values, all typical characteristics also present in Roberto Benigni the actor, who highly appreciated Marco Ferreri's direction. In the documentary *La lucida follia di Marco Ferreri*, directed by Anselma Dell'Olio in 2017, Benigni says: «Just to say his name today makes my heart and soul vibrate. Marco Ferreri... It wasn't Italian comedy, or Neorealism, Nouvelle Vague, Post Vague, it was Marco Ferreri himself, the author par excellence»²⁰.

The innovation and the extraordinary brought inside the Bentini school in Corticella by teacher Roberto are welcomed with curiosity by children and adults alike. Benigni interprets a male teacher and from his first surprise encounter with children it is obvious that his teaching method is going to disrupt existing schemes, starting from the fact that he is a man, contrary to what was the norm in Italian infant schools at the time. The comments from other adults on Roberto and the boy he chooses as his assistant, Luca, are harsh, blunt, and focused on the surface of things. Roberto is advised against resorting to Luca as assistant because he is “different”. Luca, on the other hand, is firm in his choice and states: «I just wish to do all the wonderful things I haven't been able to do or that I've done late in life» (16'). In general, the other female teachers gravitate outside the universe that Roberto built for the children, because they either represent the traditional female role, and also contribute to create the institution that teacher Roberto wishes to dismantle. Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention a comment from one of the women, part of the school personnel, who at the end of the school year, admits and praises the wind of innovation brought about by Roberto:

This year we've had a male teacher among us. For us, the personnel and me as school worker, it's been a very positive experience. And also for the boy, we've seen his happiness. I mean we've seen, in the context of life, of the nursery school we live every day, the presence of a daddy, so to speak. For you, as parents, it's been harder to get used to it. (58')

It should be mentioned that during the time period depicted in the film, men could access the teaching profession by law, but the infant school personnel had always been primarily female because of the equivalence teacher-mother, but also for the high number of women that chose the teaching path. As already suggested, the *Guidelines* in 1969 were also innovative in the way they outlined the figure of the female educator. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the role of the female teacher was associated to that of the mother: the Teaching Curricula of 1914 mentioned a “teacher-mother” that taught among children, not sitting at the teacher's desk. The *Guidelines* in 1945 and 1958 still mentioned the teacher-mother and also invited to consider the infant school as a copy

¹⁹ A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 129.

²⁰ *La lucida follia di Marco Ferreri* (Anselma Dell'Olio, 2017).

of the family environment. In the 1969 *Guidelines*, on the other hand, there is a more complex definition of the role of the female educator that is no longer an imitation of the mother role but is mainly based on psycho-pedagogical, and cultural competence.

One last comment should be dedicated to the children in *Chiedo asilo*, the last standing barriers against an alienated society. Throughout the film, the motto “Ora e sempre resistenza” (Resistance now and forever) is often repeated, the teacher passes it on to children not only to recuperate the spirit of revolutionary syndicalism, but also to push them towards spontaneity, seen as the only way to escape from a society that is perceived as hostile. Therefore, the need to approach the infant world with respect emerges, but also the awareness that the first encounter of a child with social life needs to be grounded in trust from adults in the child him/herself and his/her own skills. Ferreri argues that the children up to two years of age can fully participate in the flow of life precisely because they are not forced to live inside the boundaries of models and schemes imposed by society. Gianluigi refuses to speak, his communication is based on another kind of language. The boy does use nonverbal communication with facial expressions and body language. According to Maurizio Grande, this type of communication is clearer and far more essential than verbal expression²¹. The body mythology is called upon with Gianluigi’s character, Ferreri considers the childhood phase as the moment when the child is robbed of his/her own freedom. For example, he/she is taught that when they need to pee or defecate they must do this in hiding, thus taking away from them a revolutionary revelation, when food takes on a different shape²². Both the teacher and children explore the body dimension in ways that are different from social laws and obligations. Through the opposition between the teacher’s and the other adults’ behaviour (Irma, Paolo, Isabella, the school and factory personnel and managers, the elderly people in Sardinia), the film emphasizes the difficult transition from childhood to social life. Gianluigi symbolizes this difficulty, the first child in Roberto’s class that is shown to the audience.

The most peculiar trait of children in *Chiedo asilo* is spontaneity. In the director’s intentions there was the will to emphasize this contrast with the alienation of adults. As Stefania Parigi states: «Ferreri does not show the work of cinema but cinema at work»²³, so that the children called to “perform”, those in the Bentini school of Corticella, between three and five years old, behave spontaneously and are filmed as free animals in the wild²⁴, untouched by the full conquest of language that would lead them to the world of adults. Alberto Scandola explains that: «The child makes me think at what a man could be. We do not know. We do not know what kind of distorting work is carried out on children so that they begin to speak once they turn thirteen months old. That is when they are done for, they start to become slaves of the words whispered by their mother and father». And then, quoting Ferreri’s words, adds: «I did write something, but then the children swiped away almost everything. And that is all right, after all. What good could one of my stories

²¹ Cfr. M. Grande, A. Canadè (edd.), *Marco Ferreri*, cit.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ S. Parigi, *Le immagini di Marco Ferreri*, in G. Azzaro, S. Parigi (edd.), *Marco Ferreri. Un milanese a Roma*, Roma, Tienellemedia, 2007, p. 21.

²⁴ Cfr. M. Grande, A. Canadè (edd.), *Marco Ferreri*, cit.

be compared to the real life of a two-year-old human being?»²⁵. The language used in the film is extremely simple, the teacher never completes his sentences, children speak through slogans and are allowed to speak freely for the rest of the time. Also Benigni's acting is frequently spontaneous and fragmented, it blends in with the editing rhythm, which eliminates dead times in the film: «scene changes occur when the previous scene is not yet concluded, and this seems to preserve the energy that is used to make the next scene blossom»²⁶.

The presence of many children, which would have made the traditional management of a film impossible, actually determined a revolution in time and spaces, everything is designed at child-level, the teacher leaves them to conquer the world in the way they see fit. The underlying message is to make children grow outside all repressive structure: the filming done inside the classroom are very few compared to those carried out outside or anywhere else. The factory is shown under its most negative aspects, it is a sort of dangerous cage that keeps parents locked away from their children; the family itself, the traditional family, is presented as a rigid, unmanageable structure.

Therefore, the film represents the pure at heart: Roberto, Luca, and the children. But it is also critical of ruthless institutions. Ferreri criticizes the stiffness of real school by imagining a school where not only children, but the teacher himself is an ode to spontaneity. The real co-star in the film is young Gianluigi, a strong image of nature that does not want to be tamed by social rules. To give humanity back to the human species it is necessary to start with a renewed relation with childhood. Predictions on the future of mankind are mainly catastrophic, but there is an inkling of hope: the value of innocence must be recalled, go back to living like children do before they are moulded by society. Children, far from the repressive role of institutions and the myth of progress, are the last existing oases of fantasy and imagination.

²⁵ A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Pupils and Teachers at School: Memories and Social Imagination through Cinema

Dalila Forni
Link University (Italy)

1. *Cinema, History and Education*

Cinema is one of the main means of construction of our socially shared imaginary. Filmic narratives work at building our cultural perception of past and present societies. Our idea of a period of time is silently and constantly affected by different media, among which cinema stands out for its visual potential in constructing social memories¹. Through cinema, the experience of an individual or a group of individuals becomes a public narrative, a symbol or a marker of a specific society in a specific era². The relationship between cinema and History is complex³. Most of the studies agree to state that cinema is a strong tool to connect contemporary spectators to past times and places, working in parallel with History: «Cinema neither replaces History as a discipline nor complements it. Cinema is adjacent to History, just like other forms of expression that link us to the past, such as memory or oral tradition»⁴.

However, cinema can hardly offer an impartial representation of History. Films are constantly conditioned by different filters. Therefore, we might wonder whether it is possible or not to tell a completely neutral story, to give back a neutral image of History. Films that aim to realistically reproduce past times (i.e. documentaries) are often influenced by some subjective or social factors, such as the time in which a historical period is recounted, the values and models that are conveyed, the director's personal choices, the audience's interpretation or perception of the work, and so on⁵. Thus, if on the one hand cinema works on the social construction of memory and creates historical awareness or testimonies, on the other hand, it can seldom be a pure, direct account of the past. Even when describing realistic facts, cinema constructs fictional narratives,

¹ I. Dussel, K. Priem, *Images and Films as Objects to Think with: a Reappraisal of Visual Studies in Histories of Education*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. LIII, n. 6, 2017, pp. 641-750; E. Colledemont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. XXVIII, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156.

² S. Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, in P. Malavasi, S. Polenghi, P.C. Rivoltella (edd.), *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005, pp. 19-52.

³ R. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1998.

⁴ R. Rosenstone, *The Historical Film as Real History*, «Journal of Film Studies», vol. 9, n. 1, 2018, p. 171.

⁵ D. Forni, *Children's Literature across Media: Film and Theatre Adaptations of Roald Dahl's 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'*, Pisa, ETS, 2020.

it “makes” history through a distinct interpretation of the past. So, cinema occupies a liminal space between historical reality and narrative fiction.

For what concerns historical films, temporal relations have to be considered to detect possible bias in the objective or subjective representations of a period of time. Films on history may be based on multiple historical frames, offering a dual perspective built on two main levels. The first one – the representative level – regards the past moment portrayed in the work, while the second one – the interpretative level – concerns the historical context in which the work is elaborated. These levels interact, giving life to different relations between the object and the period of time in which the object is approached and depicted. A particular moment in History can be represented in a work created synchronically or in a subsequent period of time. The historical framework in which a film is elaborated is not a secondary element as it may give a specific interpretation of the past, following social trends, cultural perceptions and sensibilities related to that specific moment.

Moreover, cinema has a strong educative potential. History of Education is nowadays transmitted through different media and textual sources have lost their central position in favour of polyphonic means of narration⁶. Cinema does not simply inform its viewers, giving new knowledge to spectators, but it also demonstrates a deeper and more collective educative function as it preserves and transmits historical memory through the involvement of a wide and heterogeneous audience⁷. Quoting Edgar Morin, cinema involves its spectators through their perceptions and their emotions, generating feelings such as empathy, identification, and emotional involvement. This phenomenon strengthens our social memory thanks to an affective connection established with the fictional characters presented in a film⁸.

2. *School memories in cinema*

Taking into account cinema related to school memories⁹, films give voice to children and teachers and transmit different experiences of schooling, different points of view

⁶ Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, cit.

⁷ F.M. De Sanctis, F. Masala, *Pubblico e cineteche. Nuove frontiere del lavoro educativo all'uso del cinema*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1983; A. Agosti, *Cinema ed educazione. Percorsi per la formazione degli adulti*, Padova, Cedam, 2001; E. Mancino, *Pedagogia e narrazione cinematografica. Metafore del pensiero e della formazione*, Milano, Guerini, 2006, pp. 161-170.

⁸ E. Morin, *Il cinema o l'uomo immaginario. Saggio di antropologia sociologica*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2016.

⁹ C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; R. Sani, *Education, school and cultural processes in contemporary Italy*, Macerata, eum, 2018; G. Bandini, S. Oliviero (edd.), *Public history of education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2019; J. Meda, *The 'Sites of School Memory' in Italy between memory and oblivion: a first approach*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 25-47.

throughout history. Thus, films create or support perceptions, ideals and canons related to school life and young identities, building collective narratives and memories.

The representation of school or educational contexts activates processes of strong identification as the narrative retraces, even when set in different ages, common life phases. Films can show the educational practices, the pedagogical approaches, the values and norms that are part of the school routine of a given era¹⁰. Thus, cinema can be considered an influential tool to reinforce or revise our social perception of schools, sometimes fueling stereotypes and prejudice, sometimes deconstructing them. Cinematic school memories may fall into representations that are not entirely neutral, biased or influenced by several aforementioned factors¹¹.

Cinema has historically represented school and education: school cinema has been tracking social and educational changes for more than a century. Today, we have numerous film repertoires that represent (or re-elaborate) the educational practices that characterized different times. The social narrative of schools and educational contexts have changed over time, generating diversified social perceptions of educational institutions. The idea of school is therefore contaminated by the intersection of various narratives – some based on reality, others on fiction – and by the influence of our collective memory¹².

To being with, school memories are presented both in films *for* children and *about* children, but these two macro-categories work at different levels as they address a different audience in their account of childhood. Again, this creates a double perspective based on the target audience and puts on screen different elements, topics and approaches. Cinema *for* a young audience usually tells stories about children aimed at giving viewers the chance to identify with the protagonists of the storytelling. However, cinema *about* children not always addresses young audiences: in some cases, it might target an adult audience that looks back at childhood from a different, more mature perspective. These products equally represent and explore present and past times, but their depiction of childhood reach different levels of interpretation. Both cinema for children and for adults aim to represent and explore (and sometimes criticize) past or contemporary school systems and/or social experiences taking place in schools.

Cinema on schools and students is often based on a series of recurrent approaches. Here, four lines will be explored: the realistic and documentary approach; the critical approach; the melancholic approach; and the literary approach. Firstly, the realistic and documentary approach wants to represent a specific period of time through an objective lens. As stated in the first paragraph, a completely neutral approach is not easy to find as some personal and cultural factors constantly influence even realistic or documentary works. A fictional element, even in non-fictional films, cannot be avoided.

¹⁰ P. Ortoleva, *Testimone infallibile, macchina dei sogni: il film e il programma televisivo come fonte storica*, in M. Gori (ed.) *La storia al cinema, ricostruzione del passato, interpretazione del presente*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1994.

¹¹ P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019.

¹² C. Shaw, M. Chase (edd.), *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989.

Secondly, the critical or satirical approach aims to shed light on specific issues: it invites the audiences – usually, but not necessarily, adult spectators – to reflect on specific themes and to take into account particular problems related to schools. Even when offering a critical approach related to past times, its critique might often refer to contemporary issues as well, connecting long-lasting difficulties between two eras.

Thirdly, the melancholic approach acts between social criticism and nostalgia for the past. This line is usually selected when representing past – but not too distant – times, so as to generate melancholy in adult audiences that directly or indirectly experienced those times. Sometimes, the nostalgic approach looks back highlighting positive situations worsened in present times, but in other cases melancholy may be associated with a soft criticism of past methods, institutions, and habits.

Finally, the literary approach may in some cases overlap with previous lines as it is based on the production of a film following a literary source¹³. In this strand, the main aim is to create a reproduction of literary works and to present their contexts and experiences. However, sometimes the director may construct personal interpretations starting from a literary source, for instance contextualizing the story in different periods of time or inserting events that give the audience a different perspective on its main issue.

3. *Analysis of some case-studies*

The paper offers a preliminary qualitative investigation of the representation of young pupils and teachers in school cinematic memories. It considers a variety of popular and international films about (and sometimes for) children set in school or educative settings and produced from the last years of the Fifties to the end of the Century. A film for each decade will be presented, so as to give a first overview of the evolution of schools and pupils in our collective, cinematic imaginary. In particular, the following four works will be presented: *The 400 Blows* (1959) by François Truffaut; *Amarcord* (1973) by Federico Fellini; *Stand by me* (1986) by Rob Reiner; *Matilda* (1996) by Danny DeVito.

The films mentioned in the following paragraphs were selected as they were considered significant for what concerns their representation of schools, pupils and teachers and for their popular relevance. Popularity is a key aspect in considering the potential influence of films on a large audience. The study has no claim of exhaustivity and is carried out in a comparative approach, detecting the abovementioned approaches and trends. In addition, a gender-sensitive perspective is included in order to notice differences and transformations in the representations of boys and girls at school. The final aim of the analysis is to give a first overview and to create a pilot taxonomy on the topic, trying to trace transformations and recurrent trends and themes related to schools and schoolchildren.

¹³ M.T. Trisciuzzi, *La scuola e i maestri narrati attraverso le rappresentazioni della letteratura per l'infanzia*, in G. Elia, S. Polenghi, V. Rossini (edd.), *La scuola tra saperi e valori etico-sociali. Politiche culturali e pratiche educative*, Lecce, PensaMultimedia, 2019, p. 1073; A. Antoniazzi, *La scuola tra le righe*, Pisa, ETS, 2014.

Films are explored as instructional, educative, and formative means of narration, but also for their emotional and entertaining potential¹⁴: all of these elements are fundamental in the construction of collective school memory through storytelling.

3.1 *The Fifties and Sixties*

With Italian Neorealism and French Nouvelle Vague, but also in some later films of the 1970s, the themes of childhood and education became predominant in film narratives. These topics were developed through a rather realistic approach and within a harsh critique of society. It is precisely the plausible narrative of these cinematographic trends, although mixed with fictitious narratives, that allows these works to be considered a valuable – albeit not totally neutral – historical source, a view on a past era focused mainly on the everyday life routine of ordinary people.

A key example is *The 400 Blows* (1959) by François Truffaut. The director recounts France at the end of the Fifties through the point of view of Antoine Doinel, a twelve-year-old boy who is disillusioned with his family, with the adult world, and with the educational system: his father is depicted as a broken man, his mother originally wanted to terminate her pregnancy and has an extra-marital affair, while teachers ignore the boy and are unaware of his torments. So, Antoine commits some minor crimes and is sent to a reformatory, where he suffers an extremely rigid and violent education. The boy decides to escape from the school to admire the sea at the highly significant end of the film. Antoine's experience serves as an expedient to tell the story of France and Europe between the 1950s and 1960s, denouncing juvenile conditions, the instability of the educational system, and the adult world's superficial or violent attitude toward childhood. Children are represented as ignored or subjected to overly restrictive rules, they are often educated through guilt and fear and through the use of violence. Truffaut's critique hits several categories of adults, especially teachers or parents. Specifically, two contrasting figures of teachers appear in the film, representing two opposing social attitudes: the teacher Petit, who is authoritarian, stern, and inflexible, and the teacher Richet, who is kind-hearted and gentle with his pupils.

In *The 400 Blows* a realistic and critical approach is selected consistently following Nouvelle Vague's most common style. The film narrates contemporary events: it first works as a direct social critique in the Fifties and Sixties, while today acts as a testimony of that period of time, still offering important opportunities for reflection related to contemporary times. Moreover, the film selects the child's perspective to underline the faults of educational systems, considering both schools and families. This choice allows the child's voice to be heard, the child's identity to be placed at the centre of a socio-educational debate involving childhood itself. In this case, the focus is mainly on male

¹⁴ C. Secci, *Cinema, educazione e memoria storica*, «Educazione Aperta», n. 3, 2018, pp. 97-115.

identity (Antoine Doinel), without fully capturing female voices in the construction of a historical memory capable of embracing multiple points of view, multiple experiences.

3.2 *The Seventies*

Considering the Seventies, a significant example is Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), a film that gives its viewers a melancholic picture of educational contexts and childhood. The plot takes place in an unspecified period of time in the Thirties: the film follows the course of a year and narrates the events of a fictitious village in Romagna, Italy. The title recalls the importance of personal and collective memory: *a m'arcord* means *I remember* in the Romagnolo dialect. Titta – one of the key characters, a young boy who represents the director himself – clearly symbolizes the troubles of youth and the disenchantments of adulthood during the Thirties. In addition, the flaws of the school system emerge as well: teachers are characterised by the constant desire to appear respectable, predilecting charmless, rigid, notional lessons. As a consequence, students do not feel involved and interested in the lessons and prefer to spend school time amid mockery and boredom. The film highlights teachers' superficiality as they are often oriented towards old educational methods which are directly mocked by the director. So, *Amarcord* is a historical testimony that partly acquires the traits of caricature, retracing key moments in Italian history by representing them on an ideal level which is the result of the filter of collective memory. This collective ideal is juxtaposed to concrete problems that students, teachers and families had to face, for instance introducing Fascist overtones and popular rhetoric.

Thus, *Amarcord* looks back at the Thirties in a biographical representation of the past, recounting historical events, habits, traditions, archetypes. The film selects a melancholic approach, that looks at past events idealizing them but also underlining their flaws and problems. Considering the representation of gender identity, pupils are portrayed in mixed classrooms, but identities adhere to precise standards related to femininity and masculinities, developed as two opposing poles with specific features. Moreover, male figures are more commonly presented as central both in the classroom and outside educative spaces. Two main female figures emerge, Gradisca and Volpina, and they incarnate the stereotype of the *femme fatale*, as opposed to respectful and strict female teaching figures not able to impact the collective imagination associated with the film so strongly. The adult female figures are thus placed between two opposite poles, between vices and virtues without nuances, while the youngest female figures are lost in a class represented by a male perspective and focused on male figures, resulting in boys at the forefront of greater activity and initiative.

3.3 *The Eighties*

Films produced in the Eighties are characterised by great diversity. Several films are constructed as transposition of literary works, and many of them are addressed directly to child audiences: the child viewer began to be seen as an active, chief spectator and therefore many works are not only conceived as films about children, but also for children¹⁵. Furthermore, the line between young and adult audiences blurs as some films address both children and adults through multiple levels of interpretation.

An emblematic film is *Stand by Me* (1986) by Rob Reiner, based on Stephen King's short story *The Body* (1982). *Stand by Me* is set in 1959, in Oregon, and tells the story of four twelve-year-old boys who set off in search of the body of a missing child. The journey is an opportunity for growth, for confrontation, for the construction of long-lasting bonds: these elements are not created by the guidance of adult figures or scholastic institutions, but rather through their non-appearance, through freedom and autonomy. The school is therefore significant in its absence: the boys grow and mature because they are not pupils, but individuals that venture into authentic life experiences. Significantly, the work is set in summer, represented here as a light-hearted time spent away from school obligations. The film thus focuses on a common feeling drenched in melancholy as it depicts summer holidays as a suspended time, apart from ordinary school-life.

Moreover, the film is an insight into that delicate life phase that lies between childhood and adulthood. The story is presented in a narrative framework that features an adult narrator who looks back at his childhood through autobiographical narration. This choice underlines the importance of memory: a personal memory that is made collective and becomes the voice of one or more generations. In these memories innocence and the desire to grow up result in a multifaceted adolescent voice, capable of capturing in an intimate way the turmoil of those years. As in *Amarcord*, *Stand by me* also looks back at the past in a process of idealisation and nostalgic revision that, however, does not omit its faults and difficulties. Again, as in the previous films, a masculine narrative is favoured by telling the adventures of four boys in the world outside. The decision not to include female characters in the journey is significant as it operates a strong gender distinction during the construction of one's own identity and the creation of a group of friends, which are exclusively male. Besides, it relegates girls to the domestic or civic space, letting the boys – and just the boys – venture into the outside world and take advantage of opportunities that are concretely formative.

¹⁵ M.T. Trisciuzzi, *Letteratura, cinema e animazione per bambini e ragazzi*, in S. Barsotti, L. Cantatore (edd.), *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Forme, temi e simboli del contemporaneo*, Roma, Carocci, 2019.

3.4 *The Nineties*

Following the Eighties' trends, the Nineties further develops films targeting children starting from literary sources. The child viewer is more and more at the center of cinematic narratives and his/her importance becomes crucial. An example is *Matilda* (1996), directed by Danny DeVito and adapted from Roald Dahl's book *Matilde* (1988). The story involves Matilda, a little girl with supernatural powers who lives in an unloving family which is not able to understand her potential.

The film shows a cheerful classroom of the Nineties: classes are colourful, lively spaces filled with posters, drawings, and artworks created by students. Pupils are depicted while collaborating altogether on large wooden tables in a cooperative and mutually supportive educative method. Miss Jennifer Honey, who is represented in close relation to the original work by Dahl, is portrayed as a kind, empathetic teacher who tries to understand her pupils' feelings and needs. A symbol of her kindness is the flower she uses to indicate specific points on the blackboard. Another significant element is her approach during Matilda's first day of school, when the teacher reminds her classmates of the excitement and fear of their first day, inviting them to create an empathetic contact with the girl. The teacher is juxtaposed to calm, obedient, understanding boys and girls, perhaps unreal in their perfection, but certainly presented as an ideal model to be followed by girls and boys. The teacher is contrasted with the antagonist of the story, Miss Trunchbull, the school headmaster. She is an unpleasant woman both considering her temperament and her appearance: she has strong, rough, authoritarian manners, prefers violent punishments and moves as she was acting in a military camp rather than in an educational context¹⁶. Her character is cleverly juxtaposed with the grace and kindness of Miss Honey, so that the characteristics of both of them are reinforced in the contrast. This contrast reminds us of the scholastic and educational changes that have occurred in recent decades and thus it counterpoints the fear and unpleasantness of a figure anchored to the past with the benefits of a teacher oriented towards the future.

In *Matilda*, the setting is built on real and fantastic elements, but it presents a verisimilar, plausible context that is close to young viewers. The film, therefore, selects a realistic and critical approach starting from a literary source. The film narrates contemporary events which are constructed as both for and about children. Moreover, the film presents numerous and variegated female portrayals: firstly, a young female protagonist depicted with characteristics that are partially out of the ordinary in relation to gender canons. Matilda is a bold, active, curious, stubborn child. Similarly, Miss Honey, while maintaining characteristics linked to the female standard (she is quiet, beautiful, kind, good, and patient) offers an important opportunity for female protagonism on a cinematic level, renewing the image of the female teacher¹⁷. Similarly, Miss Trunchbull,

¹⁶ D. Forni, *Bambine e ragazze a scuola. Rompere gli schemi dell'istruzione femminile nei romanzi per ragazzi degli ultimi 150 anni*, in F. Borruso, R. Gallelli, G. Seveso (edd.), *Dai saperi negati alle avventure della conoscenza*, Milano, Unicopli, 2023, pp. 151-164.

¹⁷ A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, ETS, 2019; S. Olivieri, *Donne e scuola. Per una storia dell'istruzione femminile in Italia*,

despite its caricatured portrayal, offers new opportunities to re-evaluate the female sphere through a representation that is far removed from the affable and graceful model that often typifies female portraits. Miss Trunchbull mixes masculine and feminine characteristics, deconstructing the norm but, given her role as an antagonist and her despicable actions, failing to create empathic contact or identification and thus remaining a negative model not to be imitated, even in her pioneering experimentation with identity.

4. Discussion

Some recurrent themes and trends can be detected in films regarding childhood and schools. Five main thematic lines emerge in the analysis of the case studies: the need for educational revolutions; the key role of the teacher; a criticism to violent education; the process of growing up; the issue of gender identity.

Firstly, a topic at the center of different narratives on childhood and schooling is the need for both pedagogical and educational “revolutions”. An example is the need for an education system that supports the pupils’ requests and creates a sincere, direct dialogue with boys and girls, highlighting the need to overcome old conceptions of the school system (*The 400 Blows*).

Secondly, the role of the teacher as an educative actor is another fundamental and recurrent element: teachers are usually shaped in a binary approach that sees the good teacher contrasted to the bad teacher. This simple, and sometimes one-dimensional, vision of educative figure encloses teachers in specific roles that seldom present multifaceted, round characters (*Amarcord; Matilda*).

Thirdly, violence often emerges in school narratives for/about children. Violence can be displayed both as verbal/psychological or physical. In some cases, violence is perpetrated by children on children, but in other situations, teachers, parents or educating adult figures act violently against children, using violence as a pedagogical or socializing tool (*The 400 Blows; Matilda*). This choice is usually represented through a critical approach, so as to encourage a reflection on past or present educative methods that do not simply belong to fictional worlds.

The topic of growing up is another key aspect that emerges in childhood’s narratives. Children and teenagers are usually looking for their identity, trying to understand who they want to become, what values and models they want to follow, what stereotypes they want to deconstruct to find their personal path. However, in some films schools and educative figures are not a reference point for children (*The 400 Blows; Stand by me*). In these cases, the young protagonists are educated in other contexts (orphanages, families, and so on), but school is presented as a fundamental tool even when not depicted. The

absence of paramount educative contexts highlights the importance, for children, to find staples and supportive figures during their growth.

Finally, another recurrent element is the construction of gender dichotomies that portray little boys and girls in different roles, contexts, facing different life experiences. Some of the films represent a strong binarism due to effective social differences of the past, so a sexist representation often goes back to a real depiction of past social perceptions related to gender (*Amarcord*; *The 400 Blows*). However, even in more recent works some of these dichotomies persist and only a few films manage to portray innovative identities related to femininity and, most of all, masculinity (*Matilda*).

Conclusions

Because of its capabilities and its universal and intersectional nature, cinema is a useful medium in the construction of collective imaginaries. However, film and social imagery on a variety of topics, including schooling, does not necessarily reflect historical facts, but still establishes a collective memory, a shared “feeling” that is transmitted and becomes an indicator of the historical periods involved. Therefore, through the study of school memory and historical-educational heritage, we can understand how the past is read and, more importantly, interpreted and transformed in present times. Our collective imaginary is not necessarily faithful to historical facts as it is more often shaped by different means of symbolic representation within the popular narrative. The study of the historical-educational heritage can thus unfold on two opposing levels, both of which are rich and multifaceted: the real and the imaginary, which is to say, history and the collective feeling or perception that history has left us with. And, considering education, school as it actually was and school as we visualize it by looking back to the past. Cinema is thus an extremely effective and direct vehicle for the study of collective memory, but it should be cautiously approached, so as to understand which elements are part of an ungrounded or stereotype-based popular imagination and which ones relate to precise historical moments, contexts, and dynamics.

Between School Memory and Visual Culture: the Photo Albums of the Porta Romana Art Institute in Florence (1939-1962)

Chiara Naldi
University of Florence (Italy)

Introduction

This contribution brings together the results of a PRIN research segment focused on a number of school photographic archives held in Florence and aimed at investigating school memory in relation to photographic culture¹. After exploring and ruling out the possibility of a sweeping census of the city's existing photographic heritage, the work focused on identifying and delving into a number of case studies².

As we shall see, some interesting and substantially unpublished material has been brought to light from the photographic collection held in the historical archive at the Porta Romana Art Institute (since 2010, Art College), which constitutes not only a case study, but also a *taste case*.

The photographic collection, kept within the school's historical archive, features various photographic objects, including series of both film negatives and prints from the 19th century onwards. However, as it is neither ordered nor catalogued, it poses a number of problems related to its preservation, protection and knowledge, making its study somewhat fragmented. Nevertheless, by cross-referencing the photographic material with information from archival documents, it is possible to identify pieces of a puzzle that have yet to be defined as a whole.

¹ For an initial contribution on the results of the research, cf. C. Naldi, *I patrimoni fotografici delle scuole di Firenze, temi e metodo di una ricerca in corso*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 9, n. 2, 2022, pp. 63-74.

² I had initially planned to carry out a survey of the collections and compilations of photographs in the city's secondary schools, as this has never been done and is a necessary exercise, especially from a conservation and cognitive point of view, but unfortunately, out of 32 secondary schools contacted, only five archives could be consulted.

1. *The Porta Romana Art Institute and its historical archive*

The Institute was founded in 1869 in the district of Santa Croce as part of the technical culture of grand-ducal Florence and stimulated by the economic interests of the Florentine woodcarvers, who founded the “School of Woodcarvers, Cabinetmakers and Woodworkers” with the aim of educating pupils from the artisanal class to become skilled workers³. From the outset, the industrial school’s attitude was to engage with the international scene, to the extent that it presented material at the Paris Exhibition of 1878 demonstrating the technical quality of its pupils’ woodcarving work, to boost industrial competitiveness⁴.

In 1880, it became the “Scuola professionale di Arti Decorative e Industriali” (Professional School of Decorative and Industrial Arts). In 1919, a royal decree elevated the former Professional School for the Decorative Arts to the highest level in the school system, the “Regio Istituto Artistico Industriale” (Royal Industrial Art Institute), an institution supported by the Ministry for Industry, Commerce and Labour, the City Council, the Province and the Chamber of Commerce of Florence. Organised on three levels, the training programme consisted of a four-year “manual workers’ course” with three hours of study a day in the hours free of industrial workshops; a four-year standard course with eight hours of study a day and workshops on decorative arts, painting, visual arts, mobile architectural design, etc.; and, finally, a one-year master’s course for teaching art subjects⁵.

From 1923, with the Institute’s move to its current location in Porta Romana – a monumental building inside the Parco della Pace built to house the Royal Stables of the Royal Palace of Palazzo Pitti – and with the reorganisation following the Gentile Reform, a phase of considerable vivacity was ushered in on a cultural and educational level. The directors of the three Italian art institutes (Naples, Venice and Florence), Lionello Balestrieri, Marco Salvini and Ferruccio Pasqui, worked together on a new system for art institutes – an intention already in place thanks to a long initiative led by Ugo Ojetti since 1920. During this time, the Minister of Public Education and the Undersecretary of Fine Arts had set up a commission on the reform of art schools, whose central aim was to overcome the separation between the “arti minori” (minor guilds) and the “arti maggiori” (major guilds), and between fine art and industrial art – schools whose main purpose would be to create original works of applied art⁶. During those years, art

³ M. Branca, A. Caputo, *Le arti decorative a Firenze. Il patrimonio storico dell’Istituto d’arte 1869-1940*, exhibition catalogue (Gallery of Modern Art, Florence, 17 December 1994 - 26 February 1995), Livorno, Sillabe, 1994, p. 10.

⁴ The volume *Disegno lineare e di Applicazioni alle arti and the Raccolta di ornamenti scolastici*, in which a theory of ornamentation led by Antonio Salvini was developed.

⁵ V. Cappelli, S. Soldani, *Storia dell’Istituto d’Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, Firenze, Olschki, 1994, p. 76. Other contributions on the history of the Institute: *L’Istituto d’Arte di Firenze centoquattro anni dalle sue origini 1869-1973*, Florence, Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, 1973; *L’Istituto Statale d’Arte di Firenze: un grande passato, un presente di crescita, quale futuro?*, proceedings of the conference (6 July 2005, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence), Firenze, Polistampa 2007.

⁶ Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell’Istituto d’Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., pp. 79-85.

teaching was at the centre of a fruitful debate on bringing the major guilds closer to the minor guilds, presided over in a special ministerial commission by Ugo Ojetti, who, from 1920 onwards, was also head of the Florentine school⁷. In the years that followed, the Florentine institute became an educational and cultural model that was admired even abroad: inspired by the Renaissance workshop in which an artist teacher, with a studio next to the workshop, gave lessons, allowing continuous contact between teacher and pupils, the vocational division became the fulcrum of teaching⁸.

This model transformed the Porta Romana school into a major urban and national cultural hub – an educational-cultural paradigm for the emerging artistic and artisanal Florence in the global market of mass tourism. To fully understand the cultural and educational political character of the Art Institute, we cannot disregard the more general urban context whereby Florence, which in the liberal age and still in the early post-war period was asserting its national cultural dimension as the «Athens of Italy», reflected a close relationship between artists and craftspeople. This relationship was evident in the exhibitions that, from 1922, were held in a building specially constructed to bring together the various cultural and artistic initiatives in a single urban space, with the aim of gathering «the genius of our masters of every art and the hand and intelligence of our craftspeople and artisans», as the manifesto «Italiani, Toscani, Fiorentini» wrote⁹.

With the first National Crafts Fair held at the Parterre in 1931, the link was forged between Alessandro Pavolini's cultural-political initiative and the artistic identity of the Art Institute, which aimed to carve out a space for itself in public commissions, such as the artistic decoration of the works of the regime¹⁰. Thus began a process that was to characterise much of the second half of the 1930s, in which the administrative

⁷ Ugo Ojetti (Rome 1871-Fiesole 1946) was a leading figure in the Italian cultural milieu of the early 20th century: an influential journalist and writer and a successful critic of the figurative arts, he was a collector and talent scout, and held various positions in the preservation of monuments and cultural commissions of the time, convinced that works of art fitted in perfectly with the spirit of the age, cf. F. Amico, *Il ruolo di Ugo Ojetti nella vita culturale italiana della prima metà del Novecento*, «Luk», n. 20, 2014, pp. 109-23. The numerous contributions on Ojetti also include: I. Calloud, *Ugo Ojetti e le esposizioni: un'anagrafe digitale dal fondo della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*, «Studi di Memofonte», n. 6, 2011, pp. 53-61; G. De Lorenzi, *Ugo Ojetti critico e collezionista d'arte*, in G. De Lorenzi, *Da Fattori a Casorati*, Viareggio, Centro Matteucci, 2010, pp. 17-29.

⁸ L. Felici, *I laboratori dell'Istituto d'Arte di Porta Romana, 150 anni di formazione artistica a Firenze (1869-1919)*, Firenze, Edifir, 2019, pp. 22-23.

⁹ The organisers of the exhibitions included the Provincial Council of the Corporate Economy (which had absorbed the Chamber of Commerce), the Independent Fascist Federation of Artisans of Italy, the National Board for Small Industries; in addition, it is worth noting that in 1923, the Board for Tuscan Activities was founded to promote artistic and cultural activities in the region, and in 1931, the Independent Tourist Board was established. Cf. F. Tacchi, «A fianco degli artigiani stanno e devono stare gli artisti». *La Mostra dell'artigianato nella Firenze fascista (1931-1942)*, in C. Giometti, *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 111-126.

¹⁰ Alessandro Pavolini (Florence 1903-Dongo 1945), elected secretary of the provincial Fascist federation in 1929, was a promoter of the artisanal turn of the attractive city as a tourist hub, cf. F. Tacchi, «A fianco degli artigiani stanno e devono stare gli artisti». *La Mostra dell'artigianato nella Firenze fascista (1931-1942)*, in C. Giometti, *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 114, for a broader overview of Fascist Florence, see M. Palla, *Firenze nel regime fascista (1929-1934)*, Firenze, Olschki, 1978.

normalisation proceeded with the growing ideological normalisation of the Institute, and the most important new developments in the school concerned the re-founding of Florence as «the most artisanal city in Italy», in which economic interests were united, reasserting the supremacy of Florence's trades and workshops¹¹. In the pages of *Il Bargello*, Pavolini urges us to «use the press, photography and cinema not as a mirror in which to gaze complacently at ourselves, at what we have done, but as a megaphone in which to repeat to the world: Florence, Florence, Florence»¹².

The relationship between the policy of the regime and art education was consolidated with the exhibition ardently supported by Bottai in Rome in 1939: the «Mostra degli Istituti d'istruzione artistica» (Exhibition of Art Education Institutes) was inaugurated at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in the presence of Mussolini, Minister Bottai and the highest officials in the National Fascist Party and the Ministry of National Education¹³. In the vision of Bottai, who had recently published his School Charter, the renewal envisaged introducing manual labour into every level and grade of education, supporting applied art and breaking away from the centrality of the classical secondary school, which still dominated since the Gentile Reform of 1923¹⁴.

The works submitted by the Florence Art Institute were selected in quantity and quality, affirming the school's leadership. The school, directed by Ferruccio Pasqui, exhibited at the Triennials of 1930, 1933, 1936 and 1940¹⁵.

2. *The School of Photography*

It was within this political and cultural framework that, as engineer Vincenzo Balocchi wrote in a letter in spring 1937, «thanks to the involvement of the Ministry for Press and Propaganda, a photography course was set up at the city's Royal Institute of Art», which was inaugurated on 18 April in the presence of the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai¹⁶. The Institute's School of Photography opened with the financial contribution of the Independent Tourist Board of the Province of Florence,

¹¹ Pavolini's economic and social project focused on the political and propagandistic reorganisation of the National Fascist Party, which had been imposed as a matter of urgency in Florence after the squadrist phase and the anti-worker and anti-socialist repression of the 1920s. New forms of domination were needed to transform the state into an increasingly authoritarian and centralised form. The project for an artisanal and touristic Florence was also promoted through the pages of the periodical «Il Bargello». M. Palla, *Firenze nel regime fascista (1929-1934)*, cit., pp. 231-233. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between fascism, propaganda and figurative art, see L. Malvano, *Fascismo e politica dell'immagine*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1988.

¹² A. Pavolini, *Bilancio della Primavera*, «Il Bargello», 5 July 1931, cited in Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., p. 93.

¹³ D. De Angelis, *Bottai e la Mostra dell'Istruzione Artistica del 1939*, Roma, Gangemi Editore, 2008, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ V. Balocchi, 29 March 1937, handwritten letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence. See also Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., pp. 98-99.

with the stated purpose of tourism-related advertising and propaganda for the regime. According to the archival documentation, the School of Photography, like the other workshops, also supplied photographic material externally, thus fulfilling a dual role of teaching and service. A particular focus was placed on the sights of Florence and Tuscany for the promotion of tourism, so the school was required to send these photographs to the Independent Tourist Board every month¹⁷.

In a letter to Bottai, Ojetti praised the initiative for «drawing the public's attention to the importance that this ensemble for artists and craftsmen presents for the purposes of cultural and practical propaganda on the natural and artistic treasures of Italy»¹⁸.

The initial core of the Institute's photographic collection consisted of the photographs donated by shareholders Brogi and Alinari¹⁹, later supplemented by the acquisition of administrative, technical and scientific materials from the "Società Fotografica Italiana" (Italian Photographic Society), an organisation that supported photography following the model of international societies, which had opened its doors in 1889 and ceased its activity in 1915²⁰.

In 1924, with the expansion of the teaching equipment, 360 slides were purchased for the teaching of Art History²¹. For the most part, the collection comprises the in-house photographic production of the photography course.

Among the material collected, the first to catch the eye is a series of seventeen bound albums containing 24x18 cm gelatine-silver prints. Organised thematically and asynchronously, a visual journey unfolds from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, in dozens of photographs that reveal not only the documentary intent but also a specific taste in image composition and the rendering of the various components, from the figures and machinery present to the study of light. The subjects depicted include the pupils at work in the various printing, weaving, bookbinding, engraving, sculpture, painting and ceramics workshops, the artefacts produced, the entries in national exhibitions – highlighting the externalisation and dissemination of the knowledge and achievements of the art institute – and, finally, the interiors of the school building.

¹⁷ *Azienda autonoma del turismo al R. Istituto d'arte*, 18 February 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence. See also A. Caputo Calloud, *Il fondo di fotografie dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze. Profilo per una storia istituzionale della Società Fotografica Italiana*, «AFT-Archivio fotografico toscano», n. 16, 1992, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ojetti a Bottai*, 8 January 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence.

¹⁹ These are at least 181 photographs of ornamental motifs, taken from the 1882 inventory, cf. Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., p. 147.

²⁰ A. Caputo Calloud, *Il fondo di fotografie dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze. Profilo per una storia istituzionale della Società Fotografica Italiana*, cit.; F. Strobino, *La doppia anima della Società Fotografica Italiana (1889-1915)*, «Rivista di Studi di Fotografia», n. 5, 2017, pp. 82-101; T. Serena, *Le proiezioni pubbliche di fotografia a Firenze all'inizio del Novecento*, in C. De Benedictis, R. Roani, G.C. Romby (edd.), *La Palazzina dei Servi a Firenze*, Firenze, Edifir, 2014, pp. 125-128; E. Puorto, *Fotografia tra arte e storia, il "Bullettino della Società Fotografica Italiana" (1889-1914)*, Napoli, Guida, 1996.

²¹ Filza 1929, A.I.S.A., Florence.



Fig. 1. Some photographs from the albums of Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

For the first two years, the school was directed by engineer Vincenzo Balocchi, a photographer of considerable significance in the history of Italian and international photography. Known in the 1930s as a modernist photographer, he also worked as director of the Fratelli Alinari studio. For the following three decades, the teaching was then handed over to Renzo Maggini²².

In Italy too, the search for a photographic “specificity” developed mainly between the two world wars, when photography emancipated itself from painting, with which it had chosen to identify itself, turning to more modest things and beginning to isolate the subject, which at this point needed to stand out in the composition of the image. Despite the constraints imposed by Fascist rhetoric on iconographic models, the debate on photography developed and a new kind of photography emerged, derived also from technical advances such as small-format cameras (Leica) and film coatings, and nourished

²² Vincenzo Balocchi (Florence, 1892-1975) left Fratelli Alinari and founded the Istituto Fotocromo Italiano in the late 1920s, specialising in the reproduction of works of art. In 1936, he founded the Gruppo Fotografico Fiorentino; the studio was razed to the ground by a fierce bombing but the photographs were saved, V. Balocchi, *Idea e forma nella fotografia di Vincenzo Balocchi*, Firenze, Fotostudio, 1984. The Balocchi collection now is the subject of an enhancement project by the Tuscany Region, cf. <https://www.alinari.it/it/news/archivio-balocchi> (last access: 10.02.2023).

by the linguistic experiments of the Bauhaus in Germany or Edward Weston and Paul Strand in the United States²³.

If it is possible to identify strands in early 20th-century photography, these would include photojournalism and avant-garde photography, which mingled with the artistic avant-garde and itself became a means of expression in its conception of modernity, necessarily involving the use of modern media²⁴.

3. *Photographic Library and visual culture*

The historical archive of the Art Institute was initially approached through the photographic objects, observed somewhat randomly at first because, as already mentioned, they are not in any order. It immediately became clear, however, that the photographs had been taken not only with technical skill but also with attention to composition, poses and lighting. The cultural gaze of the photographers is evident, probably also derived from the use of cultural models and references in circulation at the time, such as trade magazines. It was therefore interesting to trace in the school's archival documentation the organisation of a Photographic Library, concomitant with the opening of the photography course in 1937 and into which the books, periodicals and pamphlets inherited from the Italian Photographic Society became incorporated²⁵, to which were then added purchased texts and subscription magazines²⁶ including: «Corriere fotografico», «Progresso fotografico», «Note fotografica», «Pagine fotografica» and «Galleria», along with the «Domus» series, with which they collaborated as Gio Ponti, architect and editor-in-chief of the magazine, supported the cultural achievements of the school by publishing photographs of the artefacts; likewise the magazines «La ceramica» and «Il vetro», house organs of the «Federazione nazionale fascista degli industriali del vetro e della ceramica» (National Fascist Federation of Glass and Ceramics Industrialists)²⁷. Subsequently, in 1942, we

²³ For a general overview of the photographic culture of the period, see J.C. Lemagny, A. Rouillé, *Storia della fotografia*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1988, pp. 103-157.

²⁴ The aesthetic values on which Balocchi's photography is based and which initially set the tone for the School of Photography at the Art Institute, are the narrowing of the visual field, fragmentation, in search of stable geometric elements, following models such as the photographers Moholy-Nagy, Weston, Kertesh, Steichen.

²⁵ Transfer to the Art Institute of the material stored at the Leonardo da Vinci Institute after the liquidation of the Italian Photographic Society in 1913. *Pasqui a Pachò*, 31 May 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 II, A.I.S.A., Florence; *Elenco materiali ricevuti dalla Leonardo da Vinci*, 8 June 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 II, A.I.S.A., Florence.

²⁶ V. Balocchi ai direttori delle riviste specializzate, 29 March 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence. In this letter addressed to the editorial directors of the magazines, Balocchi asks to receive the magazines free of charge for educational use in the School of Photography.

²⁷ Il direttore della rivista *La ceramica al R. Istituto d'Arte*, 20 December 1939, typescript letter, Filza 1939 II, A.I.S.A., Florence. For an in-depth study of photography magazines, see I. Zannier, *Leggere la fotografia: le riviste specializzate in Italia (1863-1990)*, Roma, La Nuova Italia, 1993.



Fig. 2. School of Photography, (*Girl at the loom*), 1939 ca., gelatin silver print, 24x18 cm, Album 9, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence



Fig. 3. Harold Cazneau, *Behind the bamboo shutter*, table 8 published in Achille Bologna, *How to photograph today*, Milano, Hoepli, 1935, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

find a request for specialist manuals in exchange for a subscription suspended by the periodical «Corriere fotografico» of Milan and published by the same company²⁸.

Through these materials, the students on the photography course were able to engage with the current trends in taste and keep abreast of technical developments in the medium of photography.

A notable aspect of the Art Institute at the time, and of which the practice of photography is an essential tool, is the full connection with the outside world – an all-embracing school, participating in and influencing cultural dynamics and the craft industry, not least through its avid participation in National Exhibitions such as the Milan Triennial and the exhibitions organised in Rome by the Fascist regime such as the Autarchia and Art Institute exhibitions or the Crafts Exhibition in Florence.

²⁸ The books requested were: *Per riuscire in fotografia* by Giuseppe Castruccio (first edition 1913), *Vademecum del fotografo* by Rodolfo Namias, 1911, *I fondamenti della Fotografia* by C. E. K. Mees, 1923, *La fotografia degli oggetti a colori* also by Mees, *La fotografia in pratica di Photophilus* by Photophilus, 1919, *La fotografia durante l'inverno all'aperto e in casa* by Gincastra, 1920, *Il ritocco dei negativi e dei positivi fotografici* by Peirano, 1917. Cf. 7 May 1942, typescript letter, Filza 1942 I, A.I.S.A., Florence.



Fig. 4. School of Photography, (*Students in rubble*), 1945 ca., gelatin silver print, Album 18, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

These are just a few comparisons, somewhat instrumental, that help us to understand the visual imagery in which this photographic production of a scholastic and institutional nature appeared – a visual culture that certainly teachers but also pupils could observe in its dissemination in specialist magazines and exhibitions.

One of the most striking images in terms of composition and interpretation of light among those kept in the Porta Romana albums is undoubtedly *La ragazza al telaio*, which brings to mind photographs that had already introduced a new interpretation of the photographic medium, such as Alfred Stieglitz's *Sun Rays, Paula*, taken in 1889 and only exhibited and published from 1921 onwards²⁹.

An example of the handling of lighting effects can be found in one of the practical photography manuals available to the school's students, the Hoepli manual *Come si fotografa oggi* (How to Photograph Today), published in 1935 and among the study materials of the students of the school; the photography is by Harold Cazneau (1878-1953), titled *Dietro la persiana di bambù*.

²⁹ One of the best-known photographs that reveals the modernist impulses of Stieglitz, one of the greatest innovators of photographic aesthetics in the transition from pictorial to straight photography. Photograph by A. Stieglitz, *Sun rays-Paula*, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.35206.html> (last access: 30.01.2023).

One particularly unusual subject found in the Porta Romana albums is that of children amidst the rubble of the Second World War, in a photograph depicting middle school pupils inside the Art Institute, in a composition reminiscent of pictorialism.

The children are sitting on the rubble like little Rodin thinkers, in an image that brings to mind the much better-known photograph taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson in Spain in 1933, while still in his surrealist phase³⁰.

One last example is a carefully thought-out composition with close-up framing of the subject: the act of writing by a small pupil and well-known cultural references, such as the bust of Giuseppe Garibaldi, reminiscent of a painting by Telemaco Signorini depicting the same subject³¹.

These juxtapositions, devoid of a cause-effect relationship, reveal the cultural gaze of those who took the photographs kept in the Porta Romana albums – photographs that do not so much deal with the illustration of the school as with its representation. As historians, we have the opportunity to consider these photographs in terms of their documentary value, as sources for school history; however, although we can recognise practical aspects of school activities, from teaching to workshops, these photographs seem to deal more with gestural portraiture. The photographer's intention to depict the gestures of the student as they use their tools in the workshops and learn a trade is a predominant feature. It is therefore a visual representation of the school in its development rather than an illustration of its institutional and educational characteristics, which can now be consulted from a critical and historical perspective.

I therefore feel that the most interesting aspect of these photographs – which until now have remained confined to the private setting of the school and were taken in-house, both for the purpose of learning the medium of photography and for documenting and constructing a visual memory of the school – is that, in terms of visual culture, they are part of the dynamics of the taste and photographic trends of the time, albeit dealing with an individual and specific segment in the panorama of educational history. The circulation of the Institute's photographs in specialist architecture and craft magazines confirms this.

³⁰ Photograph by H. Cartier-Bresson, *Seville*, 1933, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283312> (last access: 30.01.2023).

³¹ Painting by T. Signorini, *Bambina che scrive*, 1880-1890, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/opere-darte/bambina-che-scrive> (last access: 30.01.2023).

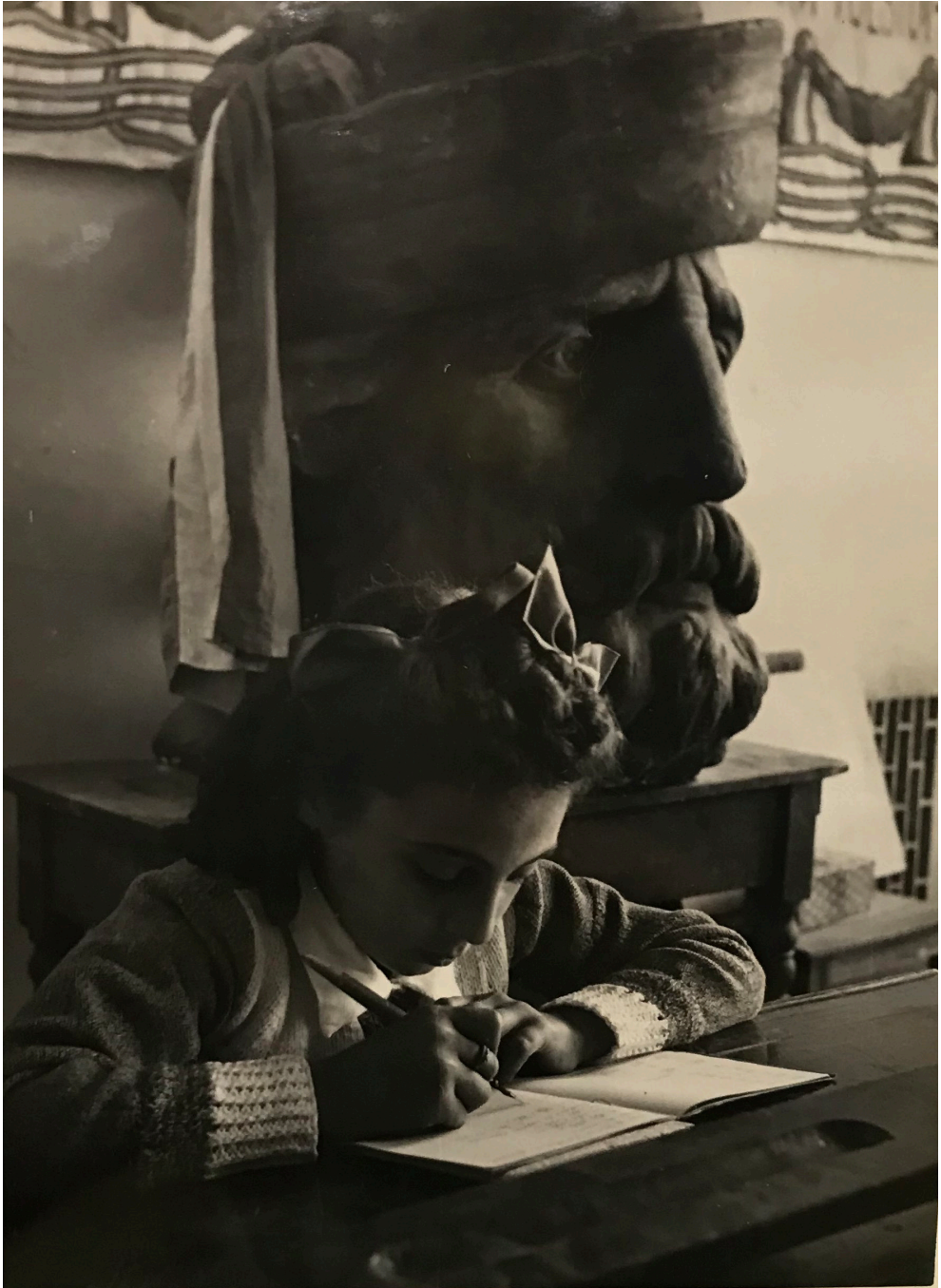


Fig. 5. School of Photography, (*Little girl writing*), 1945 ca., gelatin silver print, 24x18 cm, Album 18, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

School Life Representation in the Photographic Images of the Dossier Series “Biblioteca di Lavoro” by Mario Lodi

Silvia Pacelli, Valentina Valecchi¹
Roma Tre University (Italy)

1. Biblioteca di Lavoro: *purposes and structure*

Biblioteca di Lavoro was an innovative editorial project directed by Mario Lodi with a group of avant-garde educators, members of Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (MCE)², published in Italy between 1971 and 1979 by Luciano Manzuoli, a Florentine printer. The dossier series was accompanied by black and white photographs depicting, among many other images, various moments of school life.

These photographic images are examined in this essay as historiographical sources contributing to a school visual history. Images are, in fact, significant sources in the historical studies in education, as Gustavo E. Fishman, Roberto Farné and Liborio Termine's studies confirm³. The photographic images collected here show the authentic educational practices used in MCE classrooms in this historical period, the teaching methods adopted and everyday schoolwork. The photographs are thus historical evidence of a collective imagery of school and reveal the pedagogical and social climate of the time⁴.

Biblioteca di Lavoro was born from a profound debate on traditional schooling which did not correspond to MCE's pedagogical ideas and, more importantly, to the Italian Republic's constitutional principles⁵. In 1975 Lodi wrote:

¹ Silvia Pacelli is the author of the first and third sections of this essay and Valentina Valecchi wrote section two.

² Founded in 1951, MCE is an Italian association of teachers connected to the Federation Internationale des Mouvements d'École Moderne. For a more in-depth study of MCE's origins, see: A. Pettini, *Origini e sviluppo della cooperazione educativa in Italia. Dalla CTS al MCE (1952-1958)*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1980; E. Catarsi (ed.), *Freinet e la pedagogia popolare in Italia*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999.

³ This particular aspect will be dealt with in section two.

⁴ See J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memorie ed Educazione Identità, Narrazione, Diversità*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2020, pp. 25-35.

⁵ See A. Masala, *Mario Lodi maestro della Costituzione*, Trieste, Asterios, 2022 and the preface by F. Tonucci, *Non ditemi che è difficile*, in M. Lodi, *Cominciare dal bambino* (1977), Milano, Bur Rizzoli, 2022, pp. 5-12.

Once upon a time there was a single textbook and it played an important role in school life. This was once a school of imitation. The teacher talked and talked, putting forward certain ideas for assimilation. The students listened and watched, and if they spoke at all it was only to show that they had, indeed, assimilated these ideas and had, in fact, adopted the appropriate behaviour⁶.

This short quote summarises the main target of the criticisms of Lodi and MCE teachers in the 1970s: the single textbook, the dominant role of teachers in class, student passivity, a competitive and standardising model of school. The ultimate purposes of *Biblioteca di Lavoro* were, consequently, to replace the single textbook with a plurality of material and stimulate critical thinking and cooperation with new experiments and activities in class.

In his preface to the volume *Mario Lodi e la Biblioteca di Lavoro*⁷, Meda emphasises that this collection was one of the greatest and most composite alternatives to the school textbook in Italy, but it has, all the same, been the subject of very few history studies. Maria Rosaria Di Santo recent work⁸ is, for example, one of very few monographs on the series.

Biblioteca di Lavoro is a collection of 130, sixteen or thirty-two pages, dossiers printed in an easy-to-handle size of 15x20cm. The volumes were written by some of Italy's greatest educators, such as Fiorenzo Alfieri, Tullio De Mauro, Caterina Foschi Pini, Palmira Maccarini, Francesco Tonucci and many others. They were supplemented by Ivo Sedazzari masterful illustrations, original children's drawings and black and white photographs as visual documentation.

The editorial collection's role was a twofold one. On one hand, it was designed to provide teachers with a new methodological tool, to inspire and support a new way of teaching. On the other hand, the idea was that students themselves would be able to consult it for research work in class. For this reason, the dossiers were divided up into three main categories: Documents - research sources containing authentic testimonies; Readings - brief stories on social and environmental issues too; and Guides - practical examples of activities already tested in the author's classrooms. In addition to this there were the half-yearly Newsletters, explaining the principles and goals behind the series, and a Register, an operational tool usable in the classroom.

Another innovative feature of the collection was that its dossiers were not classified by student age. In fact, they were intended for every school level, including workers' courses for the "150 hours" with no rigid distinction being made. Teachers were free to choose the right dossier and activity based on the topic dealt with and on students' maturity levels. Contemporary social and political problems were present in many dossiers, and this is further reason for *Biblioteca di Lavoro*'s significance as a source in the historical

⁶ M. Lodi, *Schedario*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 4, 1975, p. 2 (translated from Italian by the author).

⁷ J. Meda, *Prefazione. La Biblioteca di Lavoro di Mario Lodi tra ortodossia freinetiana, indipendenza intellettuale e specificità culturale*, in M.R. Di Santo, *Mario Lodi e la "Biblioteca di Lavoro": una proposta didattica alternativa ancora attuale*, Bergamo, Edizioni Junior, 2022, p. 9.

⁸ Di Santo, *Mario Lodi e la "Biblioteca di Lavoro": una proposta didattica alternativa ancora attuale*, cit.

and educational field. The volumes testify the profound social changes and are a clear expression of them.

The Seventies were, as a matter of fact, a time of great social and political transformation which also involved school. In 1967, the publication of Don Milani's book *Lettera a una professoressa*⁹ had a profound influence on public opinion and became a benchmark for the school renovation process. In 1973 *Diario di un maestro* (De Seta) was broadcast on television to great acclaim. Education was considered key to social emancipation and school was central to the political and social debate, especially after student protests in 1968. Having experienced Fascism, MCE's teachers were convinced that school was fundamental to disseminating democratic values and training future citizens and their critical thinking¹⁰. Italy was now a Republic but its authoritarian teaching and traditional values had not substantially changed¹¹. Textbooks, in particular, continued to convey common places, as an Italian research made clear¹², and were full of notions students were to commit to memory. The purpose of such textbooks was to educate a passive, uncritical youth capable of rote learning ideas, but incapable of interpreting social and political issues. Lodi himself considered the single textbook to be a tool with which to perpetuate the idea of a pre-organised culture, as something already existing outside students: «like in a department store, the school program is sliced up and cut up into bite-sized chunks, packaged up into chapters in units called “school subjects”. All teachers had to do was to get the dose and instructions right, and that was that»¹³. Textbooks were one of the cornerstones of traditional education, based on front-of-class lessons and selection: questioning these meant questioning the entire school system.

The advent of citizenship rights and Italian school reforms (e.g. law no. 820/1971 on full-time schooling, the 1974 delegated decrees for a more participatory school system and law no. 517/77 which sanctioned school integration) were just some of the major changes triggered by a strong social mobilisation. It was, as Lodi wrote, a true «Copernican revolution»¹⁴. Educators shed the requirement to represent the establishment and became cultural organisers, freeing up children's logical, expressive and creative abilities. MCE led this social movement and the ideas previously reported necessarily permeated *Biblioteca di Lavoro*'s pages and photographs.

A careful analysis of the collection confirms that the dossiers constitute a visual summary of the ideas expressed by Lodi in his books and the MCE's “deconstruction techniques”. The photos illustrate the action and activities narrated in Lodi's diaries, such

⁹ Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1967.

¹⁰ See J. Meda, *Gli esperimenti scolastici di Barbiana e Vho. La scuola come luogo di inclusione e come spazio di crescita civile e democratica*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Inclusione e promozione sociale nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità a oggi*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2020, pp. 97-101.

¹¹ On the Italian school system in the Seventies also see M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017, pp. 183-218.

¹² An inquiry on the textbook was conducted by a group of Genoese teachers and collected in A. Alberti et alii, *I libri di testo della scuola elementare*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1972.

¹³ M. Lodi, *Il paese sbagliato. Diario di un'esperienza didattica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1970, p. 22 (translated from Italian by the author).

¹⁴ M. Lodi, *Muore la Biblioteca di Lavoro*, «LG Argomenti», vol. 4, 1980, p. 11.

as *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*¹⁵ and *Il paese sbagliato*¹⁶: collective conversations, group activities, outdoor trips, the unusual classroom arrangement and the use of new materials.

2. *Photography as a source*

As we have seen, photography can contribute in retracing a specific historical and social context, as a number of interesting studies have noted, when it is viewed as a fragment of collective memory¹⁷.

In retracing school life and the use of the various aids to teaching, photographic sources are an especially valuable source¹⁸ as they constitute direct testimony, «traces of the past in the present»¹⁹ as Peter Burke defined them, capable of providing clues regarding the intentions of those who took them too²⁰.

From this perspective, the black and white photographs of school scenes presented in various issues of *Biblioteca di Lavoro* can be seen as important evidences, useful in constructing school memories to the extent that they:

1. show the pedagogy methods applied, in a concrete way, in every day practice;
2. show moments of a different but feasible school;
3. unhide a common school-related imaginary.

As far as this latter point is concerned, the persistence of a shared idea of school is tangible: the idea of the school desk in a dominant position, desks lined up in rows, the blackboard as the focus of attention for explanations and oral tests²¹. As Roberto Farné has noted, images of school taken without advance planning or transformed into rituals are, in fact, very rare²². Furthermore, educational phenomena are very often hidden from public view and the school building can come across almost as an “impenetrable fortress”²³.

¹⁵ M. Lodi, *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*, Torino, Einaudi, 1963.

¹⁶ Lodi, *Il paese sbagliato. Diario di un'esperienza didattica*, cit.

¹⁷ See P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Use of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaction Books, 2001; A. Mignemi, *Lo sguardo e l'immagine. La fotografia come documento storico*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.

¹⁸ On this subject, see: E. Colleldemont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156; G.E. Fischman, *Reflections About Images, Visual Culture, and Educational Research*, «Educational Researcher», vol. 30, n. 8, 2001.

¹⁹ Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Use of Images as Historical Evidence*, cit., p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹ See P. Mottana (ed.), *L'immaginario della scuola*, Milano, Mimesis, 2009.

²² See R. Farné, *Pedagogia visuale*, Milano, Cortina Raffaello, 2021, p. 62.

²³ See M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Is there any place for the history of "education" in the "history of education"? A plea for the history of everyday reality in and outside schools*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. XXXI, n. 1, 1995, pp. 9-16.

An historical enquiry using this type of source clearly needs to bear in mind the peculiarities of photography itself. Photography is an ambiguous source needing interpreting simultaneously on the *information* and *representation* planes²⁴.

Roland Barthes, in his famous work *Camera Lucida*, defines it as «a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time»²⁵. According to Barthes, the photographic message can be summed up as a relationship triangle, between the photographer, the spectator and the photo itself. In reading and interpreting photography, moreover, Barthes argues that two elements exist: the *studium*, i.e. the contents of the photo, what it represents, and the *punctum*, that which strikes us on a visual level²⁶.

Photography's objectivity is purely fictitious. Its reality is determined by the way both spectator and photographer look at it.

«Reading a photograph is an action in which it is not only the reader who interacts with the image. To what extent is the photographer present?», writes Manuela Cecotti²⁷.

On the subject of the photographer's selective act, John Berger, a further writer known for his interesting theoretical studies on images and vision, has said:

Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight: his sight was selected from an infinity of other possible sights. [...] The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject²⁸.

The author's non-neutrality is tangible in the photographic documentation work in educational contexts, too. The vision of those taking photographs of school episodes inevitably betrays a vision of childhood, school and the educational experience.

At the same time, whilst the black and white photos present in certain files come across as exceptionally spontaneous if compared to the usual school photos, they contain covert programmatic choices all the same.

Returning to Farné's comments on the subject of visual pedagogy:

In making learning contexts and processes visible, photography also contains an idea of childhood and the educational institution bound up with the vision of educators, an inevitably selective and interpretative vision. This is not a limitation on visual pedagogy, but rather a value because it makes visible not only the learning experience but also the purposes of those who put the experience in place and have no intention of hiding it²⁹.

²⁴ See P. Ortoleva, *Una fonte difficile. La fotografia e la storia dell'emigrazione*, «Altreitalia», vol. 5, 1991, pp. 120-158.

²⁵ R. Barthes, *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, Seuil, 1980; engl. transl. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981.

²⁶ Barthes, *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la photographie*, cit., pp. 25-27.

²⁷ M. Cecotti, *Fotoeducando*, Parma, Edizioni Junior, 2016, p. 55.

²⁸ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 10.

²⁹ Farné, *Pedagogia visuale*, cit., pp. 90-91.

From the starting point of the assumption that photography never entirely corresponds with reality, but is rather a personal representation of it, in examining the BL files as a historical source the focus was on the image of school the photographers were trying to get across in their photos. What did the photographer focus on? What educational climate was they attempting to bring out?

Echoing the title of a famous essay by Mitchell³⁰, we thus did not simply observe the individual details of the images in question but asked ourselves what do the images present in the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* want? What do they intend to represent and, subsequently, what thoughts are they capable of provoking regarding legacies and topical issues for today's schooling, fifty years on?

2.1 *Analysis of the Biblioteca di Lavoro images*

Following on from a general analysis of each separate file in which photographs of school from the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* were selected, observation concentrated on the aspects below:

1. the activity taking place in the image;
2. the educational space and setting;
3. what those shown are wearing;
4. proxemics and the gestures shown;
5. the focus of the photo's attention;
6. the relationship that links the image to the others and to the text;
7. the message the photo is trying to get across.

Let us take a file dating to 1973 such as *Il tempo pieno, per affermare una scuola al servizio dei lavoratori* as an example³¹, one of the most significant for the purposes of this research. Here the purpose of the photos is to document the value of the full time experience, considered one of the school reform's most significant aspects: the idea of a new school, the outcome of democratic debate and sharing, is evident right from the cover image which captures a moment of debate between adults in a circle.

Subsequent photos depict the multiplicity of activities offered to children and designed to get them actively involved and motivate them to learn: writing essays, stories and poetry, plays in costume and a great deal more.

The image captions are also interesting: «Children come to school dressed as they choose. While they work their posture is their own choice»³². In fact, pupils look “free” at all times and were even free to strip off on the grass, sunbathe and behave as their natural aptitudes.

³⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

³¹ Turin teachers (edd.), *Il tempo pieno, per affermare una scuola al servizio dei lavoratori*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», vol. I, n. 18, 1973.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 7.



Fig. 1. *Il tempo pieno: per affermare una scuola al servizio dei lavoratori*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», I, 18, 1973, cover image

It is also interesting to note that the focus of attention is never, as according to the collective imagery we might expect, namely the teacher's desk or the blackboard in a dominant position. The children are always looking at multiple points, concentrated on the various types of activities going on at the same time in the various classroom spaces. At the same time the focus of the camera lens is not one directional. It is virtually never focused on a single subject but rather takes in the dynamic nature of the school situation.

The intention of the file, taken as illustrative of the others in the *Biblioteca di Lavoro*, seems to be demonstrating the potential bound up with an alternative type of school, a break with the past but one which, although used only by a minority of teachers, was considered possible, feasible, one in which children finally played a centre stage role.

In historical analysis terms, an observation and comparison between the photos in the various files effectively convey the idea of childhood and school espoused by Lodi and his colleagues as well as the educational milieu of the day. The key aspects which emerge from an observation of the images are:

- 1) the importance of children working together — virtually all the photos show them working in groups, independent and involved in activities whose starting point is their questions and curiosities.
- 2) A democratic vision of school life, in accordance with the social movements of the day. The photos repeatedly show children raising their hands to vote in order to take



Fig. 2. *L'unione fa la forza*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», I, 16, 1971, p. 13

collective class decisions. In *L'unione fa la forza*³³, for example, the pupils are shown deciding together to set aside part of their school kitty to support striking workers.

«It is not the teacher who decides what to do. When a decision needs to be taken a class assembly is called and it is discussed. One child is chairperson and anyone raising their hand can speak»³⁴.

3) The class is organised like a self-managed community, founding cooperatives, discussing social problems together and finding solutions and strategies. It is open to the local area, the city, breaking out of the confines of the classroom. The school community is an organism which is built and grows over time.

Overall there are many photos depicting children outside the school building, in the open air, in the belief that it is the social context which generates thinking and enquiry insights. The idea in the titles of one of the files, *Una grande scuola: la città – a great school: the city – gets this across very well*³⁵.

4) The children depicted are active, in the centre of the educational process, engaged in highly variegated creative experimentation.

5) Promoting a questing approach; for Lodi school was to foster children's need to explore and find out and give it continuity. Researching, for him, had great educational value, it opens the mind and frees children of conditioning.

In the MCE vision, this is as true of teachers as it is of pupils. Cooperative research was viewed as the basic precondition for professional growth: documenting the experiences proposed and making one's own work available to others – the idea underlying the BL itself and the images in it – is a full-blown “researcher” mindset.

³³ Collective text, *L'unione fa la forza*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», vol. I, n. 16, 1971.

³⁴ Turin teachers (edd.), cit., p. 8.

³⁵ F. Alfieri (ed.), *Una grande scuola: la città*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», vol. VII, n. 88, 1978.

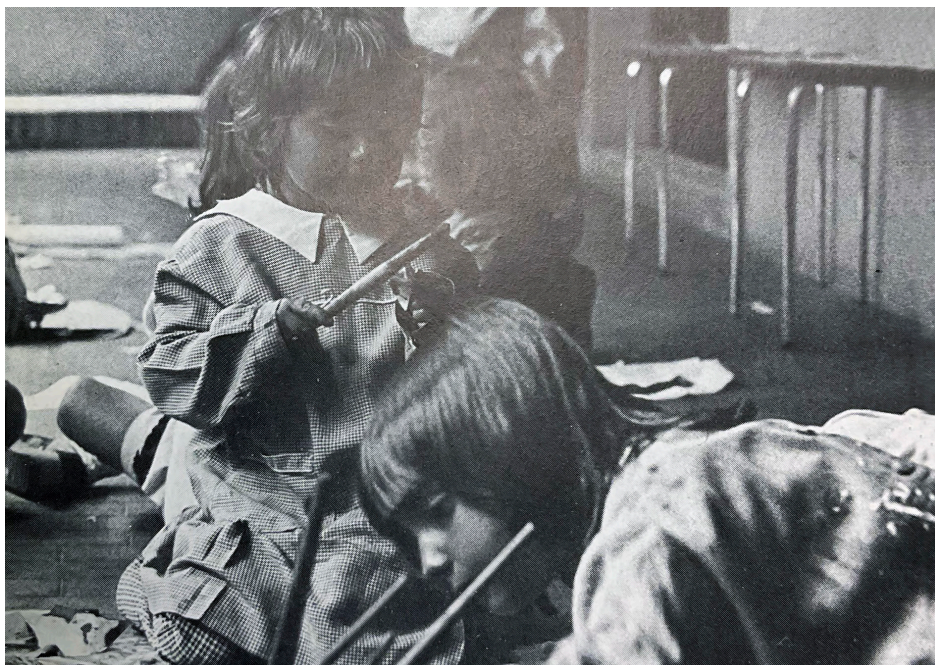


Fig. 3. *Prima dell'ABC*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», V, 56, 1976, p. 7



Fig. 4. *Dall'alfabeto al libro*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», VIII, 94, 1979, cover image

6) Using new materials and techniques to ensure that children can truly express themselves freely and experiment at school: browsing through the photos brings out the great many ateliers developed and for which the classroom space was restructured in a way which was functional to the various painting activities, text printing with a limograph, cooking and much more.

To this end, in the preface to Lodi's book *Cominciare dal bambino*, Tonucci states: «I have always thought that [Lodi's school] felt less like a classroom than a craft workshop, with many corners and resources (...). In this stimuli and potential packed environment each and every pupil could find the activity most congenial to them and devote themselves to that with special interest and commitment»³⁶.

Conclusions

The absence of the teacher emerges strongly from an observation of the photos, with these never being photographic subjects. Most of the time the author of the image was the teacher himself, who left his or her desk and stood behind the camera to record classroom activities: teacher became a witness to children's learning process. Aside from the practical details, however, this was certainly a meaningful aspect corroborating the vision of school deliberately passed on by the entire dossier series. Children are the true focus of the images and the educational process as well. In Lodi's published diaries, the educator is similarly invisible, encouraging the students to speak but remaining a step back, with children's discoveries and thoughts centre stage.

Whilst the photographs can, to some extent, be considered illustrative of the intentions behind this specific editorial project, this complete change of perspective is a significant clue to the social and pedagogical changes then underway and an important addition to the school memories discourse.

An idea of school which focused more on experiences and students' natural aptitudes and less on handed-down knowledge still seems a long way away today, verging on the utopian. MCE's educational ideals then clashed with 80s' disillusionment, as Lodi himself commented: teachers had created a few «happy islands»³⁷, based on democracy, in a society still oppressive to childhood.

Even though the idea of school the dossiers bring out did not have the desired effects and the classroom shown remained a minority experience, the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* legacy is still significant: the photos allow observers to reflect on a school based on cooperation rather than competition and on critical thinking in the face of contemporary challenges. Photographs are a visual inspiration for a creative and truly inclusive teaching and learning approach. These aspects are now more important than ever and the methodological insights of this period may perhaps provide answers to current school difficulties.

³⁶ Tonucci, *Non ditemi che è difficile*, cit., p. 11.

³⁷ Lodi, *Cominciare dal bambino. Scritti didattici, pedagogici e teorici*, cit., p. 19 (the expression was translated from Italian by the author).

Representing the Institutions between 1968 and Coming-of-age Novels: the “Educational Video Memories” Database

Chiara Martinelli
University of Florence (Italy)

1. *The terms of a problem: from narrative to reality, back and forth*

If there was no football or other things [to not to do], the things that I can remember are these: hunting, as we were the boys of the via Pal, hunting lizards to cut off their tails [addressing Alessia Bacigalupo, who is interviewing him], you are laughing, but [...] lizards, if you cut off their tails, the lizard runs away, it doesn't die, the tail continues to hop around, alive, I don't know for how many hours [...] you see? or if not, again like the boys of the via Pal, even worse, we would hide behind the cabins of the guards who were attending at the barracks, which was a wall; we would get behind these sort of cabins, and on that other side in the middle of the camp we would throw stone after stone after stone!¹

Extrapolated from a context apparently alien to reading, the words with which Giulio Olmastroni evokes his own childhood pastimes constitute a tangible demonstration of how much narrative models and signifies our own experiences. Narration is an indispensable component of human life, as has been asserted by vast currents of international studies². We are immersed in narrative from the moment we fall asleep, in our dreams, to when we wake, signifying and classifying our present or future events within patterns already read and known; we were this way as children, when we devised horrific stories full of monsters or natural disasters and so were our most distant ancestors, when, in glimpsing the traces of a prey on the ground of the Savannah, all the possible trajectories made by it were foreshadowed³. The adaptive abilities provided by narrative are fundamental for the human species: abilities to adapt to natural adversities and the harshness of social life, as suggested by the current of *Darwinist Literary Theory* inaugurated by the works of Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottshall, or of control of one's anxieties and anguishes, as suggested instead by the *Cognitive Literary Theory* of Nancy Easterlin⁴.

¹ C. Martinelli, “My mother laughed because a teacher said a teacher”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/la-mamma-mia-rideva-perche-diceva-un-maestro-un-maestro> (last access: 23.06.2022).

² J. Bruner, *La fabbrica delle storie. Diritto, letteratura, vita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006, p. 2.

³ J. Gottshall, *L'istinto di narrare. Come le storie ci hanno reso umani*, Milano, Bollati Boringhieri, 2014, pp. 26, 51-2; S. Calabrese, *Neuronarrazioni*, Milano, Bibliografica, 2020, pp. 14-7.

⁴ J. Gottshall, *L'istinto di narrare*, cit., pp. 66-74; N. Easterlin, *The Functions of Literature and the Evolution of Extended Mind*, «New Literary History», vol. 44, n. 4, 2013, pp. 661-682.

Usually, however, human narrative modes have been studied on classical sources – tangible and immutable sources, such as writings, novels and diaries. Until now, the oral word of speech and dialogue has not been considered, which even, in its being a more immediate medium and one that is less subject to reworking and rethinking, could give us the opportunity to understand how the narratives influence the folds of our thoughts⁵. Particular attention, in our context, will be paid to the coming-of-age novel, a narrative genre that, as evocatively argued by Franco Moretti in the now classic *Il romanzo di formazione*⁶, has photographed, in the years of its greatest consolidation – that is, between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries – the need, for the individual person who desires a calm and socially recognised life, to acclimatise to the desires and rules of the social assembly⁷. It is a task that is all the more intriguing if we pause to reflect on the very structures of life memories, which do not fail to configure themselves as “coming-of-age novels”, *building romance*, in which the author signifies and contextualises his or her experiences according to the goals accomplished and the results achieved⁸. Investigating the mix between children’s literature and historical vicissitudes is therefore all the more compelling as it allows us to detect the influences between readings and testimonies, between novels and processes of construction of one’s own identity⁹. A process that was all the more delicate in transition periods, where social, cultural and mental transformations suggested new ways of interfacing with reality, and where readings could indicate new personal trajectories or point to unprecedented behavioural modalities. Among these, as evidenced by numerous essays, are the sixties and seventies, where student protest constituted only the most evident part of a radical cultural or, as it has been defined, transpolitical revolution¹⁰.

This is the purpose that we propose to achieve with this contribution: our source will be the vast database accumulated by the “Educational memories in video” project, which was one of the areas of development of the PRIN 2017-2020 “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation”¹¹. The project, which involved numerous

⁵ See for these considerations J. Dewey, *Comunità e potere*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1971, pp. 168-70.

⁶ F. Moretti, *Il romanzo di formazione*, Milano, Garzanti, 1999; M. de Bernardi, *Il cassetto segreto. Letteratura per l’infanzia e romanzo di formazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2011.

⁷ However, there are many doubts about the Moretti partition, in that several scholars argue both the presence of the coming-of-age novel in ancient, medieval and early-modern times and its persistence, albeit in ways and measures renewed, after the First World War: cf. M. Domenichelli, *Il romanzo di formazione nella tradizione europea*, in M.C. Papini, D. Fioretti, T. Spignoli, *Il romanzo di formazione nell’Ottocento e nel Novecento*, Pisa, ETS, 2007, pp. 11-37; G. Barracco, *Vocazioni irresistibili, vuoti vertiginosi*, Roma, Studium, 2019, pp. 30-31.

⁸ Cf. C. di Pasquale, *Antropologia della memoria. Il ricordo come fatto culturale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, pp. 65-66.

⁹ H.H. Ewers, *Lo sviluppo storico della letteratura per l’infanzia dell’epoca borghese dal Settecento al Novecento. L’esempio tedesco*, in E. Becchi, D. Julia (edd.), *Storia dell’infanzia 2. Dal Settecento a oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996, pp. 409, 426.

¹⁰ F. de Giorgi, *La rivoluzione transpolitica. Il ’68 e il post-68 in Italia*, Roma, Viella, 2020.

¹¹ Cf. R. Sani, J. Meda, “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation”. *An innovative research project with a strong international vocation*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26; L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica: a proposito del primo seminario nazionale PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 1047-53; L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica: a proposito del secondo seminario nazionale PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XV, n. 1, 2020, pp. 809-16.

Italian universities (including the Universities of Macerata, Florence, Campobasso, Milan Cattolica and Roma Tre), resulted in the creation of the portal www.memoriascolastica.it, within which we can also find the “Educational memories in video” data bank.

The latter, compiled by the University of Florence, currently consists of 250 videos (September 2022), developed by the students of the degree course in Primary Education Sciences for the teaching of “History of education”. During the lessons, students were invited to interview an acquaintance about their memories of childhood and school experience. Among the submissions, it was explicitly required that the product lasts at least forty-fifty minutes: most of the files, however, contain longer recordings, sometimes exceeding two hours. The birth cohort, initially restricted to the years 1945-1962, was subsequently extended in the term *ad quem* until 1989; only exceptionally, however, were interviews with people born in the 1930s allowed, people whose childhood memory was very often marked not by the experience of school, but by war. The database allows the disaggregation of interviews on a temporal and spatial basis. From the point of view of the decades considered, we are witnessing a pyramid trend, with a concentration of sources between the Sixties and Eighties: and in fact, the Thirties are covered in two interviews, the Forties in twenty-two, the Fifties in fifty-six, the Sixties in eighty-six, the Seventies in one hundred and eighteen, the Eighties in eighty-one, the Nineties in thirty-three¹². Twenty-one, finally, is the number of interviews that cover the noughties: of the latter, however, only two are related to childhood memories: the remaining nineteen concern professional memories, made by teachers, educators and secondary school teachers. From a geographical point of view, the preponderance of Tuscan school experiences (87% of the sample) over those held in other Italian regions is clear. As for gender, however, students (who, in most cases, are female) preferred to interview a woman: of the 250 interviews, in fact, 188 were directed at a female person.

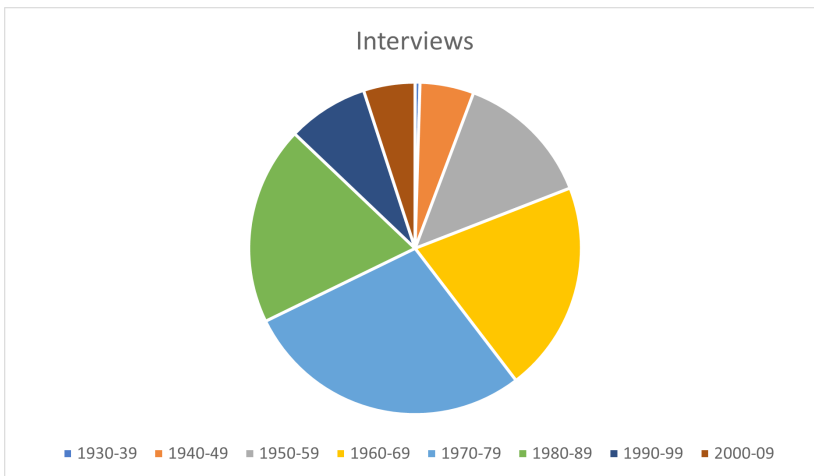


Fig. 1. Breakdown of interviews by decade covered

¹² Bear in mind that, normally, an interview spans several decades.

2. *Coming-of-age literature as a channel for other narratives*

After defining the sources in our possession, we can return to the terms of the problem. What is the presence of literature, and coming-of-age literature, in the childhoods of the interviewees? Some distinctions are necessary. Distinctions of social class and schooling, in the first place: because, for witnesses who grew up in the Forties and Fifties, the way in which their approach to literature is described is different. Books as a means of evasion and escape from reality dominate the accounts of respondents who were able to embark on a prolonged school path (until, at least, the completion of what we would now call upper secondary schools); reading as a channel of self-learning and emancipation instead characterises the discourse of those who were not able to continue beyond primary school or lower secondary school. «I read a lot, because I liked it, because it was the only way to escape, that is, to imagine a different reality», recalls Claudio Calugi (Cerreto Guidi, b. 1946)¹³. A bulimic reading, especially in the post-war campaigns, where the availability of books and bookstores was rare¹⁴. Claudio Calugi, who spent his childhood in Empoli, for example, read «Anything, anything I could get my hands on»¹⁵. «He read what he found» was also the case for the father of Gastone Milani (Fiorenzuola, b. 1937) who, to satisfy his interest, borrowed “L'Osservatore romano” from the parish priest¹⁶. A non-selective activity, which involved the use and reuse of the same, few volumes available. In this regard, Lia Rubechi (Arezzo, b. 1949) dedicates a clear memory to the only book in the house, an edition of *Little Women* given by a teacher and which was consumed in dozens and dozens of readings¹⁷. Reading, moreover, was configured as the only activity that, in those years, people could carry out alone. Only in the Eighties, with the spread of television sets into children's bedrooms, did television guarantee an equal intimate and private dimension: like the one sought by Simonetta Soldani (Florence, b. 1942) in her secondary school years, who remembers her Sundays spent reading the affordable classics of Bur literature¹⁸.

Different perceptions of people characterised by a temporally short schooling, at least for the Forties and Fifties. Graziella Bartolini (Scarperia, Florence, b. 1945), who, like many girls in her cohort, interrupted her studies in the aftermath of Year 6 (the school

¹³ C. Martinelli, “*Accidenti a tutte queste rose*”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/accidenti-tutte-queste-rose-memorie-dinfanzia>, (last access: 10.07.2022).

¹⁴ T. de Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, pp. 118-119.

¹⁵ Martinelli, “*Accidenti a tutte queste rose*”, cit.

¹⁶ C. Martinelli, *Da cassetta per le munizioni a cartella*. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/da-cassetta-le-munizioni-cartella-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 10.07.2022).

¹⁷ C. Martinelli, “*Le proteste dei genitori, ancora le sento*”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/le-proteste-dei-genitori-ancora-le-sento-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

¹⁸ C. Martinelli, *Per fuggire dal qualunquismo*. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/fuggire-dal-qualunquismo-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

obligation up to the age of fourteen sanctioned in 1923 by the Gentile Law was, in fact, merely formal)¹⁹, recalls daily and continuous reading of books and newspapers: a practice that, recommended by her teacher, according to Bartolini allowed her not to lose the skills acquired in the five-year primary school period²⁰. Amelia Gambicorti (Chianni, Pisa, b. 1945), who also began to learn a trade at the age of ten or eleven, describes herself during her adolescence as a girl who was hungry for knowledge, intent on creating small encyclopaedias with newspaper clippings on which she affixed mottos such as «I have not studied, but I want to know»²¹.

In order for respondents to systematically begin to describe a different approach to reading, it is necessary to wait for the cohorts that grew up in the 1960s, enrolled in school at a time when respect for compulsory schooling had become more widespread until the age of fourteen. In the latter, the spontaneous account of the readings addressed in those years emerges more frequently, without the intervention of specific and detailed questions by the interviewers. In this regard, the gender gap is clear. Coming-of-age novels dominated by external actions, explorations and adventurous protagonists characterise the male testimonies, reluctant to correlate historical moments and reading habits. This is, for example, the case of Vincenzo Marsicovetere (Viggiano, Potenza, b. 1966), who claims to have mainly read

books about adventure generally; I read a lot of [Emilio] Salgari and Mark Twain, maybe those were the books that were the most formative for me, they gave me something that movies couldn't. I really liked to read because books in any case develop the imagination, you can imagine the scenes; in short, I like and I have always liked reading more²².

Reading is understood as an activity of imagination and construction of another reality: those cited are coming-of-age stories in which the energies of the protagonists are “externalised”, aimed not at the analysis and transformation of one's character and relationships with others, but at the discovery and action on a largely unknown world. This aspect was also highlighted, symptomatically, by Alessandro Lapini (Greve in Chianti, b. 1961), who, when asked the question «What were you reading?» replies:

the classics, I remember... [Emilio] Salgari, Jules Verne, then, I remember Moby Dick, but you know they were books that were taken from the library and then read among all the other books, yes surely the ones I remember the most are those of Jules Verne and Salgari, the ones that I remember that left a more important mark because, of course, I was a country boy, now we have a thousand means to

¹⁹ Cf. L. Borghi, *Educazione e scuola nell'Italia d'oggi*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1958, p. 32.

²⁰ C. Martinelli, “*Mi disse di leggere, leggere sempre*”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/mi-disse-di-leggere-leggere-sempre-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 10.07.2022).

²¹ C. Martinelli, *Non ho studiato ma voglio sapere*. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/non-ho-studiato-ma-voglio-sapere-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 10.07.2022).

²² C. Martinelli, *La camera oscura*. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/la-camera-oscura-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

explore the world but in those times there were not as many, and these books made you dream, these places, these explorations, “From the earth to the moon”, “Twenty thousand leagues under the sea”, “Around the world in eighty days”, “The pirates of Mompracem”, “The pirates of Malaysia”, in short, they were simply books that captured my imagination²³.

The dimension of emulation, inherent in the coming-of-age novel that sees an often young reader consider literary characters close to them in age, is underlined by Riccardo Rossi (Prato, b. 1956), who, symptomatically, associates both volumes cited with the phrase «go to conquest», which implies *ipso facto* an external projection:

it almost seemed to open a door to a world of beauty or pleasant experiences of which you heard a book speak, to open one by one; you opened it and went to see it [...] it was a continuous discovery of beautiful things [...] it captured my imagination, it gave me certainty, if you read the “Red and Black” you wanted to be like the young man from “Red and Black”, the young man who sets off in the conquest of love, or if you read Balzac you wanted to be like the young Rastignac, to go off in the conquest of society²⁴.

From this point of view, it is in female memories that literature refracts the problematic in the relationship with institutions. The latter perspective is not coincidental in a context in which it was especially girls who experienced, in the years of protest and in the years immediately following them, the increasingly accentuated discrepancy between a family structure still linked to traditional dictates and a school that, albeit in a rhapsodic and leopard-spotted form, saw a progressive change in the relationship between teacher and student. It is in this perspective that the coming-of-age novel seems to acquire its most compelling value, both from an “externalising” perspective and from an “internalising” perspective. Externalisation in that, thanks to it, it seems easier to perceive the connection between personal events and historical events; internalising in that the readers, in retracing anxieties and anguishes to their allies between the pages of a volume, build and define an identity that is often not aligned with the female canons then in force. For Anna Brancolini (Pistoia, b. 1953), who was a secondary school student in the years of the youth protest, coming-of-age novels contributed, in a broad sense, to a better understanding of the dilemmas of her time, because

their reading does not occur without leaving marks and then at those times it was very beautiful, that is, we lived in a period in which I felt the sense of history was being breathed and therefore also reading the works of the neorealists, okay, or the works of Vittorini or Pavese, immersed you in a historical substrate that has always fascinated me particularly²⁵.

²³ C. Martinelli, “Non sembrava una scuola ma un magazzino”. *Memorie d’infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/non-sembrava-una-scuola-ma-un-magazzino-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

²⁴ C. Martinelli, “radioso per tutti”. *Memorie d’infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/radioso-tutti-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 13.07.2022).

²⁵ *Memorie d’infanzia*, interview with Anna Brancolini, <https://youtu.be/1i-uPEoQCqc> (last access: 2.09.2022).

But reading could also be a way to imagine a different feminine identity from the one that, exclusively anchored to the needs of the home and the family, was offered to girls of the Sixties. Reading, for example, recalls Concetta Guida (Naples, b. 1960)

As soon as I started reading, it was one of my main activities because, I repeat, there were no alternative activities [...], back home, you were with your family, both in the family unit and in the extended one, and so I started reading just probably to relate, you know? with the characters, I loved reading a lot and in fact whenever I received gifts they were books and I was very happy and so I read the books of the time, who of my age has not read “Little women” and all the books, “Good wives”? Who has not become attached to Jo, who for us represented coming out of the shell of the family and becoming autonomous?²⁶

«Who hasn't read *Little Women*?» Guida asks emphatically, and not by chance: unlike the heterogeneity provided to us by male memories, the female testimonies of the fifties and sixties almost all revolve around this book²⁷. We have already mentioned the readings and rereadings dedicated to it by Lia Rubechi; but May Alcott's volume is cited as the main reading undertaken in the primary school years by most of the interviewees who elaborate on their readings, such as Sandra Pratesi (Rosignano Marittimo, b. 1954), Letizia Ignesti (Florence, b. 1954), Beatrice Poggesi (San Giovanni Valdarno, Arezzo, b. 1970)²⁸. Far away, therefore, seem the times when *Piccole donne*, in the first Italian translation of 1908, appeared on the national market with a preface that advised girls not to read “alone”²⁹. It is worth noting, however, the marked narrative homogeneity offered to girls, who, in addition to the novels by May Alcott, usually cite two “classic” readings for primary schools, namely “Cuore”, and “Pinocchio”. The narrative availability for their male peers seems much more heterogeneous, who, in their memories, can count on a much more varied book selection to refer to. But being able to read more volumes necessarily entailed having more narratives from which to draw in order to be able to signify one's own reality and one's own life path; more destinies to choose from, unlike those narrower ones that were destined for the female gender.

Let us therefore dwell on what the plot of this novel, which is so often cited, may have signified in the narratives of female witnesses. The different characters of the four

²⁶ C. Martinelli, *Un ambiente protetto e controllato. Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/un-ambiente-protetto-e-controllato-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 12.07.2022).

²⁷ See also M. Bernardi, *Il cassetto segreto. Letteratura per l'infanzia e romanzo di formazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2011, pp. 118-9.

²⁸ C. Martinelli, “*Paginate intere*”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/paginate-intero-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 23.06.2022); C. Martinelli, *I sei anni che ci differenziano. Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/i-sei-anni-che-ci-differenziano-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 23.06.2022) and C. Martinelli, “*Ascoltare, ascoltare, ascoltare*”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/ascoltare-ascoltare-ascoltare-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 25.06.2022).

²⁹ M.I. Palazzolo, *Editoria e cultura: il caso Alcott in Italia*, in C. Covato, M.C. Leuzzi (edd.), *E l'uomo educò la donna*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1989, pp. 111-127; F. Borruso, *L'infanzia tra rappresentazioni sociali e violenze educative. Un itinerario storico-educativo*, in E. Zizioli, M.L. Sergio (edd.), *La Convenzione ONU sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza tra storia e futuro: le ragioni di un anniversario*, Roma, Roma Tre Press, 2020, p. 39.

protagonists, the attention to family relationships and friendship, the modest social conditions of the March family that forced them, in a similar way to many Italian families of those years, to limit their expenses, undoubtedly constituted a reason for reflection for the young readers; but the continuous tension that, during the novel, is maintained between Jo's aspirations and the demands of the society surrounding her probably contributed to strengthening their cogency³⁰. The second of the four March sisters, Jo structurally expresses her discomfort with her social and gender condition: she wants a freedom of movement and action granted only to men, dreaming of being able to live without the conventions that limit her, both because she is a woman and because of modest social conditions. She already knows that her character will have to be tamed and limited to respond to the duties of society: and, although there is a destiny of relative female emancipation awaiting her – work as a teacher, marriage to a much older man – this will be achieved at the price of conforming to the values and dictates of the social assembly. It is a discomfort that we find in the female memories of the sixties, focused on the desire for greater freedom of movement or for the possibility, as for Gisella Bacci (Florence, b. 1956) to be able to access the same educational opportunities offered to male peers:

We had the apron, us girls, the black apron and the boys no, that is...we always had the apron - you couldn't not have it and then practically what I regretted was that in certain subjects... apart from gymnastics, for which there were two gyms, and there was the gymnastics teacher, a male physical education teacher for the boys and a female teacher for the girls, and there were separate gyms; we alternated between the small gym and the big one in turn, it was easier that the big one was always used for the boys [...] but then there was also another subject, technical applications, which was very different: there was the female teacher for girls and the male teacher for boys and even we girls were made to stay in the classroom and the boys went to the laboratory, and they could do very interesting activities, because they were taught technical drawing, they even designed a boat, a small Viking boat and [Bacci increases the emphasis] they made it! Precisely with the materials, even the journalists of the "Gazzettino toscano" came to interview them, they did a whole broadcast because it was a beautiful thing, and we girls, on the other hand, the first thing that the female teacher gave us [Bacci laughs sarcastically] was a recipe for custard³¹.

Growing up, however, in classic coming-of-age novels seems to mean coming to terms with the surrounding social structures, and repressing the motions of indignation and discomfort that can characterise the years of childhood and adolescence. The acceptance of context marks both the conclusion of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Goethe and of coming-of-age novels aimed specifically at children, such as *Pinocchio* and *Good Wives*: and it is no coincidence, in fact, that with the turn of the seventies and eighties the incidence of these volumes dwindles, and they arise less and less in the citations of witnesses.

³⁰ M. Bernardi, *Il cassetto segreto*, cit., pp. 109-111.

³¹ C. Martinelli, "E così mi mandarono al classico". *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/e-cosi-mi-mandarono-al-classico-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 3.07.2022).

The Construction of an “Archive of Memory”. School Memory through the Voice of Its Protagonists in 20th Century in Molise

Rossella Andreassi, Valeria Viola
University of Molise (Italy)

1. *Oral sources within the new historiographical frame of reference*¹

In the summer of 2011 in Brixen at the 14th *International Symposium for School Life and School History Collections*, one of the first interesting discussions took place between scholars on the topic of the heuristic potential of oral sources in the field of history and education. The research group of the Documentation and Research Centre on the History of School Institutions, School Books and Children’s Literature (Ce.S.I.S.) of the University of Molise participated with a paper entitled “*School memories*”. *Oral sources in the history of schools and educational institutions* which illustrated “some working hypotheses” conducted as part of a “publishing project” aimed at setting up an audio-visual archive through the collection of oral testimonies of former teachers and pupils, in order to highlight the development of schooling processes and teaching experiences carried out in some areas of southern Italy between the 1930s and the 1980s. «The aim of the project» – as Alberto Barausse reiterated the following year at the conference entitled *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi* (Educational History Research Today) held in Lecce – was to «focus and develop some initial considerations on oral sources and their possible use within the new fields of investigation identified by educational historiography»².

This statement expressed an attempt to legitimize the use of oral testimonies in the historical-educational field in the wake of the broader reflection triggered by the historiographical revolution initiated in the late 1990s by the French social historians Dominique Julia and André Chervel³, which saw a shift from the history of schooling

¹ The present contribution is the result of the joint work of Valeria Viola author of paragraph 1, and Rossella Andreassi, author of paragraph 2 and 3. The conclusions were co-written by the two authors.

² A. Barausse, “E non c’era mica la bic!” *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, in H.A. Cavallera (ed.), *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un confronto di metodi, modelli e programmi di ricerca*, vol. II, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2013, p. 543. For the report of the Brixen conference, see P. Zamperlin, *Le fonti orali e i Musei dell’educazione*, «Studium Educationis», vol. XII, n. 3, 2011, pp. 147-149.

³ D. Julia, *Riflessioni sulla recente storiografia dell’educazione in Europa: per una storia comparata delle culture scolastiche*, «Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», vol. 3, n. 3, 1996, pp. 119-147; A. Chervel, *La culture scolaire. Une approche historique*, Paris, Belin, 1998.

based on pedagogical ideas and theories to that of «tangible culture»⁴. This «passage from the ideal to the real», as Carmela Covato has pointed out, has given “document citizenship” to any element that bears within itself the traces of man’s actions over time, regardless of the reasons for which it was created and the use to which it was intended. It thus becomes a source in its own right. Thus it is for oral sources⁵. From that moment on, in Italy the process of cultural affirmation and legitimisation of the use of oral testimonies within historical-educational research has accelerated, as demonstrated by the increase in dedicated projects launched at the many documentation and research centres in the field, that are part of the Italian Society for the Study of Historical Educational Heritage (SIPSE)⁶. In recent years, in conjunction with the Molise series, other projects focusing on oral memory have been launched, which, for reasons of editorial economy, will only be listed briefly here: the project of the University of Florence coordinated by Gianfranco Bandini and Stefano Oliviero⁷; the project of the Department of Education Sciences of the University of Padua led by Fabio Targhetta; the initiative of the Faculty of Education Sciences of the Free University of Bolzano and the Swiss High Pedagogical Schools (*Pädagogischen Hochschule*) of the Grisons and the Canton Valais, under the scientific coordination of Annemarie Augschöll Blasbichler; the one curated by Mirella D’Ascenzo of the University of Bologna; the History of Education and Children’s Literature workshop of the Master’s Degree Course in Primary Education Science at the University of Turin; the one at the University of Foggia recently launched by Antonella Cagnolati and Barbara De Serio; the “Paolo and Ornella Ricca School Museum” project at the University of Macerata. These are diverse initiatives involving researchers, students and the community in different capacities, for the analysis of which we refer to the recent work by Lucia Paciaroni, which is the first dedicated monograph within the still limited bibliography on the topic of oral sources. The belated publication of a study devoted entirely to oral sources in the field of educational history reflects the difficulty in the process of liberating them from the marginal position they had long occupied within the research field. Until the late 1960s, in fact, the use of interviews encountered strong resistance in most areas of school and educational history research; only the social sciences that dealt with popular culture used it to give voice to the «lower and unlettered classes»⁸. In particular, in the 1950s, it was mainly scholars such as Rocco Scotellaro, Danilo Dolci and Ernesto De Martino who made use of oral testimonies to bring out those typical aspects of popular culture belonging to ordinary people that eluded official documents. Later on, the cultural changes that took place during the last decades of

⁴ R. Sani, *L’implementazione della ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia: itinerari, priorità, obiettivi di lungo termine*, in S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla, L. Pomante (edd.), *La práctica educativa. Historia, memoria y patrimonio*, Salamanca, FahrenHouse, 2018, p. 28.

⁵ A. Barausse, J. Meda, C. Covato (edd.), *Scuola, memoria, storia. A proposito di un recente volume*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020, p. 757.

⁶ Cf. M. Brunelli, *La recente costituzione della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico Educativo (SIPSE)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XII, n. 2, 2019, pp. 653-655.

⁷ L. Paciaroni, *Memorie di scuola. Contributo a una storia delle pratiche didattiche ed educative nelle scuole marchigiane attraverso le testimonianze di maestri e maestre (1945-1985)*, Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 39-49.

⁸ Barausse, “*E non era mica la Bic!*” *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, cit., p. 544.

the last century, focusing attention on aspects such as «traditional work practices, the experience of small business, daily life and the family, the collective experiences of local history, resistance to fascism, and gender history»⁹, also prompted a re-evaluation of the interviews. As far as the field of educational history is concerned, on the other hand, the use of such sources is only documented from the end of the 20th century in Spain and France; in the Anglo-Saxon world, on the other hand, their use coincided with the greater attention paid to the sphere of the subjectivity and the individual. The first approaches to oral sources in the educational-historical domain in Italy came fairly late. Apart from the 1994 work by Marcello Dei, who observed the teaching profession between the turn of the century and the post World War II period “from an eminently sociological perspective”, there had been no interest in this type of source for several years, unlike the Anglo-Saxon and North American contexts such as the one promoted by Philip Gardner and Peter Cunningham¹⁰. The reasons for this delay are to be found not only in the Crocian prejudice, but also in the caution of Italian researchers to perceive in interviews the same degree of reliability in terms of data retrieval as compared to official “maps”, as they are «considered subjective and changeable depending on the interviewer, the context of collection, and the time interval elapsed between the experiences lived and their re-evocation»¹¹. Juri Meda emphasized that even within this «strenuous historiographical campaign» conducted by the strand of tangible culture studies that aimed to lengthen the list of sources to interview, the inclusion of oral testimonies required a greater effort¹²:

It is as if historiography's growing interest in “educational materiality” has somehow penalized the exploration of the heuristic potential of intangible sources', such as the memories of former teachers and former pupils in the school of a given historical period, which are able to provide us with fundamental information on the “real school” that is often hidden behind the “legal” one prescribed by school legislation and informed by pedagogical doctrines¹³.

A mistrust that did not allow historians to provide a detailed reading of significant aspects of the history of national education that the interrogation of oral sources allows, instead.

Oral sources, in fact, are perhaps the only ones that allow the historian access to the educational routines carried on by inertia beyond their natural end of decay, to the conscious breaches of prohibitions imposed by school authorities, to the ideological non-conformities and resilience of teachers in the face of radical school reforms and pedagogical taboos of all kinds, in other words, to all the most exceptional information preserved within the black box of schooling referred to by Depaep and Simon¹⁴.

A turnaround has taken place since the international symposium *School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Barausse, Meda, Covato, *Scuola, memoria, storia. A proposito di un recente volume*, cit, p. 761.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 762.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 761.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Issues, held in Seville in 2015¹⁵ which has the merit of having acknowledged to ego-documents, within which oral memories are included, a strategic role within the process of constructing the forms of school memory¹⁶. This theoretical and methodological approach, by glimpsing heuristic possibilities not only in the tangible but also in the intangible elements belonging to and witnessing the school's past¹⁷, called for a review of the tools and methodology of interview construction in order to ensure the most impartial and objective reading possible. This contribution, in particular, aims to focus the role that school museums¹⁸ have played in the genesis of such research projects based on the collection of oral testimonies by illustrating the experience of the Museum of School and Education of the University of Molise (MuSEP). Like all the museums of the same kind, the MuSEP, since its formal establishment in 2013, has not limited its mission to a mere exhibition of objects, but, inspired by the suggestions of the ecomuseum and critical museology, has positioned itself as a point of connection between conservation, education, research and the dissemination of results at the service of the community in a mutual exchange relationship, meeting the needs dictated by the practice of the third mission required of universities. This "exchange" has made the Molise museum a strategic place where researchers can be brought into contact with former teachers and former pupils who have been involved in initiatives for the construction of the editorial series in question. Through a varied series of activities ranging from the presentation of children's literature books, reading workshops, conferences and seminars, to recreational/educational activities aimed at local schools of all levels¹⁹, the MuSEP has positioned

¹⁵ There, the Molise research group presented a report entitled *When I used the trumpet to call up the schoolkids». The use and value of oral memories in the historical-school research* which illustrated the theoretical, historiographical and methodological premises underlying the project launched in 2012 to create the audiovisual series "La voce dei maestri".

¹⁶ Cf. A. Viñao Frago, *La Historia de la Educación ante el siglo XXI: tensiones, retos y audiencias*, in *Repensar la historia de la educación: nuevos desafíos, nuevas propuestas*, in M. Ferraz Lorenzo (ed.), *Repensar la historia de la educación nuevos desafíos, nuevas propuestas*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2005, pp. 147-166; Id., *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33; Id., *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao Frago (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

¹⁷ Sani, *La ricerca sul Patrimonio storico-scolastico ed educativo tra questioni metodologiche, nodi interpretativi e nuove prospettive d'indagine*, cit., p. 37.

¹⁸ R. Andreassi, *I centri di ricerca e i Musei della scuola indicatori di sviluppo del rinnovamento storiografico*, in Cavallera (ed.), *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un confronto di Metodi, Modelli e Programmi di ricerca*, vol. I, cit., pp. 175-192; M. Brunelli, *L'educazione al patrimonio storico-scolastico. Approcci teorici, modelli e strumenti per la progettazione didattica e formativa in un museo della scuola*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2018, p. 15; A. Ascenzi, M. Brunelli, J. Meda (edd.), *School museums as dynamic areas for widening the heuristic potential and the socio-cultural impact of the history of education. A case study from Italy*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 57, n. 4, 2021, pp. 419-43; A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

¹⁹ In this respect, please refer to: A. Barausse, R. Andreassi, *Il Museo della scuola e dell'educazione popolare dell'Università degli Studi del Molise tra internazionalizzazione della ricerca e percorsi di educazione al patrimonio storico educativo*, in V. Bosna, A. Cagnolati (edd.), *Itinerari nella storiografia educativa*, Bari, Cacucci, 2019, pp. 155-185; A. Ascenzi, M. Brunelli, *I musei universitari del patrimonio storico-educativo e la Terza Missione: una sfida o un'opportunità? Riflessioni dal Museo della Scuola dell'Università di Macerata*, in A. Barausse, T. de Freitas

itself as a favorable place for dialogue and collaboration between the community and the research group, contributing in a crucial way in making the historical-scholastic heritage a fundamental sequence of the cultural and identity code of the history of each individual and of the community to which they belong, and in encouraging them to contribute with their own testimonies to its reconstruction.

The contribution proposed here, therefore, aims to illustrate the Molise project updated in both theoretical and methodological terms upon the reflection on the relationship between individual school memory and oral sources that emerged during the Spanish symposium and was further developed recently within the PRIN "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)"²⁰.

2. The "Memory Archive" project: methodologies and tools

As stated above, oral testimonies, as «egodocuments», are being more and more used as sources in the field of educational-historical research, in order to obtain a "subjective" representation of the school for the reconstruction of "school memory"²¹. Their use, however, poses a number of problems, most of which can be traced back to the fact that they are "imperfect" because they are sources of memory and memory is a reservoir in constant flux, a transforming archive where corrections, revisitations and rewritings take place alongside rejects²².

Ermel, V. Viola (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul Patrimonio Storico Educativo. Atti dell'incontro Internazionale di Studi. Campobasso 2/3 Maggio 2018*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, pp. 237-246; R. Andreassi, A. Barausse, *Il «Museo della scuola e dell'educazione popolare» nel Sistema Museale dell'Università del Molise: tra pratiche storiografiche. Terza missione e sperimentazione didattica*, in *ibid.*, pp. 271-298; R. Andreassi, V. Viola, *Percorsi per la conoscenza partecipata della Storia della Scuola: l'esperienza del Ce.S.I.S. e del Museo della scuola dell'Università degli Studi del Molise*, «Glocale», n. 8, 2014, pp. 231-241.

²⁰ For details of the PRIN, please refer to the webpage: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/il-progetto> (last access: 07.03.2023) where the full description of the thematic bibliography produced during its lifetime is also available. <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/il-progetto> (last access: 07.03.2023). Among them, for the purposes of this reflection, the following contributions should be noted: G. Bandini, S. Oliviero (edd.), *Public History of Education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze, FUP, 2019; J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli, *Memories and public celebrations of education in contemporary times. Presentation*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019; J. Meda, *Memoria magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in S. Polenghi, G. Zago, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memoria ed educazione. Identità, narrazione, diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2021, pp. 25-35; A. Barausse, *Gli "archivi della memoria" e il rinnovamento del fare scolastico*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 33-48.

²¹ Barausse, "E non era mica la Bic!". *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, cit.

²² Interesting observations by Giovanni Contini are provided in the article of G. Nataloni, G. Venerucci, *Lo sguardo della storia orale: il percorso delle fonti orali nella narrazione storica*, «Storia e Futuro, rivista di Storia e Storiografia», n. 28, febbraio 2012, http://www.storiaefuturo.com/it/numero_28/memoria/ (last access: 5/03/2023). See G. Contini, A. Martini, *Verba manent. L'uso delle fonti orali per la storia contemporanea*, Roma, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1993; C. Bermanni, *Considerazioni sulla memoria, la storia e la ricerca sul campo*, in C.

In addition to these critical aspects, there are also those attributable to the strictly methodological sphere such as: the unlikely neutrality of the interviewer, the physiological process to which memory is subjected, the processes of transformation of memories²³.

It therefore happens that one must somehow interpret a memory that, from a certain moment onwards, can no longer be exact and is full of gaps. Any interview given, moreover, depends heavily on the “point of view” expressed by the witness, his personal interpretation of his past, his self-representation²⁴.

It is therefore crucial to be aware of these shortcomings or reinterpretations of individuals, and to use the necessary tools to access other historical information through comparison with other sources, in order to reconstruct a well-founded and verifiable historical process.

Many other elements have to be taken into account in the production but also in the interpretation of an oral source. Fundamental are: the place where the interview is carried out, the relationship established between interviewee and interviewer, the instruments used (video cameras, recorders), the presence of various types of audience (video operator, relatives, various listeners), the type of questionnaire (open/closed/free). We will then try to explain and briefly motivate the choices made within the Ce.S.I.S./MuSEP *Memory Archive* project.

The *Memory Archive* project started in 2012 and was promoted by the Centre for Documentation and Research on the History of School Institutions, School Books and Children’s Literature (Ce.S.I.S.) and the Museum of School and Popular Education (MuSEP) of the University of Molise. It includes a publishing project consisting of an audio-visual collection “School Memories”²⁵, which is currently divided into «The voice of the teachers» and «The voice of the pupils», and consists of about 50 video interviews collected through the specific methodology of oral sources, with the involvement of teachers, school managers and former pupils. The project is continuously growing; it is at present made of 13 interviews collected by school historians and professionally edited thanks to the support of the audio-video technician of the University of Molise, and of about 40 more interviews that were conducted by university students as part of their History of School course project, in line with the others carried out at a professional level.

Bermani, A. De Palma (edd.) *Fonti orali, istruzioni per l'uso*, Venezia, Soc. Mutuo Soccorso, 2008.

²³ R. Andreassi, *The museum and the individual memory for a reconstruction of the rural schools for didactic purposes*, in P. Dávila, L.M. Naya (edd.), *Espacios y patrimonio histórico-educativo*, Erein, Donostia, 2016, pp. 1119-1131.

²⁴ Cf. G. Contini Bonacossi, *La fonte orale tra la storiografia e l'archivistica*, in L. Borgia (ed.), *Studi in onore di Arnaldo D'Addario*, Lecce, Conte, 1995, pp. 43-58.

²⁵ The project is conducted under the scientific supervision of Alberto Barausse, director of Ce.S.I.S. and MuSEP. The interviews were carried out and supervised, in addition to Alberto Barausse himself, by Rossella Andreassi, head of the Museum and Cultural Heritage Resources Sector and Valeria Viola, an adjunct lecturer at the University of Molise, with the collaboration of Michela D'Alessio of the University of Basilicata. For the technical realisation, the project relies on the contribution of Giorgio Calabrese (Relations and Communications Office of the University of Molise). For the transcription of the interviews, in addition to Emilia Ciaccia, various civil service volunteers collaborated, but in particular the Unimol civil service volunteers “ME.TE.CO. Memories, TEcnologies, COmunities. MuseUnimol and intangible cultural heritage” 2019-20, in particular Angela Colonna, Pamela Lustrato, Caroline Vitone.

There have been many issues that the research team had to deal with, in relation to the collection and use of oral sources.

The first element is the identification of the witnesses: the interviewees were chosen using the principle of heterogeneity and aiming to have a significant sample in both temporal and spatial terms. Some interviewees were not chosen but were referred to by word of mouth among the teachers or former students themselves. The interviews conducted covered a sample of 50 units, where the following indicators were taken into account: age, period of training, period of employment and spatial indicators. Also, the interviewees were: teachers of both sexes, retired, aged between 68 and 95, former teachers in schools of southern Italy, with preference being given to teachers from Molise. The other regions represented in terms of territorial proximity, but to a much lesser extent, are Campania, Puglia and Lazio. Considerable space was also given to experiences carried out in the countryside (rural schools) or in municipalities located in the mountains.

Another element to keep in mind is the relationship between interviewee and interviewer between whom it is necessary to establish a climate of trust and listening but also of empathy. Some scholars think that the role of the interviewer should be almost invisible so as not to influence the narrative. In reality, the role of the interviewer is decisive because if he or she were not there, the oral source that is constructed together at the time of the interview would not exist. As Lucia Paciaroni recalls²⁶ «It is believed that one of the main characteristics of oral testimonies, and one that distinguishes them from others, is precisely the fact that they are the product of the encounter of two people who, together, through question and answer, give life to that source». Contini, too, recalls the fundamental role of the interviewer not only in the interview collection phase but also in the subsequent transcription, reinterpretation and writing phases of a historiographical text²⁷. The interviewee must let himself or herself be guided through the flow of questions, and the interviewer must be able to prompt memories, collect insignificant details to trigger other memories: there must be constant interaction between the two. To enable this, the interviewees were always met a few days beforehand to get to know each other and view the questions together and eliminate any doubts or misinterpretations of the questions. Moreover, on this occasion, it was possible to view the materials kept by the teacher and also bring back dormant memories of those years. When it was not possible to meet beforehand, a preparatory phone call or at least a short interview before the video filming took place.

Another element that greatly influences the course of the interview is the place where it is conducted. Often the interviews were recorded at the witness's home: this allows the interviewee to feel comfortable and more casual, but sometimes conducting the interview in the museum or in the school that the interviewee attended may be more evocative. Over time, it was also noted that there are variations in self-representation depending on the presence or absence of an audience during the recording. The presence of the

²⁶ Paciaroni, *Memorie di scuola. Contributo a una storia delle pratiche didattiche ed educative nelle scuole marchigiane attraverso le testimonianze di maestri e maestre (1945-1985)*, cit., p. 67.

²⁷ Contini, Martini (edd.), *Verba Manent*, cit.

audience tends to give the memories a more ordered but also sweetened form, precisely because they tend to give the best self-representation.

The focus has also always been on the use of personal semiophore items (photos, notebooks, teaching materials, report cards, diaries, etc.) either personal or belonging to the museum, which help the witness to go back in memory to the school moments experienced and that he or she will tell about²⁸.

Another fundamental element is the choice of the recording mode. MuSEP favored the video-recording mode because it also helps to reinterpret non-verbal communication, which is very often rich in elements and references. Only in the event that the interviewee explicitly wished not to be filmed did we switch to the audio-only recording mode. The editing of the interview also involved a number of considerations. It was decided to keep a complete version of the original interview in the archive and also to produce a version that could also be enjoyed by the museum public, with editing of the images and minimal cuts of the video (especially of parts that were difficult to understand). An attempt was made to remain as faithful as possible to the original footage.

The interviews are also carried out following a pre-set questionnaire with questions guiding the interviewee by inquiring mainly into 4 macro-areas (1. Training as a child and as a teacher 2. Inside the classroom (smells, sounds, timing, teaching etc.) 3. Exercise of the profession, 4. There is also a free space where the interviewee can talk about his or her memories more freely). To allow comparability of the interviews, the same questionnaire structure is maintained, varying only a few questions according to the year of birth and the period in which the profession was exercised. Obviously, the order of the questions can vary depending on the course of the conversation and you can choose not to propose all the questions or insert new ones. It should be a guiding tool, but also a flexible one.

Although the questions are repeated almost the same in the different interviews, the length is variable (30 to 90 minutes) because it basically depends on the relationship between interviewee and interviewer but also on the different eloquence of the protagonists.

It was deemed more appropriate to have the 13 sample interviews conducted by experts in the field of school history who could better guide the flow of memories by having an in-depth knowledge of the relevant historical contexts. Similarly, it was deemed useful to proceed with the editing by a professional technician; during filming, the various documentary sources (notebooks, books, diaries, photos, teaching materials, etc.) that the interviewees brought with them were filmed and included in the video montage.

The scientific research work also involved the complete transcription of the text, including the questions, which are considered essential for understanding the narrative. Many scholars tend to eliminate the questions asked, in order to try to give a sense of spontaneity to the narrative, but this in our opinion and as also considered by Contini²⁹

²⁸ R. Andreassi, *I centri di ricerca e i musei della scuola indicatori di sviluppo del rinnovamento storiografico*, in H.A. Cavallera, *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un confronto di metodi, modelli e programmi di ricerca*, Lecce, PensaMultimedia, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 175-192.

²⁹ Contini, Martini (edd.), *Verba Manent*, cit., pp. 12-14.

and Portelli³⁰ turns out to be a manipulation of the source because it does not let one understand what stimulus the interviewee responded to. A faithful transcription was also made of the spoken word, reporting the dialectal parts and speech and idioms that are not always understandable. An abstract and keyword choices were made for each interview, useful for indexing. Each interviewee also has his or her own biographical sheet (with data also framing autobiographical and family aspects) and a release for the use of the interview.

It was also decided to place online³¹ extracts of the 13 interviews on the MuSEP website, each accompanied by a short abstract, to make them accessible to a wider audience.

3. *First analysis of historical data from the sources produced*

The administration of the same specific questionnaire to the various interviewees made it possible to compare the information provided by teachers and pupils and to reconstruct the different historical frames of reference, as well as to have a spatial snapshot of school environments in southern Italy, with particular attention to the reality of Molise.

The collection of oral sources mainly concerned a territorial area, Molise, which experienced a socio-economic development with rhythms and timescales quite different from those experienced by the northern areas of the country in the second half of the 20th century, and which strongly conditioned the schooling processes.

The oral sources collected made it possible to compare the different situation of the schools located in the municipal rural areas with those in the hamlets and villages³² from the 1930s and 1940s until the 1980s, with elements of long-standing and persistent difficulties and precariousness of the structures. In addition, a great deal of information emerged on the social situation of the pupils and information on the poverty of the families and the consequent phenomenon of emigration. Another interesting piece of information was the relationship that the teachers had with parents.

The interviews are based on the experiences of teachers born in the 1920s who attended primary schools as pupils in the 1930s and had their first professional experiences during the last years of Fascism and during post-war reconstruction, within a territorial context that was in any case marked by a substantial delay in economic development.

³⁰ Cf. A. Portelli, *Sulla diversità della storia orale*, «Primo Maggio», n. 13, 1979, pp. 54-60; A. Portelli, *L'uso dell'intervista nella storia orale*, in E. Cento, L. Di Ruscio (edd.), *Didattica della storia dell'800 e del '900. Un modello per la fruizione e la valorizzazione delle fonti documentarie*, Corazzano (Pisa), Titivillus, pp. 58-67.

³¹ See <http://musei.unimol.it/musep/home-musep/collana-audiovisivi/> (last access: 09.03.2023).

³² Cf. V. Viola, *Un problema di "spazio". Alcune riflessioni storiografiche sull'edilizia scolastica in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, in Barausse, de Freitas Ermel, Viola (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul Patrimonio Storico Educativo*, cit., pp. 471-494.

The picture that emerges from the sources obtained³³ is that of a small central southern region of Italy that was marked very slowly by the gradual transition from a profoundly rural society to an industrial society and, finally, to a service society. As Gino Massullo points out in his studies on Molise from the socio-economic point of view, the evolution can be, briefly, summarized in three moments. The first is that which goes from Fascism to the end of the 1960s, a phase in which the process of Molise's economic, social and cultural isolation and depression was completed; the second is that between the 1970s and the end of the 1990s, during which the region, having acquired its institutional autonomy from Abruzzo, went from being an island to a periphery of the Italian economic system. The third and last period is the most recent, collected between the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s.

In the memoirs, there are frequent references to the condition of economic, social and cultural isolation and depression in Molise and to the widespread condition of structural poverty that characterized the life of so many small municipalities and that would be recorded by the National Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. The oral testimonies bring to light the situation of a profoundly rural world crossed by phenomena widespread in much of southern Italy and expressed through precise recollections such as depopulation due to emigration, pauperism in childhood, and particular working conditions. The questions provide information on various topics. Those most investigated at the time were those concerning the characterisation and differentiation of rural and urban school spaces; the social situation of pupils and the school's relationship with parents; social poverty and emigration.

There are many other topics that can be analyzed through oral sources, starting with the teaching practices in use, the teaching materials used, participation in political and associational life, information on salary, sanitary conditions, inspection visits.

The publishing project will soon make it possible to consult the interviews in their entirety and to have an additional wealth of useful sources for historical-educational research.

Conclusions

This rapid examination is coming to an end. On the one hand, it intends to contribute an update of the Molise project in the light of the revaluation of oral sources recorded by the school memory strand of studies, and on the other hand, to reaffirm their usefulness in completing and comparing the data coming from the analysis of the other tangible and intangible sources contemplated in the sector research. The contribution, in fact, intends to highlight the heuristic potential of oral testimonies, but if they are constructed by adopting those methodological expedients that are constantly being revised, functional to confer them an objectively greater degree of reliability. Their inclusion within the

³³ Barausse, "E non era mica la Bic!". *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, cit.

range of sources admitted by the field research, continues to require their verification for those aspects such as the subjectivity of the interviewee and interviewer, removals, lability, distortion of memories.

In conclusion, the intention is to contribute to the reflection on the topic after taking up the solicitations coming from the field studies conducted in recent years, in order not to give up further that glimpse of national school history that emerges from oral sources, full of those aspects linked to the everyday life and humanity of its protagonists and that official records do not reveal.

The School of “Fascism in Crisis” through the Memories of Pupils of the Time

Francesco Bellacci
University of Florence (Italy)

Introduction

In the historiographical debate in the historical-educational field, the study of school memories is now a consolidated trend thanks to which it is possible to shed light on a series of dynamics that have remained in the shadows in the political-legislative reconstructions of the school of the past and partly also in the reconstructions that are more attentive to social history. Certainly, the proliferation of studies on educational and scholastic heritage has, over the course of the last few decades, made a notable contribution to the investigation of everyday school life and of the aspects of material culture. To name just a few: *Gentile e il fascismo*¹ and *Il regime degli editori: libri scuola e fascismo*² by Monica Galfrè, *Le parole educate: libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*³ by Davide Montino, *La scuola fascista. Istituzioni, parole d'ordine, luoghi dell'immaginario*⁴ by Gianluca Gabrielli and Montino, *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria esperienze e prospettive*⁵ by Anna Ascenzi, Carmela Covato and Giuseppe Zago, *La ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia*⁶ by Roberto Sani and *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*⁷ by Juri Meda.

In this regard, the study of video testimonies on school and childhood memories between the 30s and 40s, collected between 2019 and 2022 for the PRIN project School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001), no doubt making a valuable contribution by providing unedited insights. In particular,

¹ M. Galfrè, *Una riforma alla prova: la scuola media di Gentile e il fascismo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2000.

² M. Galfrè, *Il regime degli editori: libri scuola e fascismo*, Roma, Laterza, 2005.

³ D. Montino, *Le parole educate: libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, Milano, Selene, 2007.

⁴ G. Gabrielli, D. Montino, *La scuola fascista: istituzioni parole d'ordine e luoghi dell'immaginario*, Verona, Ombre corte, 2009.

⁵ A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago, *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive. Atti del II Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo Studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Padova, 7-8 Ottobre 2021)*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

⁶ R. Sani, *La Ricerca Sul Patrimonio Storico-educativo in Italia*, «Linhas (Florianópolis)», 2019, pp. 53-74.

⁷ J. Meda, *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017.

we are interested in investigating the school memories surrounding some of the years of the Fascist dictatorship, to better understand the totalitarian dynamics in schools.

1. *Oral history and school memories*

Since the end of the 1990s, educational historians have begun to study «school memories» by bringing the debate on oral sources and memory as an interpretative category, which for several decades had already been open to broader level of historiography, within their scientific community⁸.

History, as Giovanni De Luna⁹ rightly points out, appears increasingly characterised by the ability to use new sources and materials, thus expanding the territory of the historian and the possibilities of expanding knowledge of human facts of the past through their traces. This great revolution also affects interdisciplinarity, the quantitative expansion of sources, and the possibility of also taking into account the subjective factors of human beings.

Oral memories of school memories are linked to oral history, which mainly uses sources produced – and recorded – by a dialogue between two or more subjects, who relate according to the typical codes of orality. The use of oral sources makes it possible to overturn the «top-down» view that is typical of traditional historiography, in favour of a «bottom-up» approach focused more on the events and culture of ordinary people and subaltern or marginal groups. Choosing to use these sources for a historiographic study means exploiting their specific potential on two levels: the level of personal events and experiences, and that of subjectivity and memory. As far as the first level is concerned, oral sources have the ability to shed light on important aspects of the past that it would often be difficult to reconstruct effectively only through other kinds of testimony. In fact, they can fruitfully compensate for documentary gaps or integrate information from other sources. Moving on to the second level, these testimonies are of great use for exploring individual memory, collective memory and common sentiment. These sources enable us to grasp the deepest aspects of subjective experience and to focus on the meaning that the interviewees attribute to their past experiences and how they interpret them when they are asked to speak about them¹⁰.

As oral testimonies, the individual school memories allow us to explore even more deeply – and from a different perspective than the one offered by traditional historical-

⁸ J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memorie ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020; B. Bonomo, *Voci della memoria. L'uso delle fonti orali nella ricerca storica*, Roma, Carocci, 2013; G. De Luna, *La passione e la ragione: Fonti e metodi dello storico contemporaneo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2001; M. Bloch, *Apologia della storia: o mestiere di storico*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996; Id., *Storici e storia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997.

⁹ De Luna, *La passione e la ragione: Fonti e metodi dello storico contemporaneo*, cit., p. 99.

¹⁰ Bonomo, *Voci della memoria. L'uso delle fonti orali nella ricerca storica*, cit.

educational investigation practices – the years of Fascist schooling, teaching and its educational models, but they could also shed light on aspects not considered by the scientific community or that are still under study, such as for example the children's consumption and the effectiveness of indoctrination.

School memory – like memory in general – can therefore be used, as well as to study the past, also to define how it is seen, perceived, interpreted and even reinterpreted in the present. In this sense, as stated by Juri Meda and Antonio Viñao¹¹, «from a historical-educational point of view, school memory interests us not only as a means of accessing the school of the past, but also as a key to understanding what today's society knows, or thinks it knows, about the schools of the past, and how close this is to the truth or is the result of prejudices and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in the common mentality and are difficult to eradicate» And it is possible to add the statement that «The object of the historiographical investigation, therefore», according to Giuseppe Zago, «no longer consists simply of the school as it really was, but also of the complex process of defining the idealised image of that school that has been elaborated over time on an individual and collective level, initially on the basis of real school experience and subsequently on that of other social and cultural agents – which I will mention later – which have contributed in part to redetermining it¹²».

Juri Meda¹³ has highlighted the existence of three schools: the «legal» one, codified by legislative norms and pedagogical theories, the «real» one, shaped by the actual educational practices carried out in the classroom and by the material conditions inside the school, and the «ideal» one, constructed by the common mentality, imagined and represented by the cultural industry and subject to the distortions of personal memories and collective memory. The story of the Fascist school is, in practice, the story of a legal and real institution, rather than an ideal one. Studying the methods of symbolic and, indeed, ideal representation of school, schooling and teachers over time through the memories of the protagonists can reveal the overall cultural dimension of this historical phenomenon: the school seen «from the outside» as well as «from the inside».

However, the study of collective memory involves numerous analytical risks and difficulties. It must therefore necessarily be studied as a complex process, since it consists of a social reconstruction of the past, which arises from the fusion of moments experienced by a multitude of actors and the memory in the present that they have of those events and in which a combination of factors – often political – shape, modify and reconfigure it¹⁴.

When dealing with memory, it is therefore essential to move with precision and awareness within the dimension of recollection and the mental processes that are involved in the selection of information to be conserved, changed or deleted. Indeed,

¹¹ C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School memories: new trends in the history of education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 6.

¹² L. Agostinetto, S. Polenghi, G. Zago (edd.), *Memorie ed educazione: identità narrazione diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, p. 31.

¹³ Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, cit.

¹⁴ Agostinetto, *et alii*, *Memorie ed educazione: identità narrazione diversità*, cit.

it is these «interferences» that, produced by factors internal and external to the subject, allow images and interpretations of past experiences to become fixed in the interviewee's memory. These are inputs of various kinds which are absorbed over time by the subject and which, added to the well-known natural and automatic process of forgetting, modify the memory and therefore the interpretation of the event in the present¹⁵.

In short, what the eyewitnesses remember and speak about is not what exactly happened and should not, therefore, be accepted as the indisputable representation of an event. The reworking of memories over time, their reinterpretation and therefore their change is an automatic, natural and unconscious process. In fact, even if the interviewee witnessed an event firsthand, the details will begin to fade over time. But, above all, the recall and reworking of that moment will undergo transformations together with the changes in the person themselves or in the surrounding context or in various factors that contribute to shaping a different image in the mind, including the circulation of a collective historical memory, which will always have political connotations¹⁶.

Finally, it should be noted that this specific school memory does not refer to the «memory transmitted by the school», but to the «memory relating to the school», i.e. the memory that individuals, communities and society have built based on the realm of school and on the educational process in a given period¹⁷. It is no coincidence that more and more historians of education are interested in a conception of memory as the practice of individual or collective recollection of a common scholastic past, based on the analysis of the self-representation that pupils and teachers have made of it in their individual experiences, on the representation of the school and the teaching offered by the cultural industry, conveyed through literary and popular fiction¹⁸, through theatre and cinema¹⁹, as well as, more generally, through the images²⁰ conveyed also obviously by the means of information and communication²¹, together with that developed from the official commemorations promoted by public institutions²² with respect to a specific policy of memory and public use of the past²³.

¹⁵ C. Papagno, *Come funziona la memoria*, Roma, Laterza, 2008.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Cabrera, *et alii*, *School memories: new trends in the history of education*, cit.

¹⁸ A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù: la maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, ETS, 2019.

¹⁹ L. Girotti, J. Meda, E. Patrizi, *La figura dell'insegnante nel cinema italiano e straniero: modelli e stereotipi a confronto*, in M. Corsi (ed.), *La ricerca pedagogica in Italia. Tra innovazione e internazionalizzazione*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2014, pp. 481-489.

²⁰ E. Colleldemont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156.

²¹ D. Crook, *Viewing the past: the treatment of history of education on British television since 1985*, «History of Education», vol. 28, n. 3, 1999, pp. 365-369.

²² P. Cunningham, *Making use of the past: memory, history and education*, «History of Education Society Bulletin», n. 66, 2000, pp. 68-70.

²³ Cabrera, *et alii*, *School memories: new trends in the history of education*, cit.

2. *The interviews and their contributions*

The PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861–2001)”, on the basis of new sources for the history of education and a methodological approach that requires an interdisciplinary point of view, has explored among other things the models of school, teaching, learning and education that emerge from the memories, ultimately aiming to outline the evolution of the collective perception of the role and purpose of education.

Within the project, the research unit of the University of Florence has edited the Video–testimonies database²⁴ (within the *Memoria scolastica* website²⁵), which stores a digital repertoire of video testimonies from teachers, pupils, educators, educational directors and school inspectors, as well as other school and educational operators who were some of the main subjects of the scholastic sphere from the end of the Fascist period to the present day. The interviews were collected mostly by students on the History of Education courses. Some of those used for this study – which, I point out, is only in its initial phase – are not present in the *Memoria scolastica* portal, but their creation followed the same construction procedures as the source.

The quality of the contributions varies greatly from interview to interview, but it must be pointed out that in various cases they are well-constructed sources, which manage to delve deeply into the topics covered. As far as the subject of this contribution is concerned, i.e. the Fascist school in its final years, it is currently possible to consult the testimonies of former pupils who attended primary schools at least until the fall of fascism in the *Memoria scolastica* portal. It is evident that such a number of sources does not allow us to fully develop any theme that revolves around school during the regime. However, what is emerging suggests that, in perspective, the potential of these oral sources may make an important contribution to historical-educational research around the years of the Fascist regime. It would therefore be worthwhile to collect new interviews, intercepting other eyewitnesses born in the 1930s, and to refine the tools. By expanding the number of eyewitnesses and entering to a greater degree into the specifics of everyday school life, we will be able to gather new ideas, which will supplement what the school historiography has already widely recounted. Above all, we hope to contribute to the debate on the Fascist influence on schools and on the indoctrination of the young generation, since the oral sources offer the possibility of seeing the classrooms of Fascist Italy from within, colouring their details and shining light on areas that have remained dimly lit.

«Historiography has wondered a lot about the effectiveness of [fascist] propaganda mechanisms and the construction of consensus on the two sides of teachers and pupils. Detailed work still remains to be done²⁶». In the course of the studies we are conducting, the use of memories of former pupils offers food for thought and further study, especially

²⁴ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze> (last access: 02.09.2023).

²⁵ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/> (last access: 02.09.2023).

²⁶ F. Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, in F. De Giorgi, F. Pruneri, A. Gaudio (edd.), *Manuale di storia della scuola italiana: dal risorgimento al XXI Secolo*, Brescia, Scholé, 2019, p. 143.

in terms of the issues of fascistisation and indoctrination in primary school during the final phase of the Fascist dictatorship. With the video testimonies available, it is possible to isolate some recurring themes in the direction of that «detailed work».

3. *Fascist influence on schools, indoctrination and the ONB in the memories of the eyewitnesses*

In the midst of the «policy of adjustments» to the Gentile reform and later in the 1930s, the succession of Ministers of Education, as is well known, were particularly concerned with elementary school, developing the «cooperation» between the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) and schools, introducing strong and omnipresent propaganda and revising the curricula²⁷, but above all both the militarisation of schools and the Fascist indoctrination were accentuated²⁸.

In the academic year 1930-31, the state book was introduced for the first and second elementary classes and differentiated texts for the following three²⁹. These texts were written with the aim of «promoting a purely Fascist education and culture among children; to offer a stimulus to develop the heroic side of children; to form the religious spirit; to keep them away from all false sentimentality and all exaggerated pietism³⁰». «We had only one book in which there was only mathematics and Italian (24:52)³¹» (Tonina Lari).

In the following years, the process of politicising the topics continued – topics that themselves were linked to the religious content defined as fundamental to school life. «It was all mixed up with the Bible (33:31)³²» (Fabiola Di Maggio). This culminated in the almost sacred representation of Mussolini and his political decisions³³. The pupils then began to participate – led by their teachers – in the celebrations of the nation by

²⁷ S. Santamaita, R. Laporta: *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, Milano, Pearson, 2021; M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017; Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, cit.

²⁸ C. Spiti, «*Santi italiani*» e culto della patria nella scuola elementare fascista, Doctoral Thesis, Università degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata, (Supervisor: Tommaso Calì), 2015-2016; Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, cit.; Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, cit.; Santamaita, Laporta, *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, cit.

²⁹ *Ibid*; M.C. Morandini, *Vita scolastica e pratiche pedagogiche nell'Europa moderna*, Milano, Mondadori, 2021; A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo l'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, Milano, V&P, 2005; A. Barausse, *Il libro per la scuola dall'unità al fascismo la normativa sui libri di testo dalla Legge Casati alla Riforma Gentile (1861-1922)*, Macerata, Alfabetica, 2008.

³⁰ J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999.

³¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=genN3DOMWKE> (last access: 02.09.2023).

³² See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAk_4NRjJU (last access: 02.09.2023).

³³ C. Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1984; M. Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, Bari, Laterza, 1983; C. Spiti, «*Santi italiani*» e culto della patria nella scuola elementare fascista, Doctoral Thesis, Università degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata, (Supervisor: Tommaso Calì), 2015-2016; Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

joining the ranks of the ONB. These mass demonstrations and the remaking of the elementary curricula were aimed at shaping and perfecting the «new Italian», strong in Fascist morality and knowledge³⁴.

Almost thirty years ago, Charnitzky³⁵ observed that «while it is true that the analysis of textbooks and curricula is capable of illustrating both the intentions of the regime and the manner and extent of the ideologisation of educational content, it cannot, however, say anything about their reception». He adds, and this is of particular interest for the subject of this contribution, that «given the complex and heterogeneous reality of the Italian school, the testimonies should be supplemented by “micro-stories”». Here, then, is where oral sources assume decisive importance in trying to answer this basic question.

In this regard, Marcello Coli in his video testimony says that «the teachers propagated the regime (29:58)³⁶» and that, according to Gabriella Corsi «teaching was influenced by the Fascist regime, there was a lot of rhetoric in the books (17:13)³⁷», and even the same rhetoric «after the war too». Finally, Fabiola Di Maggio recalls that «the teacher was very strict. [...] fascism was dominant: there was discipline, discipline, and more discipline». For the eyewitness, the memories of her elementary school years «are not memories filled with joy. [...] discipline was an obsessive thing (1:47)³⁸».

But there are also eyewitnesses who go against the trend of the memories presented above or who seem to have erased the boulder of fascism and the school of the regime from their memory³⁹. In reality, this occurs in many cases when dealing with memory linked to traumatic or highly politicised events⁴⁰.

With specific regard to the Opera Nazionale Balilla, from 1924 onwards, the socialisation of boys began to assume a decisive importance. fascism tried to attract young people, who not only represented useful supporters of the future, but also important vehicles in the present to get through to families, especially those who were adverse to the regime⁴¹. In this regard, the ONB was founded in 1926 «for the assistance and for the physical and moral education of youth⁴²», defined by Antonio Santoni Rugiu⁴³ as «the most congenial pedagogical policy intervention to the new regime» and by Carmen

³⁴ Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.; Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, cit.

³⁵ Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

³⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6n-OLrZScE> (last access: 02.09.2023).

³⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNDYuDkvgZg> (last access: 02.09.2023).

³⁸ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAk_4NRjJJU (last access: 02.09.2023).

³⁹ Marisa Billi, Arturo Amoroso, Eva lafolia, Francesca Pinzauti e Giuliana Vangi.

⁴⁰ G. Gribaudi, *Testimonianze e testimoni nella storia del tempo presente*, Firenze, Editpress, 2020; F. Focardi, *La guerra della memoria: la Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi*, Bari, Laterza, 2020; L.P. D'Alessandro, *Il fascismo l'antifascismo e la società italiana: un problema aperto*, «Studi Storici», vol. 55, n. 1, 2014, pp. 197-211.

⁴¹ Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.

⁴² Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit; Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

⁴³ A. Santoni Rugiu, *Storia Sociale Dell'educazione*, Milano, Principato, 1987.

Betti⁴⁴ as «the true school of Fascism». Jurgen Charnitzky⁴⁵ points out through the words of the Fascists themselves that in the mid-1920s they saw it as the flagship of the regime and the most grandiose attempt at state education of youth in history.

The ONB's plans were very fluid and included physical, moral and pre-military education, cultural education and technical-professional education, as well as religious assistance. This particular interference in scholastic activities allowed the Fascist Party to exercise strict surveillance over the scholastic world, also concentrating its propaganda and indoctrination in extracurricular activities⁴⁶ which, it should be remembered, were «prescribed». The new organisation attempted to combine politics with school life in an ever closer relationship, since, with the Gentile reform, this combination had been erased practically in every aspect⁴⁷.

But, despite the extensive promotion of the new organisation and the numerous recreational activities, when the war became total and the fate towards which Italy was heading appeared clearly on the horizon in the early 1940s, the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio, like all organisations created by fascism, melted like snow in the sun and soon even the memory of the great parades and exercises disappeared⁴⁸.

The memories collected in the Memoria scolastica portal seem to confirm this scarce moral participation. Marcella Dei, for example, while drawing on her memories with extreme lucidity, only remembers that «on Saturday afternoons, we had to go to the assembly [...]. During breaks there was also a moment of preparation for the assembly overseen by the teacher: that is, lining up two by two and marching (42:04)⁴⁹». The eyewitness, in the course of her story, links this memory to the intrusive propaganda placed by the regime inside the schools. Marcello Coli states that he recalls in detail the demonstrations in which he participated in Balilla «almost as a sympathiser [...] seeing myself dressed as Balilla thrilled me (31:26)⁵⁰» and that «on Saturdays we didn't go to school, we all gathered in the square, dressed strictly in Fascist uniform, and paraded as if we were an army (30:10)», but despite this, he does not elaborate on the story. Other eyewitnesses speak of physical activity in school as «simple movements next to the desk (22:38)⁵¹». In other cases even stating that «we didn't do physical education». This happened in the countryside and in areas where school buildings were arranged and used only up to the second grade.

⁴⁴ Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.

⁴⁵ Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

⁴⁶ G. Zanibelli, *Scuola e sport in Italia durante il ventennio fascista. Un profilo storico-istituzionale*, «Intus - Legere: Historia», vol. 11, n. 1, 2017, pp. 75-97; Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.

⁴⁷ Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.; Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, cit.; Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, cit.; Santamaita, Laporta, *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, cit.

⁴⁸ Zanibelli, *Scuola e sport in Italia durante il ventennio fascista. Un profilo storico-istituzionale*, cit.

⁴⁹ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/questo-e-stato-il-mio-primoincontro-con-la-scuola-memorie> (last access: 02.09.2023).

⁵⁰ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6n-OLrZScE> (last access: 02.09.2023).

⁵¹ Marisa Billi, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/lavorare-dopo-il-matrimonio-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 02.09.2023).

From these interviews, food for thought and questions arise on the effective spread of the ONB and on its subjugating force in the final years of the Fascist period. The fact that the interviewees make only a few mentions of what should have been a «powerful tool» for indoctrinating young people leaves one bewildered to say the least. In a subsequent phase of the research, this aspect will certainly have to be investigated in depth, since it was a much more complex phenomenon, which has remained imprinted in the cultural history of the country.

Conclusions

The potential of school oral memories would also make significant contributions in the further consideration of objects of study that have been less well represented in the historical–educational debate. These include, for example, what Juri Meda calls the «mass media of education»⁵² or the consumption of pupils both inside and outside the classrooms, understood in terms of their complex and polysemic nature⁵³. To give just a hint, in some interviews, the eyewitnesses talk about snack time: «I remember envying the snacks, but not the objects: they were all on the same level» recalls, for example, Gabriella Corsi. Or «Those who had no food were given castor oil and a peppermint candy (40:38)⁵⁴» (Marcella Dei). Furthermore, aspects of the dismal state of the classrooms emerged, as testified by Giuliana Vangi: «We brought a piece of wood from home to keep warm».

To conclude, as Gabrielli and Montino⁵⁵ have already underlined: «Looking [at the history of the Fascist school] from other points of view, gives a different picture. And it is, in addition to a question of approach, a question of sources». The rereading of the political and scholastic dynamics of the twenty–year period of Fascist rule – in particular of the Thirties – initiated at the end of the last century has allowed us to focus on new fields of investigation. The results that have gradually emerged from the contributions in the research on the social roots of the regime have highlighted the dimensions, complexity and modernity of the mechanisms of persuasion, but also of repression, in which scholastic historiography is collaborating enormously⁵⁶.

⁵² J. Meda, *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017.

⁵³ S. Oliviero, *Educazione e consumo nell'Italia repubblicana*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2018.

⁵⁴ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/questo-e-stato-il-mio-primo-incontro-con-la-scuola-memorie> (last access: 02.09.2023).

⁵⁵ Gabrielli, Montino, *La scuola fascista: istituzioni parole d'ordine e luoghi dell'immaginario*, cit.

⁵⁶ L.P. D'Alessandro, *Il fascismo l'antifascismo e la società italiana: un problema aperto*, «Studi Storici», vol. 55, n. 1, 2014, pp. 197-211; A. De Bernardi, *Una dittatura moderna: il fascismo come problema storico*, Milano, ESBMO, 2006.

Learning Memory. The Impact of the Racial Laws on Three Roman High Schools: between Oblivion and Remembrance

Tommaso Petrucciani
University of Macerata (Italy)

1. *The Italian* *Giorno della Memoria: the school remembers the school*

The establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day or *Giorno della Memoria* in Italy (Law 211 of 20 July 2000) was motivated by the «widespread absence of historical memory among citizens, especially young people»¹, and the school was identified as a strategic place for its celebration. Memory became a school subject and the Italian school *a remembering school*. The school was also given a privileged role in official ceremonies that represented the transmission of remembrance from the Republic – embodied by its over-50-year-old president – to young citizens. In fact, President Ciampi invited the latter to «keep alive [...], in your memory, our memories»². Moreover, with the commemoration of the racial laws, the school – where they were applied first – became a subject of remembrance in itself: *a remembered school*. In this sense, *the school remembers the school*, delineating itself as the object and subject of a politics of remembrance that was promoted from above but animated from below.

The memory of educational institutions is, however, a multifaceted phenomenon. School is a crucial stage of life in which one's identity is defined in an environment shared with peers of the same generation. It is a physical place that one ends up feeling as one's own, but also an institution, entrusted with the task of transmitting a cultural heritage to new generations. The school is thus a framework in which different identities (i.e. personal, generational, national) contaminate each other.

The elaboration of a school memory of the racial laws affects the dialectic between the three main dimensions of school memory itself³: the *individual memory* of the people who were expelled, nowadays called upon to testify; the *collective memory* that took root in the public imagination of the post-war period; and the *public memory* that was pro-

¹ Motion 1/00092, 10 February 1997, dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic1_00092_13 (last access: 29.03.2023).

² Speech by President Ciampi, 27 January 2002, presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/182942 (last access: 29.03.2023).

³ J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

moted by law in the new millennium. It is worth studying this dialectic through the case of three Roman classical high schools (“Visconti”, “Tasso” and “Giulio Cesare”), starting with a number of publications about these institutions⁴. These texts originated in an institutional environment: published with the patronage of the headmaster and mostly commissioned by alumni associations, they were written by teachers or former students of the relative high school. The books thus have an official status and are direct sources of the “bottom-up” production of a school memory. The three high schools have an old elitist vocation and a strong identity that is reflected in the prestigious buildings where they are located, long family traditions and alumni associations. Consequently, they have always had a large Jewish presence: if studying is a fundamental element of Judaism, the classical high school – which allows access to university and the professions – was considered a privileged channel of redemption ever since the liberal age. The racial laws, then, left a deep wound whose memory is now an integral part of the schools’ identities. Nevertheless, «even the ways in which memory was reactivated has a history»⁵.

2. *The experience and memory of the expelled students*

In the autumn of 1938, almost 600 Jewish students were expelled from secondary schools, gymnasiums and high schools in Rome, which prompted the Jewish Community to set up a school specifically for them, first in a rented small villa in Via Celimontana and then in buildings owned by the Community, which remained open until the German occupation. The largest nucleus of the 400 enrolled students was the classical school⁶, where students from “Visconti”, “Tasso” and “Giulio Cesare” ended up sharing desks.

The expulsion profoundly marked the students’ destiny. The older ones were excluded from university studies or entered the “Clandestine University” or the Pontifical University, without being able to choose an institution according to their inclinations. Many were forced to abandon their studies for economic reasons⁷. Some of the youngest returned to a state school in 1944. Others ended their days in Auschwitz, like the siblings Enrico and Luciana Finzi, who were expelled from “Giulio Cesare”. Either way, once the Nazi

⁴ F. Mazzonis (ed.), *Un liceo per la Capitale. Storia del liceo Tasso (1887-200)*, Roma, Viella, 2001; L. Fulci, *Le centomila e una storia del Giulio Cesare. Cronistoria di un Liceo romano*, Roma, Progetto Cultura, 2018; R. Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata. Le leggi razziali del 1938 e il liceo “E.Q. Visconti”*, Milano, Biblion, 2021. See also S. Haia Antonucci, G. Piperno Beer, *Sapere ed essere nella Roma razzista. Gli ebrei nelle scuole e nell’università*, Roma, Gangemi, 2015.

⁵ W. Barberis, *Storia senza perdono*, Torino, Einaudi, 2019, p. 4.

⁶ B. Migliau, M. Procaccia, *La documentazione della scuola media ebraica di Roma del 1938*, in M.B.C.A., *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei nell’Italia unita 1870-1945*, Roma, Pubblicazione degli Archivi di Stato, 1993; D. Fishman, *Le classi invisibili. Le scuole ebraiche in Italia dopo le leggi razziste (1938-1943)*, Milano, Il Prato, 2019.

⁷ F. Tagliacozzo, *Gli ebrei romani raccontano la “propria” Shoah*, Firenze, Giuntina, 2010, pp. 85-86; Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., p. 137.

occupation was over, «there was not one family who had not suffered some serious loss», and «death was becoming familiar among young people»⁸.

The first extensive, public re-evocation of the events of the Jewish Community's school is a book published in 1969 by Fabio Della Seta, *L'incendio del Tevere*, in which the author plunges back «into an era and events that», he says, «I do not say have been forgotten, but whose memory I feared would resurface». The novel focuses on the formation of a group of friends brought together by exceptional conditions «during three years of war – the exact length of the high school cycle», but which grew stronger through adolescent discoveries. These boys «could never be separated», and so «new friendships were born, an ever more festive and human atmosphere was created as the days went by», which however «remained limited to the very small circle of the parastatal Jewish school». On the outside, «the atmosphere was becoming increasingly tense», but «we were no longer ashamed of being Jewish». Moving the school to the Community buildings strengthened «the kinship with the old Jewish quarter», bringing «the students closer to their earliest origins, from which their fathers had so painstakingly separated themselves». For these boys, the expulsion from school coincided with the search for a personal, conscious answer to the question of what it means to be Jewish. The book, then, tells the story of a condition of isolation that is simultaneously an act of sharing and something that produces identity, conveying a choral atmosphere and turning the events into collective memory⁹. The distance between the events and the book's publication, which long remained the only one on the topic¹⁰, thus raise the question of how this memory was preserved and transmitted.

As Raffaella Di Castro wrote in 2010, «it may seem unbelievable in the current era of remembrance days, but no less than ten years ago [...] many Roman Jews had never told their stories of persecution to anyone»¹¹. This fact also applies to the Jewish school. What emerges from the accounts that Romana Bogliaccino gathered among the few former «Visconti» students who were still alive and their relatives is that, when they grew older, they maintained a profound reticence about the school period even within their families¹². It represented both a carefree and a painful chapter of their lives, capable of forging an intimate bond between those who had lived that experience but which they did not necessarily want to remember. Luciano Coen recalled that, in the Jewish school, there was

⁸ F. Della Seta, *L'incendio del Tevere*, Trapani, Celebes, 1969, pp. 189, 191.

⁹ *Ibid.*, for citations pp. 5, 128, 117, 39, 40, 27. Cf. G.J. Piperno, *Frammenti di vita giovanile ebraica a Roma durante il periodo delle leggi razziali e dopo la liberazione della città*, in D. Carpi, A. Milano, U. Nahon (edd.), *Scritti in memoria di Enzo sereni*, Milano-Gerusalem, Fondazione Sally Mayer-Scuola Superiore di Studi Ebraici, 1970; L. Coen, *La scuola di via Celimontana nei ricordi di un suo allievo*, in L. Di Ruscio, R. Gravina, B. Migliau, S. Terracina (edd.), *Identità, diversità, memoria*, S.I., S.n., 2009; E. Castelnuovo, *L'Università clandestina a Roma: anni 1941-'42 e 1942-'43*; G. Fiorentino, *I ricordi di un ex-studente della «università clandestina»*, «Bollettino dell'Unione Matematica Italiana», vol. IV-A, n. 1, 2001.

¹⁰ An important exception is G. Piperno, *Frammenti di vita giovanile*, cit.

¹¹ R. Di Castro, *Presentazione. Le fonti e l'esperienza del «Fondo Svizzero»*, in Tagliacozzo, *Gli ebrei romani raccontano la «propria» Shoah*, cit., p. 10.

¹² Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit.

an «atmosphere that we jealously remember and that resurfaces every time we meet»¹³. The protagonists' memories thus remained limited to their intimacy and personal relationships. Gino Fiorentino, who seems to have been very reticent about his experience of those years¹⁴, made the following statement: «With fellow students, when we meet, it is as if we had met yesterday, even if we have not seen each other for 30 years»¹⁵.

The defensive oblivion of the Via Celimontana students obstructed the intergenerational transmission of the memory of this experience, which only slowly resurfaced in public. Bice Migliau denounced an «almost total absence of studies and publications on the subject» even in 1988, and together with the Centre of Jewish Culture in Rome, she organised the first gathering of the “1938 kids”, precisely to «collect testimonies [...] on the experience of families and young people faced with [...] marginalisation from public school»¹⁶. However, in the absence of a public memory, archival research in the Community's records and school registers was necessary to find the 400 participants. It was the first stage of a long work of rediscovery that gave the Jewish school a place in official memory at the beginning of the new millennium.

A key moment in this convergence was the unveiling in 2008 of a plaque in memory of the Jewish school in Via Celimontana, in the presence of President Napolitano, Mayor Alemanno, surviving students and Emma Castelnuovo, the only teacher of the school to still be alive¹⁷. A single ritual thus brought together several elements: the Quirinale, in its role as guardian and master of commemorative ceremonies of the Republic; the protagonists' personal memories, made public in the official liturgy of the State; the publication of Coen's lecture – printed for this occasion – at one of the meetings of the “1938 kids”, thus making it public, reproducible, citable and hence lasting. The plaque, finally, signalled that it was there that discrimination had taken place, redefining the position of the small villa in the urban fabric, so much so that the University of Notre Dame – which is now based there – claims «a special connection to the historical heritage of the Jewish presence in Rome since [its] acquisition»¹⁸. The following year, for the celebration of International Women's Day in the Quirinale, President Napolitano appointed Castelnuovo Grand Officer, presenting her as an example that «reminds us of the Resistance to Fascism that, in addition to depriving women of fundamental and elementary rights, forced those who were Jewish, through the infamous racial laws, to abandon public schools along with their colleagues and students, bravely taking refuge in the experiment of an exclusively Jewish private school»¹⁹. Thanks to the 2008 ceremony, then, the separate memory of the “1938 kids” became an official memory of the city and the Republic.

¹³ Coen, *La scuola di via Celimontana*, cit., p. 23.

¹⁴ Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., p. 284.

¹⁵ Antonucci, Piperno Beer, *Sapere ed essere nella Roma razzista*, cit., p. 87.

¹⁶ Migliau, Procaccia, *La documentazione della scuola media ebraica*, cit., p. 453.

¹⁷ P. Brogi, *Alemanno: mai più discriminazioni*, «Corriere della Sera», 25 November 2008.

¹⁸ See rome.nd.edu/news-stories/news/the-rome-gateway-commemorates-the-international-holocaust-remembrance-day/ (last access: 29.03.2023).

¹⁹ *Napolitano: “stupro infame”*, «La Stampa», 7 March 2009.

3. *The ostentatious and tangible memory of schools*

But what happened in the schools that expelled the Jewish students?

The establishment of “Visconti” – the capital’s first high school – coincided with the opening of the nearby ghetto. Here the racial laws led to the expulsion of a teacher, Maria Piazza, and 58 students, who nearly all enrolled in the Jewish school. Their traces were quickly lost; before Bogliaccino’s recent study, neither «the individual identities [...] nor the [...] total number» of the expelled were known. It was only in 2019 that, in the presence of the few surviving protagonists and their relatives, a plaque with their names was unveiled in the high school courtyard, in a ceremony that – according to the headmistress Rech – «wanted to celebrate the vitality of their memory in the school that was thus returned to them and that once again welcomed them»²⁰.

Founded in 1887, in the 1930s, “Tasso” was chosen by Mussolini for his sons’ education, whereas 42 Jewish students were expelled from it. In 2001, a book conceived by the headmaster and the “Amici del Tasso” association was published, titled *Un liceo per la Capitale. Storia del liceo Tasso*. Featuring essays and personal accounts by former students and teachers, it was presented at the Campidoglio by Mayor Walter Veltroni and the Minister Maurizio Gasparri, in the presence of «numerous other former pupils who have become prominent figures in the cultural, professional and scientific world, in politics and show business»²¹. The historian Filippo Mazzonis – a former student and editor of the book – said that he had had to deal with «the century-old history of an “institution”» as it had been «passed down orally, from one generation to the next», and this feeling was confirmed by the volume. However, if «the Fascist *ventennio* [...] is of considerable importance in the history of the Institute»²², the almost complete absence of references to the racial laws’ impact on the school community is surprising, especially if we compare it to the ample space devoted to antifascism, hence another aspect of those same years²³. This absence is even more evident if we consider the fact that the pillars of “Tasso” in the post-war era – repeatedly mentioned in the text – contained some of the main teachers of the Jewish school in Via Celimontana, (which is, instead, never mentioned): Lidia Horn, Enzo Monferini and Emma Castelnuovo. Furthermore, none of the expelled students are among the witnesses. Two years before the book came out, “Tasso” had organised a study day titled *Scuola e leggi razziste*, promoted also by the “Amici del Tasso” association. During the meeting, Micaela Procaccia listed «the names that many former students of the Tasso are familiar with: Emma Castelnuovo, Enzo Monferini, Lidia Horn». Another speaker, Giacomo Seban, told the students that «your high school has a certain relationship with the facts» and again mentioned Castelnuovo. The proceedings of the study day were «belatedly but very conveniently published» in 2003 (hence after the publication of

²⁰ Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., pp. 128, 12.

²¹ *Nota informativa per la stampa*, www.amicideltasso.it/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2001-11-19-Presentazione-di-Un-Liceo-per-la-Capitale.pdf (last access: 29.03.2023).

²² F. Mazzonis, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Un liceo per la Capitale*, cit., p. 23.

²³ The only direct testimony is that of Prof. Maria Adelaide Garaguso, who had married a Jewish doctor and experienced anti-Jewish legislation first-hand, but without any consequences for her own work.

the above-mentioned book and when Giorno della Memoria was in full swing), to show the students that the racial laws «took place among the same desks and in the same classrooms that we have all [...] known»²⁴. Until then, knowledge of the racial laws' impact on "Tasso" had not produced any awareness of the facts. Furthermore, it was not until 2007 that the students requested a plaque in memory of the expelled students²⁵, while their names – of which no trace had been preserved – have only recently been identified «through the meticulous work» of a teacher²⁶.

The Fascist building that hosts "Giulio Cesare" was inaugurated by Mussolini and Bottai in 1936. The Aula Magna now bears a plaque dedicated «to the memory of the students and workers expelled from the school by the racial laws of 1938». It was unveiled in 2008, in the presence of the Mayor Veltroni, the President of the Jewish Community of Rome – and former student of the school – Leone Paserman, the president of the Alumni Association Tullio De Mauro, and some former, expelled students²⁷. As one teacher explained, «it was very difficult to draw up a complete list of the names of the former students», which was only made possible by consulting the archives of the Jewish school²⁸. A second plaque, located in the courtyard, is dedicated to the aforementioned Finzi brothers, whose name is also linked to an award instituted in 2012 by the Alumni Association to turn them into «the emblem of the persecution of all Italian Jewish students»²⁹. The effects of the racial laws have furthermore been addressed in a documentary made by the former student Antonello Sarno, titled *Giulio Cesare - Compagni di scuola* (2014), and in a recent book on the school's history by Ludovico Fulci, a former student and teacher of the high school as well as a member of the Alumni Association³⁰, commissioned by the Former Students' Association and sponsored by the headmistress. Finally, in 2016, a solemn ceremony was held in the school's courtyard to plant an olive tree from Israel – in memory of the Finzi brothers – and place another plaque, with the following inscription: «The school educates to memory. May the olive tree be a warning to future generations. Lest we forget the Jewish teachers and students who were expelled under the racial laws»³¹.

²⁴ M. Procaccia, *A scuola nel '38: identità celate, identità ritrovate*, in M. Benvenuti (ed.), *Scuola e leggi razziste. Pomeriggio di studi tenutosi il 23 marzo 1999 presso l'Aula Magna del Liceo ginnasio statale "T. Tasso" di Roma*, Roma, Associazione "Amici del Tasso", 2003, p. 32; G. Saban, *Le leggi razziali nell'esperienza di un ebreo italiano all'estero*, p. 27; M. Benvenuti, *Prefazione*, pp. 13-14, in Benvenuti (ed.), *Scuola e leggi razziste*, cit.

²⁵ Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, *Linee guida nazionali "Per una didattica della Shoah a scuola"*, 2018, p. 31.

²⁶ W. Veltroni, *Walter Veltroni 50 anni dopo tra i ragazzi (inascoltati) del Tasso*, «Corriere della Sera», 2 February 2019.

²⁷ E. Sassi, *Il sindaco ricorda gli studenti ebrei cacciati nel '38*, «Corriere della Sera», 31 January 2008.

²⁸ L. Mari, «Quando il preside disse: voi ebrei via dalla classe», «la Repubblica», 30 January 2008.

²⁹ See www.assogiulioesare.it/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=211 (last access: 29.03.2023).

³⁰ Fulci, *Le centomila e una storia del Giulio Cesare*, cit.

³¹ See www.miur.gov.it/-/giornata-della-memoria-domani-il-ministro-giannini-al-liceo-giulio-cesare-di-roma-per-la-cerimonia-di-piantumazione-di-un-ulivo-in-memoria-delle-vitti; www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/shoah_piantato_ulivo_cortile_liceo_giulio_cesare-1495655.html (last access: 29.03.2023).

4. *A long school amnesia: the silence of walls and people*

This conspicuous memory was preceded by decades of amnesia. In the accounts collected by Bogliaccino, the indifference of the schoolmates who remained in the “Aryanised” classes emerges very clearly. Their reactions were very different, and one of them was even awarded the title of Righteous among the Nations. However, this account by Gino Fiorentino is emblematic:

The reaction to our expulsion of the non-Jewish schoolmates was one of absolute indifference. I never saw or heard from them again. In 1956, my classmates organised a dinner, which I went to. It seemed like nothing had happened, [and] I was greeted as if we had gone through our studies together, amicably, but with such indifference.... I could not help thinking that it was the same indifference with which they had reacted to our expulsion in 1938. [...] The professors had also disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again³².

That school cycle ended for everyone, be they expelled or not, but even subsequent generations continued to breathe a climate of amnesia. Enrico Girmenia, a former “Giulio Cesare” student, recently published his youth diary. Talking about his first day of high school in 1970, he mentions the expulsion of the Jewish students and the Finzi brothers. «No one talked», he recalls, «about any of these things when I was at Giulio Cesare. [...] All my teachers in high school had participated in the war» and described a few episodes, but «our teachers never discussed the subject of the racial laws»³³. Yet, only the previous year, the aforementioned novel by Della Seta – another former student at this school – had come out.

The walls of the school buildings also remained silent. In the aftermath of the First World War, they were covered with plaques dedicated to fallen students and teachers. In her contribution to the aforementioned book about the “Tasso”’s history, Alessandra Staderini called for the restoration of one of these plaques, which had been defaced by offensive inscriptions. If it shows an intention to preserve the memory of such a disruptive event, the will to remember, with a plaque, another dramatic event such as the expulsion of other students from the same school was yet to come³⁴.

In the case of “Visconti”, the former students who died in the war were almost as many as those expelled in 1938, and a plaque was dedicated to them, too. In the following years, two more plaques were placed in the atrium: one with Armando Diaz’s *Bollettino della Vittoria*, the other with a quote from Mussolini on the tasks of the Fascist school. Immediately after the liberation of Rome, the headmaster proposed to remove the latter (although it is still there today) and replace it with one dedicated to the regained freedom, as well as to affix two other plaques dedicated to the school’s Resistance martyrs (Raffaele

³² Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., p. 278.

³³ E. Girmenia, *Liceo Giulio Cesare. Una storia degli anni Settanta*, Roma, Il Filo, 2022, ch. *Liceo Giulio Cesare*.

³⁴ A. Staderini, *La costruzione di una identità prestigiosa*, in Mazzonis (ed.), *Un liceo per la Capitale*, cit., pp. 50-52.

Persichetti and Romualdo Chiesa)³⁵. Finally, “Giulio Cesare” was established after the First World War but it was only in the twenty-first century that all three schools decided to inscribe the memory of the expulsion of Jewish students and teachers on marble.

While the initiatives described above demonstrate that the high schools were able to react immediately to the need to remember tragedies experienced by the school community, they also confirm that the amputation of this community following the Jewish students’ expulsion was not considered a tragedy worthy of indelible remembrance, so much so that their names have remained unknown for decades. The story of the plaques thus seems to be the marble translation of the behaviour described by Girmenia, corroborated by bureaucratic acts.

Piazza left at least two written traces of the persecution she had suffered in the archival sources of “Righi” (her school during the post-war period): she wrote in the staff register that she had been rehired following the repeal of the racial laws and applied for benefits for those persecuted for racial reasons. Yet, upon her retirement in 1964, the headmaster – in a letter of commendation addressed to the Superintendency, in which he accurately described Piazza’s career so that she would receive a distinction – mentioned neither that she had been a victim of racial persecution nor that she had taught at the Jewish school, even if the latter had been recognised by the Ministry. The various school authorities, then, shared the will to forget this chapter of history, and Piazza’s appointment in 1965 as a *Commendatore* thus took place in a very different setting from that dedicated to Castelnuovo³⁶.

The normalisation of collective school oblivion also concerned the figure of the teacher. A fundamental point of reference for the former students emerges from the testimonies collected in the publications considered in this contribution: Professor Enzo Monferini. Originally from Piemonte, Monferini was an atheist of Jewish background who taught history and philosophy at the Jewish school and subsequently at “Tasso”. All witnesses describe him as a person of extraordinary intelligence and exceptional humanity, capable of guiding students in their cultural discoveries and helping them to identify their human and professional path, hostile to traditional pedantry and keen on developing extracurricular relationships with his students. He plays a primary role in *L’incendio del Tevere*, where Della Seta even defines the novel’s protagonists as «Monferini’s kids», but also – in the guise of Aldo Camerini – in *Tra noi due* by Elisabetta Rasy, a former “Tasso” student³⁷. However, if the way Monferini was described by the “1938 kids” is almost identical to the image conveyed of him by the 1968 generation, the latter did not mention two events that he had, instead, shared with the former: persecution and attendance at the Jewish school. While the difference may be due to Monferini’s reticence³⁸, the two generations met thanks to him. He died in 1969 and, according to his wish, his – strictly

³⁵ Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ E. Rasy, *Tra noi due*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2002. Cf. V. Zincone, *Altro che 3i. Il nostro liceo ci ha insegnato a vivere*, «Sette», n. 42, 2002.

³⁸ Confirmed by Rasy’s portrait and personal communication by Giovanna Bonasegale (2.1.2023).

secular – funeral was held at “Tasso”³⁹. It was «attended, with an incredible crowd, by the generation of ‘38 and that of ‘68», although the former did so as individuals, hence not necessarily recognisable to those who ignored them⁴⁰. The only witness who mentions this detail is Procaccia, who had known Monferini as a student and has studied the Jewish school as an archivist. Although they had shared the same professor and met in 1969, the school memories of these two generations of students remained separated for another three decades.

5. *Oblivion, heroes, victims and the Righteous: teaching and remembering State racism in the Republican Era*

These microprocesses of individual and collective suppression feed into broader processes of public amnesia and vice versa. «Oblivion and [...] even historical error», Renan wrote, «are an essential factor in the creation of a nation» whose «social capital» consists of «a heroic past, great men, glory»⁴¹. Heroism and oblivion were crucial also in the post-war period. «Precisely in the countries tainted by the disgrace of the agreement with the Nazis [...] a new national narrative had taken root, that of the antifascist epic»; in Italy, the emphasis on the Resistance «ended up covering all the spaces of memory»⁴². Already during the war, the myth of the “good Italian” and the Resistance as a “second *Risorgimento*” fought against the “bad German” – who was held responsible for the war and the crimes against the Jews – began to impose itself⁴³.

This approach also influenced historiography and, subsequently, history education. The problem of teaching recent history had already arisen during the Resistance, with the aim of making schools the training ground for a new idea of citizenship⁴⁴. The introduction of recent history in high school programmes reached a milestone in 1953, when Luigi Salvatorelli’s *Venticinque anni di storia (1920-1945)* was published at the instigation of the Ministry. Salvatorelli wrote the following about Fascist racial policy: «In imitation of the Nazis, the Fascist government too adopted anti-Semitic measures, [albeit] more moderate ones than those of the Germans (autumn 1938)». In a paragraph called *L’armi-*

³⁹ G. Bonasegale, *Per Enzo Monferini e per Carla Guglielmi*, in Mazzonis (ed.), *Un liceo per la capitale*, cit., p. 275.

⁴⁰ Migliau, Procaccia, *La documentazione della scuola media ebraica*, cit., p. 462, and Procaccia’s personal communication (28.12.2022).

⁴¹ E. Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation ?*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1882, pp. 7, 26.

⁴² Barberis, *Storia senza perdono*, cit., p. 5; E. Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2003, p. 162. Cf. G. De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un’Italia divisa*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2015.

⁴³ D. Bidussa, *Razzismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Ontologia e fenomenologia del “bravo italiano”*, «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel», vol. 58, n. 3, 1992, pp. 1-36; F. Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione della Seconda guerra mondiale*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2013.

⁴⁴ A. Ascenzi, *Metamorfosi della cittadinanza. Studi e ricerche su insegnamento della storia, educazione civile e identità nazionale in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata, eum, 2009.

stizio italiano. L'Italia divisa in due, he made no mention of the round-ups, massacres and deportations of 1943–45⁴⁵. As some surveys have shown, this remained the dominant approach of history textbooks until the end of the century⁴⁶. Even for historiography itself, things only started to change in the late 1980s⁴⁷.

The unanimous decision to create the *Giorno della Memoria* was part of the development of a new republican pact of remembrance that derived from the disappearance of the ideological and international reference points of Italian political parties of the “constitutional arch” and the search for a new position by the post-fascist Right. The pact depended on the mutual legitimisation of ex-Communists (considered alien to the Atlantic democracies that had won the Cold War) and ex-Fascists (considered alien to the constitutional pact on which the Republic was based), and was part of a broader European framework in which the memory of the Shoah was «elected as the cornerstone of liberal ethics», in a process of defining «a Europe as the champion of human rights»⁴⁸.

In the official commemoration, which the president of the Republic periodically celebrates in the company of schoolchildren, the condemnation of what he unfailingly describes as the «perverse», «shameful» and «infamous» racial laws is constantly flanked by the memory of the «numerous» Italian Righteous, including Fascists, who through their «epic deeds [...] also saved our conscience»⁴⁹. The collective redemption guaranteed by the individual Righteous thus enriched the treasure of satisfactions already provided by the Resistance. President Ciampi recalled that his generation, which «experienced the shame of the racial laws», also «knew how to find in itself the strength to oppose, resist [and] fight for freedom», redeeming the homeland. His successor, Napolitano, was even clearer: «We Italians settled accounts with Nazi-Fascism and our darkest past by fighting the war of Liberation and giving ourselves the Republican Constitution. [...] And on misdeeds such as the racial laws of 1938 and their application, we have made the hard truth known in recent years as never before»⁵⁰. The wound of anti-Jewish State persecution was re-evoked only to be instantly soothed by a reminder of the redemption guaranteed by the Righteous and the Resistance⁵¹. Remembrance refers almost exclusively to victims and heroes, and thus to the morally positive aspect of national history – that which gives shape to an edifying memory.

⁴⁵ L. Salvatorelli, *Venticinque anni di storia (1920-1945)*, Firenze, Scuola e Vita, 1953, pp. 50, 68-70.

⁴⁶ G. Belardinelli, *Il fascismo nei manuali di storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, in G. Bosco, C. Mantovani (edd.), *La storia contemporanea tra scuola e università*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2004, pp. 61-81; G.B. Novello Paglianti, L. Wofsi Rocca, *Lezioni di storia: le leggi antiebraiche nei manuali degli anni Ottanta*, «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel», n. 1-2, 1988, pp. 495-500.

⁴⁷ V. Galimi, *La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia (1938-1943). Note sulla storiografia recente*, «Contemporanea», n. 3, 2002, pp. 587-596.

⁴⁸ V. Pisanty, *I Guardiani della memoria e il ritorno delle destre xenofobe*, Milano, Bompiani, 2020, pp. 9 and 32.

⁴⁹ Speech by President Napolitano, 24 January 2008, presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54346 (last access: 29.03.2023).

⁵⁰ Speech by President Ciampi, 26 January 2006, presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/183384; speech by President Napolitano, 27 January 2012, presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54898 (last access: 29.03.2023).

⁵¹ See the remarks of B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, London-New York, Verso, 1991, on the above-mentioned passage by Renan.

6. *Learning by heart: the invention of a public school memory of the racial laws*

To conclude, at the beginning of the new millennium, the school was defined as the crucial ground for a policy of remembering racial persecution that was activated from above and animated from below. In reality, though, the school has overlooked this important chapter in its history, transmitting and consolidating oblivion for decades, to the point that it became common sense: *the school has forgotten the school*. Studying the events of three prestigious high schools allows us to see how, for half a century, different levels of school oblivion (i.e. individual, collective and public) intertwined and reinforced each other. The painful silence of the Jews who were expelled from the schools was counterbalanced by the general reticence of former classmates and schools that – albeit proud of their prestigious tradition and role in the collective imagination – let the names of the expelled quickly fall into oblivion. The few school memoirs of the Via Celimontana students that were published remained isolated. The temporal distance from the events subsequently normalised the amnesia, consolidating collective oblivion as part of the image that successive generations had of their school. Finally, the institutions helped to remove the racial laws' impact on schools from both history education and public memory.

Giorno della Memoria is, then, not the transfer of a living memory from a generation full of memories to one that tends to forget, but the construction of something that was deliberately and tacitly forgotten. It evokes a memory that has never been a common heritage, to be rebuilt *from scratch* by an educational policy aimed at creating a new collective *ethos* after the end of the “age of extremes”. Welcoming the first celebration of the new anniversary, Enrico Deaglio effectively described the norm that had instituted it, calling it «a fine law: a bit like going back to school, when the teacher told you to “learn something by heart”»⁵².

⁵² e.d., *Questo numero*, «Diario della Memoria», 27 January 2001.

Rebuilding and Enhance Memory. The Activity of the Lower School “G. Perotti” of Turin

Rocco Labriola
Lucanian Deputation of Homeland
History (Italy)

The study of the individual local schools is the subject of growing interest by general and gender historiography because it allows an increasingly thorough process of valorization of the specific experiences so as to rise «a key to understanding the most general cultural and social processes»¹. The historical-educational heritage of schools, that is the enormous amount of tangible and intangible assets produced by each school, represents a rich source for original research that allows not only the reconstruction of the profits of hundreds of students over a given space and time frames², but provides information on the working conditions of their families and their origin, on the educational aspects, on the strategies used over time by schools to address topics such as child labour, migration flows (from Southern Italy first, from foreign countries today), disability, «all issues that, moreover, intersect with the wider problems of general history»³. In essence, the study of the educational realities of cities and municipalities is «an approach “from below”» that using the most varied school material allows «to return the piece of a story, which accompanies and reflects the most general transformations of society»⁴.

In the wake of these convictions, the “G. Perotti” Middle School in Turin, from the 2020-21 school year that became the “Perotti-Toscanini” Comprehensive Institute, has started a rich and challenging program aimed at rebuilding and safeguarding his memory. A path that has the abbreviation in its history now almost centenary, outlined below in its essential features.

¹ G. Bonetta, *Note sul ruolo della scuola nei processi di formazione al Sud (1860-1970)*, in G. Bonetta, S. Santamaita (edd.), *Scuola ed emancipazione civile nel Mezzogiorno*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1992, p. 78.

² J. Meda, *La conservazione del patrimonio storico educativo. Il caso italiano*, in A.M. Badanelli, J. Meda (edd.), *La historia de la cultura escolar en Italia y en Espana, balance y perspectivas. Actas del I Workshop Italo-Espanol de Historia de la cultura escolar (Berlanga de Duero, 14-16 de Noviembre)*, Macerata, eum, 2013.

³ D. Nardelli, *Introduzione*, in D.R. Nardelli, M.C. Giuntella (edd.), *La ricerca storica e l'uso delle fonti*, Foligno, Editoriale Umbra, 1988, p. VII.

⁴ E. De Fort, *Prefazione*, in R. Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino. Dai saperi pratici all'istruzione triennale unica*, Potenza, EditricErmes, 2017.

Law No. 8 of 7 January 1929 established the Secondary School of Beginnings to Work, called, from 1932, Secondary School of Vocational Introduction⁵. It was created to «provide compulsory post-primary education up to the age of 14 [...] and to provide a first secondary education for the preparation of various trades, the practical exercise of agriculture, and to the clerical functions of exclusive order in industry and commerce»⁶.

It was with this measure that after a few years was established the Royal School of Initiation to Industrial Work, then Secondary School of Vocational Female “Santorre di Santarosa”, located in via Montenegro 70. In the school year 1932-33, the first of operation, the Vocational “Santorre” counted a total of 103 students, 75 of whom were promoted⁷; almost a decade later, in the school year 1940-41 the number of enrolled was more than doubled, for a total of 284 registrations⁸.

The years of the Second World War proved particularly hard for Turin, which suffered violent and continuous attacks by Anglo-American forces. The building of the “Santorre”, bombed on 18 November 1942, was evacuated in the autumn of the following year and the school moved temporarily in some makeshift premises in Via Palmieri, until in the autumn of 1944 it was located in Corso Peschiera 230, in the premises of the “Local fascist group Amos Maramotti”⁹.

After the failed parenthesis of fascism, the advent of the Republic, however, did not determine in the educational field, until the sixties, particular changes in the field of lower and upper secondary schools¹⁰.

At the “Santorre” the major novelty concerned a growth in the student population that gradually increased its numbers for a total of 239 pupils in the school year 1946-47; 310 in 1951-52; 302 in 1955-56; 323 in 1962-63. This phenomenon reflected the more general demographic context of the city. In fact, after the Second World War, Turin, among the main industrial centres of the peninsula, was at the center of a substantial migratory flow, coming mostly from Southern Italy, continued at least until the mid-seventies. In this way the Piedmontese capital went from 753 thousand inhabitants in 1953 to 1 million 114 thousand in 1963¹¹.

The year 1962 represented a fundamental watershed in the history of the Italian school. Until that date, post-elementary studies were divided into different paths, and the choice of one or the other was mainly dictated by their presence or not in the residential

⁵ Regio Decreto n. 491 del 22.04.1932. R. Gentili, *Giuseppe Bottai e la riforma fascista della scuola*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1979, pp. 42-43. On the school policy of the regime, reference is made, inter alia, to the work of J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1996.

⁶ L. Borghi, *Educazione e autorità nell'Italia moderna*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1974, p. 301.

⁷ Historical Archive “IC Perotti-Toscanini” di Torino (abbreviation: ASPTT), «Registro generale 1932-34»; *Ibid.*, «Protocolli 1933-36»; Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti”*, cit., pp. 17-18.

⁸ The subjects studied were as follows: conduct, Italian language, history, geography, French language, hygiene, mathematics, elements of science, ornamental design, professional, choral singing, religion, physical education, home economics, women's work. ASPTT, class records.

⁹ ASPTT, «Rendiconti 1944-45», «Protocolli 1.10.1942 - 4.07.1947», acts n. 252 ff.

¹⁰ See T. Tomasi, *La scuola italiana dalla dittatura alla repubblica*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1976.

¹¹ G. Fofi, *L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1975; F. Levi, *L'immigrazione*, in N. Tranfaglia (edd.), *Storia di Torino. IX. Gli anni della Repubblica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999, pp. 157-179; F. Levi, B. Maida (edd.), *La città e lo sviluppo. Crescita e disordine a Torino, 1945-1970*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2002.

areas where students resided, the attendance costs and social background of the pupil's family of origin. With measure n. 1859 of 31/12/1962, the Single Middle School was established, with a new compulsory course of study of eight years, including a first elementary cycle and a subsequent three-years¹².

With this law, which abolished Vocational Introduction, the "Santorre di Santarosa" became a middle school and the 1963-64 school year, the first of the reform, recorded the presence of 9 first year classes for a total of 225 pupils; in the school year 1966-67, instead, it changed name. We read in the explanatory statement written in extraordinary session by the teachers: «Currently in Turin there are three schools with the same titles» so «by invitation of the Provveditorato agli Studi di Torino and for obvious reasons of opportunity», as «the common name has brought and brings considerable confusion both in correspondence and in the very identification of the three schools, it was considered necessary to change the title». The report states that the sitting was lively but orderly. The majority of professors are inclined to propose names of illustrious Piedmontese personalities¹³. The choice, with as many as 27 preferences out of 49, fell on Giuseppe Perotti, General of the Army, engineer of the Engineer, leading exponent of the Piedmontese CLN, killed by the fascists at the Martinetto shooting range in 1944¹⁴.

In the school year 1967-68, the total number of pupils of the "Perotti" reached 691, which increased to 794 two years later: despite the opening of 4 branches, a part of the students was still forced to double shift due to the lack of classrooms¹⁵.

However, something seemed to move in positive for the immediate future, so much so that the same manager with optimism announced: «the situation will be changed from 1 October 1971, the date on which the new building in Via delle Tofane should be ready»¹⁶, as actually happened. The year 1972-73 probably represented a record for the middle school "Perotti": the total amount of the enrolled students was 1025 divided into 41 classes; while the following school year recorded for the first time the full-time experimentation with flattering results confirmed by both teachers and parents of the pupils involved¹⁷. In the following school years there was a physiological decline in the enrollment of "Perotti", dictated by the birth of new institutions that led to a more equitable distribution of the student population: so in the school year 1985-1986 the total number of pupils was 569, rising to 359 in 1995-96¹⁸.

Starting from the school year 1999-2000 the school of via Tofane has incorporated a new branch: the Middle School "Felice Maritano" located in via Marsigli, 25. The latter was born in 1974 from a splitting of the "Perotti" itself and had taken the initial name of "Scuola media di via Monte Ortigara", from the heading of the road where it was located,

¹² F. Sisinni, *La scuola media dalla legge Casati ad oggi*, Roma, Armando, 1982, pp. 100-101.

¹³ ASPPT, «Report, 15.11.1966», «Registro dei verbali dei consigli di classe, 1950-1970», pp. 23-24.

¹⁴ For its history, see G. Pansa, *Viva l'Italia libera. Storia e documenti del primo Comitato militare del C.L.N. regionale piemontese*, Torino, Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Piemonte, 1995.

¹⁵ Labriola, *La scuola media "G. Perotti" di Torino*, cit., pp. 35 ss.

¹⁶ ASPPT, «Headmaster's report 18.03.1970», «M-2, elenchi alunni».

¹⁷ ASPPT, «Rendiconti from 1968-69 to 1972-73».

¹⁸ ASPPT, «Class records» of the years mentioned.

and had had inherited from “Perotti” 599 students. In 1975 it was named after Felice Maritano¹⁹ and from the school year 1977-78 it moved its headquarters to via Marsigli, 25²⁰.

In more recent times, between 1975 and 2000, the “Perotti” has recorded an average of 576 enrolled pupils per school year, of little advanced to the fifteen years 2000-2015, that was 544. Drawing on profit figures for promotions, their share has grown considerably since the mid-1970s, when only in few circumstances it fell below 90%. On the contrary, it was reached only once during the Fascism (1941-42) and even on no occasion in the following twenty years where, on the contrary, 80% was reached at most and on only four occasions. In the most recent period, finally, the school in question has proved to be far more “severe” than the regional average: 10.71% against 6.4% in 1991-92; 6.7% against 4% in 1996-97²¹.

The reflection on the possibility of reconstructing and enhancing the history of the “Perotti” was born almost randomly, when in 2012 the Headmaster Davide Babboni and the Administrative Director Domenica Polimeni, following an infiltration of water in the premises of the archive, took the decision to arrange and put order between the papers that had accumulated for decades. However, we were not indifferent to the emergence of a very rich documentation dating back to the thirties and which also reported denominations of schools other than the current one, symptom of an intricate, long and fascinating history, but also of difficult inquiry²².

With the leadership of Simone Paiano, PhD in the field of philology and sensitive to the above-mentioned issues, the aforementioned path has resumed. Between April and June 2015, the “Project Archive” began, aimed at the recovery and cataloging of all this material: in a first phase on-site inspections have been made in order to know the consistency and type and this activity has been carried out in both the current locations of the school, the one of via Tofane and the other of the branch in via Marsigli. The next phase concerned the rejection of a part of the files of which only a few sample years have been preserved; finally, the phase of the census, namely to determine the type of materials, their consistency and their extremes chronological. Daniela Marendino, professional archivist, has therefore catalogued the entire documentation, creating a complete and exhaustive information file²³.

¹⁹ Policeman, member of the Special Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Judicial Police set up by General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, Maritano took a decisive part in the investigations that led to the capture of Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini, historical leaders of the Red Brigades. In yet another risky anti-terrorist operation, Maritano died on October 15, 1974. ASPPT, *Felice Maritano. Maresciallo maggiore dei Carabinieri medaglia d'oro al V. M. e medaglia d'oro al V. C. Alla Memoria*, Torino, 1981; F. Paterniti, *Tutti gli uomini del generale. La storia inedita della lotta al terrorismo*, Torino, Melampo, 2016, pp. 60-66.

²⁰ ASPPT, «Maritano», «Rendiconti, 1995-2001».

²¹ Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino*, cit., pp. 39-43; Cgil Scuola Torino Piemonte, *La formazione e la scuola di fronte al cambiamento nella società (Convegno di Studi, Torino, 2-3 dicembre 1987)*, Torino, Formazione 80, 1988, p. 6; Osservatorio Istruzione Piemonte, *Rapporto 2009*, Torino, Ires Piemonte, 2010, p. IX; Osservatorio Istruzione Piemonte, *Il sistema istruzione in Piemonte. Le tendenze degli anni Novanta dalla scuola materna all'Università*, Torino, Ires Piemonte, 1998, pp. 63-64.

²² S. Paiano, *Introduzione*, in Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino*, cit., pp. 9-10.

²³ P. Galliano, *Nella rete dei musei*, in R. Labriola (ed.), *La Scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino tra storia e*

At the same time as this work of reorganization, after having received the enthusiastic approval of the Manager, I began the study of the papers aimed at providing a reconstruction of the events of the “Perotti” that initially took shape in a small article on-line²⁴. However, the amount of documentary resources available and the approaching 60-year anniversary of the school’s naming by General Giuseppe Perotti, represented an occasion too greedy not to try to carry out a more organic and detailed study. In 2016, the volume *La scuola media «G. Perotti» di Torino. Dai saperi pratici all’istruzione triennale unica* took shape, published by the EditricErmes house of Potenza, for the editorial of which I made use of the valuable suggestions of Ester De Fort, professor at the University of Turin, which has, by the way, drawn up the preface. The book was presented on November 15, 2016, exactly 60 years after that college of teachers that had decided to change the name of the school. The rich day of celebration has developed in the morning through some initiatives at the branch “Maritano”. In the afternoon, in the headquarters of the “Perotti”, moderated by Liliana Campia, there was a large conference with the interventions, among others, of the Head Master, Paiano, who outlined the activities carried out to safeguard the historical heritage of the school; Luciano Boccalatte, director of the Historical Institute of the Resistance of Turin, on the figure of General Perotti; of Merandino on the work of reorganization of the archive; of myself on the contents of the book; of Pizzigoni, of Indire, on the role and function of the school museums; of Carla Perotti, descendant of General Perotti himself.

On the same occasion the historical archive of the school was inaugurated, which was decided to be named after Eulalia Mantovan, the student of the “Perotti”, then still “Santorre di Santarosa”, who tragically lost his life in an aerial bombardment in the night between 19 and 20 November 1942 along with forty other Turin citizens. Eulalia, nicknamed “Vanni”, was killed with her mother and her one-year-old sister. The news, laconically reported in the class register of the time, aroused such fear in the other students of the “Santorre” that from that day, next to the name of 230 out of 300 of them, it turned out the annotation: «leaves the school because of enemy raids»²⁵. In memory of Mantovan’s tragic death, a commemorative plaque was put at the entrance of the archive. Returning to the book, we had the opportunity to present it also at the 32nd International Book Fair in Turin, which took place between 9 and 13 May 2019²⁶: for the occasion Lucio Attorre, professor of History of the School at the University of Basilicata, spoke too.

In 2016 the “Perotti” joined the project, proposed by the city of Turin in 2007, “Do you want to build your School Museum?” conceived by museiscuol@ of the Archives

pedagogia, Potenza, EditricErmes, 2020, pp. 79-82; D. Marendino, *Poveri ma belli. Gli archivi delle scuole: un Vademecum*, Torino, Istituto Piemontese per la Storia della Resistenza “G. Agosti”, 2014.

²⁴ See <https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Storia-della-scuola.pdf>. (last access: 20.02.2019).

²⁵ ASPTT, «Registro di classe 1942-43»; Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti”*, cit., pp. 18-19; see also, on line, the historical archive of «La Stampa», 27.11.1942.

²⁶ See <https://consiglio.basilicata.it/archivio-news/detail.jsp?otype=1120&id=3436671#.Y15GZnbMLIU> (last access: 10.01.2019).

Service, Museum and Cultural Heritage of the City of Turin and by the Cultural Association Strumento Testa, with the scientific advice of INDIRE - National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research²⁷. The project, which is part of a work of a European program, “Comenius Regio” (2009-2011), has recorded excellent acclaim and so on 2 November 2015 five schools, in which the first museums were born, signed a “Network Agreement” to develop and support the School Museums; On 21 November 2016, the City of Turin and the Network of School Museums signed a memorandum of understanding with the aim of strengthening the project “Do you want to build your school museum?” and increasing the number of participating institutes²⁸. After two years of collaborations and through a long work transversal and interdisciplinary teachers and students of “Perotti” have created their own museum, the thirteenth of the above project, christened “a school... many stories” (and whose logo was made by the students themselves through a competition), which was inaugurated on 21 May 2018. The permanent exhibition of the “Perotti” is divided into two environments: there is a historical laboratory that contains teaching materials of the past (registers, books, etc.) and a time line created by panels composed of images and descriptions that reconstruct the long history of the school. There is also a scientific laboratory with numerous current and historical teaching materials, divided into thematic areas, from chemistry to physics, from biology to anatomy. The description and cataloguing of the objects present in the latter environment have been patiently carried out by groups of students, who have also created QR Codes, with their recorded voices, that illustrate everything present in the museum²⁹.

The day of presentation began with the ritual greetings of Director Paiano, who focused on the important historical-pedagogical-educational function of the program; continued with the interventions of Paola Galliano, head of the museum, by Francesca Leon, Councillor for the City of Turin, Francesca Troise, District 3, Nunzia Del Vento, manager of the comprehensive “Gabelli - Pestalozzi” and contact person of the network of School Museums, by Simona Ricci, director of the Associazione Abbonamenti Musei and finally of myself. After the screening of a video curated by Sabrina Cugliero, who told the steps of the realization of the exhibition, the students of some classes, instructed by Galliano, accompanied on his visit the speakers and the many guests intervened³⁰.

As Francesca Pizzigoni of Indire pointed out, «The School Museum proposes itself as a space of support and enhancement to training that represents the transition from the classroom to the learning environment, creating a “permanent laboratory” that is a place of participatory learning and inclusion, and a gym for study through sources»³¹. A “good

²⁷ See <http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/propostemusei/toeprov/scuola-secondaria-di-primo-grado-g-perotti.shtml> (last access: 10.11.2022).

²⁸ See http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/forma/biblio/biblio_base/rete-scolastica-dedicata-al-tema-dei-musei-scolast.shtml (last access: 10.11.2022).

²⁹ See https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/?page_id=400 (last access: 13.10.2022).

³⁰ See https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/?page_id=487. The event was also reported in some newspaper articles, in particular «La Stampa» and «la Repubblica» both on 19 May 2018 (last access: 13.10.2022).

³¹ See <https://www.indire.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Pizzigoni-Contributo-Scientifico-MUSEI-SCOLASTICI.pdf>. (last access: 13.10.2022).

practice to propose as a model to encourage the rediscovery of the history and identity of your school, where students are the active protagonists of learning». Thus starting from the historical-didactic heritage of each institute, with a path of work based on sources, we arrive at the creation of new laboratory spaces created by themselves. Permanent places at the service of daily, interdisciplinary and inclusive formation and, at the same time, spaces for active citizenship, open to the whole community»³².

As part of the continuation of this rich collaborative synergy with the relevant bodies, in the school year 2018-19 the “Perotti” participated in the PON/FSE 10.2.5 FSEPON-PI-2018-5, dedicated to “Strengthening education in cultural, artistic and landscape heritage” project to which more than a dozen Turin schools have joined. Specifically the school in question, through the form «How do I interrogate an archive?» was intended to work on the enormous documentary heritage preserved in it. The results were presented on 22 May 2019 as part of a public ceremony that took place in the large rooms of the “Perotti” gym, in the presence of a rich audience of teachers, students and parents. The program was briefly introduced and outlined by myself, tutor of the course PON, followed by the greeting of the school authorities in the person of the manager, Paiano, who focused on the importance of promoting and enhancing those historical peculiarities-artistic-scientific that schools often retain, but do not value adequately. The word then passed to the talented teachers of the course, Franca Treccarichi and Francesca Ortolano, officials of the municipality of Turin, who outlined the various stages of work of the students, the novelties and curiosities of the latter in addressing a new topic and little known as the archive: its functions, its usefulness, its composition and, above all, the way to make it better known and usable, to the outside world. In this direction have done their excellent work 20 enrolled in the course, who were the protagonists of the continuation of the beautiful initiative, showing the contents of their final product made through a paper production (panels, labels) electronic (power point) and guided tours to the public present³³.

The reconstruction of the historical memory of the “Perotti” continued alongside the analysis of its current role in the educational context of Turin. To this end, the last initiative in order of time concerned the publication of a second book that combines the interest for what has already passed, even the most important for the present and for the immediate future, in view of the new and diversified needs arising from a society in continuous development and change³⁴.

The volume, which saw the participation of 15 authors also intended to give voice to all the components of the school: this explains the participation of teachers, students and

³² See <https://www.indire.it/2018/05/21/inaugurato-il-tredicesimo-museo-scolastico-alla-scuola-perotti-di-torino> (last access: 13.10.2022).

³³ The realization and the success of the project could count on the collaboration, in different ways and stages, of colleagues Paola Galliano, Mario Palazzolo, Daniela Fedeli, Patrizia Aliberti, Paola De Stefanis, Mariacristina Tisi, Rosanna Arena, as well as the official of Aschettino’s secretariat. For details of the final product realized: see <http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/esperienze/primo-il-patrimonio-siamo-noi-.html> (last access: 20.10.2022).

³⁴ Labriola (ed.), *La Scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino tra storia, cit.*

parents. The historical essays of the undersigned and the director, Simone Paiano, focus on the typology of students enrolled in the now ninety years of the history of “Perotti” and the peculiarities of their profit. These elements have been strongly influenced by many factors: from emigration to the many legislative changes that have involved education in Italy, not least the birth of the single Middle School. Several points of discussion emerge that lead to reflection on the role and functions of the three-year period of middle school, a time span that plays an important and delicate role in the path of growth not only intellectual of adolescent pupils. Along the same lines, some works reconstruct the biographies of protagonists of national history and culture who have linked their personal lives in different ways to the school in question: the writer Giovanna Righini Ricci and the heroine of the Piedmontese Resistance Frida Malan, who taught there; General Giuseppe Perotti to whom the school is named (Flavia Harabagiu, Martina Paternò and Carlotta Tango). The wealth of educational heritage preserved at the “Perotti” finds ample space in the works on the construction of the school museum (Paola Galliano) and on the analysis of a magazine published by the school for over twenty years from the nineties (Benedetta Comes and Giorgia Piccolo).

Basic are the comparisons between the staff of the school and the parents of the students with regard to aspects and issues fundamental for the proper performance of each educational institution: one of the contributions of the volume, by Nunzio Di Bartolo, parent and former President of the School Council of the school, offers just such a cross-section of such decision-making moments. In a current perspective and with clear pedagogical intentions are the issues related to the inclusion of foreign students and those with Special Educational Needs, analyzed by Cinzia Gallo Picard, Maria Perosino and Laura Grosso; Similar to the projects and activities aimed at initiating the most disadvantaged students to certain learning paths and work together, with a view to a more immediate and effective employment, have inspired the essay by Anna Climaco. Again, two studies, one on the statistics of the choices after middle school (by Stefania Burdino) and the other on the results of the tests Invalsi (by Mariacristina Tisi), compared, like the previous essays, to the national context, questions and let the expectations and the degree of preparation of the students shine through. The book, with the intervention of some of the authors, was presented at the headquarters of the “Perotti” on 17 May 2022 under the patronage of the Salone del Libro³⁵. In addition, on the same date, the “International Museum Day 2022” (IDM ICOM 2022) did not fall by chance. So with the accession to the the initiatives of “The Week of the Turin School Museums 2022”, the “Perotti” has once again intended to provide its significant contribution to activities aimed at safeguarding the educational heritage. Mariacristina Tisi, a member of the Executive staff of “Perotti-Toscanini”, Paola Galliano, contact person of the School Museum, Franca Treccarichi and Francesca Ortolano, representatives of the Culture Area, Archive, Museums and Libraries of the City of Turin. Skilfully moderated by Angelo

³⁵ Salone Off 2022 (34° Salone internazionale del libro di Torino). The book has been reviewed by Ester De Fort in the journal «Studi Piemontesi», giugno 2021 and by Stefano Garzaro in «La voce e il tempo», 03.01.2021.

Ciotola, the day continued with the intervention of the well-known writer and journalist Stefano Garzaro, who through a jump in history has evoked events, characteristics and curiosities of the Pozzo Strada district where the “Perotti-Toscanini” is located. Moreover, the activities also saw the protagonists of the students of class 2E, who skilfully instructed by Elena Dini, referent of the school’s historical archives, illustrated the results of the project: “An archival survey”. Finally, the students of classes 1E, 1F and 2E, prepared by Paola Galliano, guided guests and speakers to discover the wonders of the school’s Archive and especially the museum, describing with skill and abundance of details the glorious tradition of our Institute³⁶.

³⁶ See <https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/relaz-conclusiva-evento-17-maggio.pdf> (last access: 20.11.2022).

The Collodi School. Educational Atmospheres in the Work of Carlo Lorenzini

Teresa Gargano, Simone di Biasio¹
Roma Tre University (Italy)

1. *The two schools, by child and by adult: Collodi expert on pedagogical issues*

Carlo Lorenzini, better known under his pseudonym Collodi, author of one of the most original literature classics for adults and children, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, was also a journalist, caricaturist, music and theatre critic, playwright, fairy tale translator and school reader, and text and guide compiler. Might he also be defined as an educationalist or a scholar of educational issues? What is certain is that his ideas on schooling were clear and courageous. Collodi's focus was on practice rather than theory. His systematic interest in school dates to the advent of his shrewd observation of the problems of Unified Italy and he did so as a sceptical, ironic and always lively lampoonist until he was no longer content with acting as straightforward observer and commentator on schooling, but decided to enter the classrooms in person. And what better way could there be than to «make himself a child amongst children», a «rascal amongst rascals», by writing a series recounting the adventures of Giannettino and his friends. He thus explored the school world from a range of angles and perspectives: both adult and child over the same years, with his characteristically acute tone and biting satire as common denominator. His aim was to mock certain social devices and a post-unification schooling lacking in identity and replete with backwardness, immobilism and chronic and recurrent ills. I will attempt here to reconstruct Collodi's school adventure from the starting point of the adult journalist, the alarmed and critical chronicler, a man who worked in satirical journalism for over forty years. As such, in the light of the ability to get acquainted with an issue which is characteristic of journalists, it can be argued that Collodi acquired a full knowledge of the facts regarding the internal Italian situation, one in which «while huge sums were put into the army and navy (and then overseas lands and colonial adventures), whilst grandiose, deceptively opulent and unproductive public works were indulged in (such as a full-blown “marble homeland”) with a rail network used for electoral purposes, money for education was scrimped and saved»². Collodi's spotlight shone, in particular, on the school bureaucratic and legislative apparatus, *longue durée* he school as an offshoot of the state, not primarily as a place of education and necessary means with

¹ Simone di Biasio wrote sections 1 and 4; Teresa Gargano wrote sections 2 and 3.

² R. Bertacchini, *Collodi educatore*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1964, p. 45.

which to build educational processes. Collodi was well aware that measures requiring mandatory schooling (the Casati Law of 13 November 1859 and then the Coppino Law of 15 July 1877 no. 3691)³ were not accompanied by socio-economic action designed to effectively ensure lower class access to education, with the poor frequently obliged to take their children out of the 6 to 9 years of mandatory schooling required in order to work and earn money. Lorenzini certainly did not keep his views to himself and expressed them firmly and with “serious humourism”, offering a valid critical vision of the relationship between school and material needs. After the Coppino Law came into force, literacy rates remained low and school non-attendance remained high. One of the factors keeping literacy rates low was the anything but marginal problem of child labour. In a letter published on 23 February 1884 in the Florentine newspaper «La vedetta. Gazzetta del popolo» entitled *Pane e libri (A S. E. il Ministro Berti e C.)* later added to the *Note Gaie* collection published in 1892 by Giuseppe Rigutini, two year after Carlo Lorenzini’s death, the latter, while conscious of the need for education, continued to criticise the mandatory education programme in its current form. His views were based on the belief that «before all else men need food and drink, protection from the elements and a roof over their heads after their patiently endured everyday hard work. Then, and only then, will they be in a state of mind enabling them to listen to their consciences and feel the ambition to improve themselves»⁴. He threw his weight strongly behind the idea that before universal education could be achieved, what was needed were measures appropriate to the country’s real social and economic state of affairs to guarantee, first and foremost, fundamental respect for human dignity. Only later would it be possible to move in the direction of «“national” and politically unifying education»⁵. This respect, as he saw it, did not exist even for teachers and Collodi condemned this in a satirical and fictitious letter sent directly to Minister Coppino written ironically in the name of Florentines alarmed as soon as the minister «hinted that... he was thinking» of a mandatory education law, later conserved in the imaginary archive, *Società degli ultimi fiorentini*⁶. In his letter, Collodi sees primary school teachers as nineteenth century Count Ugolinis, in his wise satirical style: «A count, if you like, without a county, without Gaddi, without Anselmucci and without Archbishop Ruggeri, eating the back of his skull. But in exchange that eternal joker, nature, gave him a stomach so ravenous that he would eat even the school’s benches, which for him means hunger»⁷. The first task of the mandatory school teacher was counteracting illiteracy. Once again, in his letter to

³ G. Ricuperati, *Storia della scuola in Italia: dall’Unità ad oggi*, Brescia, La scuola, 2015.

⁴ C. Collodi, *Note gaie*, Firenze, Bemporad & f., 1893, p. 186.

⁵ Bertacchini, *Collodi educatore*, cit., p. 52.

⁶ The letter he sent to Minister Coppino is present in the story entitled *Gli ultimi fiorentini* in the *Occhi e nasi* collection that came out for the first time in 1881. The outcome of a reworking of earlier writings this book – mainly satirical tales and articles on costumes, physiology, caricatures and vignettes – is made up of seventeen stories delineating character-types in their natural context. *Gli ultimi fiorentini* is structured into various short chapters, including *Come studiavano i fiorentini*, in which Collodi starts from a vision of young people’s education in Grand Duchy Florence with insights into the education status quo in post-Unification Italy using the expedient of the satirical letter sent to Minister Coppino after the mandatory education law.

⁷ C. Collodi, *Occhi e nasi*, in Id., *Opere*, D. Marcheschi (ed.), Milano, Mondadori, 1995, p. 319.

Minister Coppino, after an ironic side swipe against the succession of duties forced on citizens, he «called for respect for the illiterate», in a sarcastic condemnation around the demoralising and urgent issue of illiteracy which, a few years before the taking of Rome, had been intolerably high:

Your excellence, if we do not block the hole in the dyke, with all this overflowing of mandatory laws we will, one day, end up drowning our much vaunted freedom, that freedom which cost us so much and which, God free us, we have not yet finished paying for. [...] And then it is reasonable to ask: why bully these poor illiterates! Some time ago illiterates were counted and the abacus of government statistics showed us that they had reached the respectable figure of seventeen million. All this showed that the Kingdom's educated people numbered barely a third of the population. How is it then that the few presume to lord it over the many and impose their will on them? Let us remember, your Excellency, that the universally accepted principle of respect for the majority, is the cornerstone on which the whole ingenious institutional mechanism – which, if a name must be given it, is to be called liberal – rests⁸.

2. *On the schoolchildren's side*

His school-related journalism, like most of his publishing work, can, given the right interpretation, be seen as focusing on and feeding into the debate around the government's measures and certain neglected, awkward and sometimes even dangerous matters. By means of paradox and comic flair, Collodi's articles on school touched on matters of importance and constituted a courageous condemnation of the system's structural defects. Carlo Lorenzini never threw off his journalistic garb and this backdrop – drawn from his experience as sceptical and sometimes controversial chronicler and humourist – continued to come to the fore whenever he touched on the school universe. He believed that children could not be educated passively by rigidly imposing norms on them, but that they needed to take an active part in the educational process capable of inspiring their interest in education. It was, in fact, well known that the objective of Umberto-era educational literature was to create a new Italian, a worthy citizen devoted to country and family, and that this was to be achieved via a stuffy educational dynamic consisting of imparting moral and theoretical precepts and paternalistic lectures to ignorant learners in accordance with a plastic role differentiation. Thus, translating *I racconti delle fate* for Paggi in 1876 with the precious illustrations of Enrico Mazzanti, Collodi decided to get out into the children's literature fray and contribute to the renewal of this literary genre. Adult Collodi turned child to speak to his little readers on their own level, seeking to appeal to children's psychologies by creating living characters with human characteristics. Even his puppet is less wooden than children educated in accordance with the rigid rules of bourgeois education. Pinocchio represents the full development of an industrious educational process oriented towards freedom and

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318.

resistance to ready-made norms already set in motion by Giannettino and Minuzzolo, centre-stage players in the reading book cycle. It is important to distinguish between the books designed mainly for school use such as *Giannettino* (1877), *Minuzzolo* (1878) and the whole series of adventures *Viaggio per l'Italia di Giannettino* (1880, 1883, 1886), *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* (1890), *La grammatica di Giannettino* (1883), *L'abbaco di Giannettino* (1884) and *Libro di lezioni per la seconda classe elementare* (1889), on one hand, and readers such as *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1883), *Storie allegre* (1886), *Il regalo del Capo d'Anno* and, naturally, *I racconti delle Fate* on the other. It is clear that the Giannettino series constituted a cycle of novels with a common series of elements including their central character, while what the readers share is ironic self-references and certain characters. The social status of its characters and its setting places the textbook series in the bourgeois novel category while the readers are examples of comic-parody novels⁹. Collodi succeeded in writing books responding to the need to educate and instruct together, and he did so thanks to a simple but brilliant intuition, namely multi-level books with an autonomous narrative framework designed to link up the various textbook notions. The links between the framework and the textbook were achieved via dialogue and interview, processes which were characteristic of journalism and thus second nature to him. Encyclopaedism alternates with the transmission of knowledge and the socialisation and genuine depiction of the everyday lives of the children in his stories, with the former often taking precedence over the latter but order always being re-established, together with certain anecdotes attracting public attention. The characters are presented in broad brushstrokes at the outset directly by the author to readers, a typical ingredient of children's storytelling designed to generate empathy and stimulate pupils' interest¹⁰. Collodi pays a great deal of attention to language and succeeds, teacher-style, in ensuring that pupils are guided to the discovery of the fundamental elements from the starting point of observation of the facts. In the textbooks, education is set in motion by observation, from sometimes painful experiences, prompting error recognition and didactic commentary. «Lessons are almost always related to the characters' real experiences: zoology lessons take place during museum visits, botany lessons during villa trips imparted by gardeners in their greenhouses»¹¹. Irony and satire sublimate the writer's creatures: «Collodi wrote mixed language texts in which spontaneous oral language is used to knock traditional rhetoric off its pedestal: thus the most vernacular language, that of everyday communication and expression, with its

⁹ D. Marcheschi, *Carlo Collodi scrittore per bambini*, in *Carlo Lorenzini-Collodi nel centenario*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1992.

¹⁰ He addresses his readers directly right from the opening pages of his textbooks. The "boys" are there, for example, in the opening phrase of *La Grammatica di Giannettino*: «Have you boys met your friend Giannettino?» (C. Collodi, *La grammatica di Giannettino: per le scuole elementari*, Firenze, Felice Paggi, 1883, p. 5) or in *Giannettino*: «And now children, if you pay attention, I will tell you the story of Giannettino word for word» (C. Collodi, *Giannettino: libro per i ragazzi*, Firenze, Felice Paggi, p. 5).

¹¹ L. Volpicelli, *La via di Pinocchio*, in *Studi collodiani, Atti del I Convegno internazionale (Pescia, 5-7 ottobre 1974)*, Pistoia, Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia e Pescia, 1976, p. 31.

formulas and clichés, and high language generate a zesty blend of parody and comedy which is always, however, extraordinarily natural»¹².

3. *In classrooms with Giannettino, a work without educational purpose*

After *I racconti delle fate* the intuition of the Paggi brothers that Collodi was the right man to act as mediator between united Italy's language needs and the purposes and programmes of its embryonic educational literature turned out to have been a brainwave. The result was a reading book and something of an aid for pupils, whose intention was to intercept the vitalistic impulses of the new educational thought both in classroom teaching and in a new renewed children's literature spirit. *Giannettino*, a retelling of Alessandro Parravicini's *Giannetto*, the primary educational book in the early 19th century, was the prelude to a narrative cycle of work for children once again edited by the Paggi publishing house, within the fertile educational publishing climate of the day. This series of books is illustrative of the rapid growth of a plan by means of rereadings, additions and thematic details. As Minicucci, a scholar who has done a great deal of work on Carlo Lorenzini's handwritten papers has shown¹³, when Alessandro Paggi reported to Angelo Orvieto that *Giannettino* had originally simply been a children's novella with no other educational purpose, he was telling the simple truth. Collodi set to work on this manuscript and changed it, before submitting it to the publishers two months later in the final form we know it in. The work done in these two months, as the papers show, focused on the study of educational concepts, adding concepts and notions designed to reinforce the educational aspects of a work which remained rooted in the creative-narrative tradition. «*A labor improbus* for a journalist [...], dealing with educational concepts rooted in moralism, dogmatism and notions which he had little or no familiarity with»¹⁴. The results of these attempts to make an educational text of the work are tangible in the chapters focusing on the natural sciences, geology basics, geography and history, for example, using Parravicini's *Giannetto* model. All this represented a medley testifying to a moment of personal growth stretching from *Giannettino* to *La lanterna magica di Giannettino*, the last volume in the cycle written in 1890, the year Lorenzini died. Collodi's was certainly a novel idea and a new character, but the very name *Giannettino* is indicative of its traditional continuity. Collodi turned tradition on its head where «the reasons behind, and motives for, knowledge» were

¹² D. Marcheschi, *Dallo scrittore per gli adulti allo scrittore per i bambini*, in C. Collodi, *Opere*, cit., pp. XLVI-XLVII.

¹³ The papers referred to are kept at Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze and the publishing house which inherited Libreria Paggi, Giunti Bemporad Marzocco. See M. J. Minicucci, *Tra l'inedito e l'edito delle carte manoscritte di Carlo Lorenzini*, in *Studi Collodiani*, cit., pp. 381-403.

¹⁴ M.J. Minicucci, *Tra fantasia e didattica. Oscillazioni collodiane*, in *Pinocchio oggi. Atti del convegno pedagogico Pescia-Collodi 30 settembre-1° ottobre 1978*, Pescia, Fondazione Nazionale "Carlo Collodi", 1980, p. 225.

concerned¹⁵, but also in educational technique terms. Whilst, generalising, the subject is still the story of an irreverent rascal from an upper middle class Florentine family, who is schooled by a tutor taken on by his mother, wise Dr Boccadoro, Collodi seeks to create narrative situations in which his textbook notions are integrated more naturally and attractively into the story, not only in *Giannettino* but all the other books in the cycle too. For example, Roman history is explained by inventing a ploy involving a visit to a home gallery in *Minuzzolo* and the expedient of a journey to illustrate Italian cities fully and facilitate geography studies in *Viaggio per l'Italia di Giannettino*, a hybrid text, like most of Collodi's work, half geography literacy textbook and tourist guidebook and half children's reader. Collodi even tried his hand at grammar – at a time in which language education tools were of key importance in the dissemination of a shared language that was so crucial to educational and other debates, while the school institutions were showing themselves to be crucially important for Italianisation purposes. In this case, too, Collodi turned to the dialogue form, between Giannettino and Boccadoro, by means of functional mechanisms rather than accumulating data and rules, an exchange and a dynamic equilibrium. Collodi expertly channels his skills and mastery of language into a grammar text suitable for his target reader, namely primary school pupils in the second half of the 19th century, most of whom spoke dialect and were illiterate. Boccadoro and Mr Quintiliano, Minuzzolo's father, are not the only teachers. Antonio the gardener, for example, also captures the attention of Minuzzolo and his siblings, the children of his employer, with his botany lessons. Collodi's innovative intention here was to draw a complete picture of the society of the day. «Whilst the middle classes educate the lower classes, the lower classes can also educate the middle classes»¹⁶. And that's not all. A further expedient he uses is making the children themselves, those formerly bored rascals, into teachers. This is what happens in *L'abbaco di Giannettino*, in which Giannettino teaches the arithmetic basics to a carpenter, using cherries and beans for his explanations, simplifying the concepts and successfully adapting his teaching to his pupil, in contrast with the standardisation and generalisation which was the educational and school textbook norm at the time. Collodi was not, strictly speaking, an expert educator and neither was he professorial. Perhaps he was simply an instinctive teacher with a propensity for ongoing creative effort. This is why he used new and innovative technical-educational means, such as the unknown and fairy-tale tool, the magic lantern, in *La lanterna magica di Giannettino*, certainly inspiring curiosity and interest in children.

¹⁵ F. Tempesti, *Collodiana*, Firenze, Salani, 1988, p. 39.

¹⁶ Marcheschi, *Carlo Collodi scrittore per bambini*, cit., p. 85.

4. La lanterna magica di Giannettino *as a visual media*

These are considered Collodi's "lesser works" and they are certainly less well known than his other books, which are 19th century children's classics and even, like *Pinocchio*, a full-blown literary masterpiece. *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* was his last work and a unique one, an extremely important legacy with a great deal to say about the role of images in narrative and, more generally, in children's literature. The period he wrote it in, 1890, was the height of a period known as "pre-cinema" or, more specifically, the "cinema of attractions", a phase which continued up to the *Belle Epoque* and, as the definition itself suggests, marked a prelude to full-blown cinema. It was a highly prolific season for the "new" arts such as photography and cinema but, more specifically, it was also a prolific "era for technical reproducibility". Collodi seems to have internalised – and this is really the right word, given the projection mechanism involved – this focus on figures right from the outset. Enrico Mazzanti illustrated this book, as he had already done with *Pinocchio*, but in this work the shift is even clearer because its words presuppose images, which are referred to in the text, and Collodi seems to have wanted to try his hand at film. It was a cinema which, at the end of the 19th century, was still theatrical, a medium still imbued with fiction, tricks, magic and illusionism. Was not *Pinocchio* himself a puppet drawn from the heart of popular theatre? In actual fact, it is more exact to call *Pinocchio* a marionette but this is a mere detail. Collodi's cross-media capacity is evident and his writing is suffused with visual and theatrical profundity and an «entirely gesture-based syntaxis»¹⁷. In his *Guardare le figure*, it is exactly the history of "figurina" which Antonio Faeti outlines, a name for travelling "figurine" salespeople who once appealed most, but not exclusively, to children. The popular literature which took hold of the power of images in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was also called "muracciolaia": «images were often hung on walls, like lunar calendars or saint effigies. They were hung on walls and thus transmitted messages which were often very different from those passed on in establishment teaching content»¹⁸. Just as the young students who "hang" on Giannettino's lips and lantern look at the walls. In the same way that the books which perform the same function as the magic lantern are still, today, designed for walls, first and foremost those of a contemporary children's literature master such as Hervé Tullet¹⁹. Mazzanti's stylistic choices also conjure up a multi-prizewinning children's literature work such as Tom Haugomat's *A travers*²⁰, a French artist with an extremely distinctive and hypermodern style who illustrated the life of a man through his vision, often inserting images into spheres which are also the shape of eyes, binoculars and also Collodi's magic lantern.

A key figure required for the functioning of the magic lantern show was the huckster, a role tailor-made for Giannettino who often called for attention – to watch – with a

¹⁷ G.V. Paolozzi, *Letteratura per l'infanzia*, Roma, Istituto editoriale del mezzogiorno, 1964.

¹⁸ A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, p. 4.

¹⁹ See H. Tullet, *Il gioco della luce*, Milano, L'ippocampo, 2019 and H. Tullet, *Il gioco delle ombre*, Milano, L'ippocampo, 2019.

²⁰ See H. Haugomat, *A Travers*, Milano, Terre di Mezzo, 2019.

«want to see this scene? Here it is in my lantern», or «no sooner said than done, it appears in the eye of the lantern». What is the role, strictly speaking, of a medium that acts as visual aid in school teaching? Faeti was well aware that the figures he liked to speak of would be replaced «by more modern and effective media»²¹ which would generate an «iconosphere» that he saw as flatter, more standardised. Today, in the 21st century, we are surrounded by the possibilities offered by virtual or augmented reality. The categories reception is analysed by are essentially the same as those used for “writing *tout court*”, for literature *tout court* and thus children’s literature – *empathy*, *escape* and *engagement*, together with *embodiment* resort to «a terminology which harks back in full to the reference points adopted by cognitivist literary criticism and widely used in campaigns promoting young people’s reading»²². More specifically, the magic lantern talked about in Collodi’s book resembles an embryonic example of what are now called *enhanced books*, books, as the word suggests, which are “augmented”, which are «read, listened to, looked at, enriched with images, cartoons and, often, games»²³. It is nothing more than a trick by which to pass on knowledge and skills, which Lorenzini applied to the character of his children’s books for school. Moreover, the abilities which can certainly be acquired in this way included one that was “new” for the era in which Giannettino was written, namely visual literacy, «the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.), and that visual experience or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality»²⁴. Collodi takes these iconic demands on board with what might be seen as precocious sensibility, but he did so – and this is significant for us – not solely in the context of personal reading, the education offered by the street (which all his characters have at their fingertips), but also the public milieu of schooling. Lorenzini is suggesting *media education ante litteram*: it is the publishing operation that is interesting to the same extent as his idea of inserting visual supports into the school classroom, also because, to tell the truth, the text does not have Pinocchio’s narrative and literary ambitions. In fact it mostly conforms to the pedagogical rhetoric of its day.

At a certain point in the story one of the young students in Collodi’s narrative asks: «“Would it be possible to ask, Mr Giannettino, how you came to learn all the wonderful things you are telling us of?” “I’ll tell you right away. Just a few days ago I was lucky enough to be able to read a book which we might truly call a golden book, written for the education of men required to live in the world. And after reading it I said to myself right away: - Why not adapt it for young people’s reading too? Why not also make it attractive to young people with a few figures? Why not make a sort of magic lantern out

²¹ Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., p. 5.

²² L. Cantatore, *Libri, lettura e realtà virtuale: un’alleanza possibile?*, in L. Cantatore (ed.), *Primo: leggere. Per un’educazione alla lettura*, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2017, pp. 11-12.

²³ M. Campagnaro, *Letteratura tradizionale e letteratura digitale. Quali proposte per continuare a leggere*, in M. Campagnaro (ed.), *Le terre della fantasia. Leggere la letteratura per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza*, Roma, Donzelli, 2014, p. 224.

²⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Pictorial Turn. Saggi di cultura visuale*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2017, p. 17.

of a few figures?»²⁵ Giannettino confesses that he wants to give his lantern to the “best” of the boys, but the boy in question replies that it would be a «waste», like «giving us a book *in* which we do not know how to read»²⁶. This choice of the preposition “in” casts light on many issues revolving around defining the role of books in school education in accordance with Collodi’s ideas: the text casts off its two dimensional quality and acquires a third dimension to get into. The book is not only to be read but also to be accessed. One must get inside it, travel through it, as Giorgio Manganelli superbly stressed in his ultra-personal *Pinocchio. Un libro parallelo*:

No book ends. Books are not long, they are wide. Pages, as their shape reveals, are none other than a door to the book below, or to a further door which leads to another. Finishing a book means opening a last door, so that neither this door nor any others we have opened thus far to cross a threshold are closed. And those which have endlessly opened continue to open up and do so in a never ending creaking of hinges. A book finished is infinite, a closed book is open. The whole of a book is gathered around us, all its pages are one page, a single door. The door is thus thrown open not only so that I can cross its threshold but the door itself is its own threshold [...]²⁷.

The school outlined in the work analysed to date was, in the last analysis, none other than a theatre for Carlo Lorenzini. And as such, other types of show compete with it and thus, inevitably, other media. It is a theatrical space, and tricks, illusions and magic are thus used. How else might study, learning, even mnemonization, be magnificently defined? Are the literary methods adopted by writers to keep us glued to the page, to a description, to a character, the ones that have defined the diverse literary genres, not perhaps tricks? Who knows. Perhaps if we thought of school classrooms as theatres or cinemas, a *Pinocchio* or two less might cast them off in favour of quite different types of show.

²⁵ Collodi, *La Lanterna magica*, cit., pp. 21-22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁷ G. Manganelli, *Pinocchio. Un libro parallelo*, Milano, Adelphi, 2002, p. 63.

The Palidoro Children's House Diaries of Irene Bernasconi (1915-1916)

Martine Gilsoul
Roma Tre University (Italy)

Introduction

I had chosen to do schooling in a place where no one wanted to go, among primitive people, in need of affection; among even dirty, barefoot, ragged children: children close to the earth. In a lost place at the bottom of some little-known valley or in an abandoned place in the desolate lands of the Maremma... and Palidoro is, according to the people of Ciociaria, the “maremmaccia”¹.

This is how Irene Bernasconi (1886-1970) begins her diary when she was a teacher in one of the first two Montessori preschools opened by the *Ente scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano* (Agency for Farmers' Schools in the Agro Romano area) in 1915. Two important documents of school memory were born out of this experience: the *Diario della Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*² (Diary of the Palidoro Children's Home, 1915-1916) and the *Diario dell'asilo infantile di Mezzaselva*³ (Diary of the Mezzaselva Preschool, 1917-1919). The *Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione "Mauro Laeng"* (Roma Tre University) conserves the original of Mezzaselva's diary for the school year 1918-1919 and some didactic materials made by the teacher, while numerous ego-documents (correspondence, various notebooks, notes, photos with captions, etc.) are kept by the heirs.

In this contribution we intend to present the work of Irene Bernasconi, a preschool teacher in Palidoro, where she decided to follow in the footsteps of dozens of “garibaldini dell'alfabeto” (pioneers of the literacy) who had set out to travel through the wasteland of the Agro Romano. Even though it is an official diary, compiled at the request of the Authority, it is nevertheless an historical document of great significance: it allows us, through the eyes of a teacher, alone and a foreigner, to grasp the dramatic conditions in

¹ E. Di Michele (ed.) *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, Foligno, Il formichiere, 2020, p. 41.

² *Diario di una maestra, 1915-1916*, «I Problemi della pedagogia», vol. 43, n. 1-3, 1997, pp. 32-79, with an introduction by G. Alatri (pp. 29-32); an excerpt in G. Alatri, *Il metodo Montessori e gli asili rurali: Diario di una maestra*, «Centro Studi Montessoriani. Annuario 2003: Attualità di Maria Montessori», Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2004, pp. 165-181; E. Di Michele (ed.) *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, Foligno, Il formichiere, 2020.

³ I. Bernasconi, *Quando i bambini non conoscevano i colori, diario scolastico, asilo infantile di Mezzaselva 1917-1918-1919*, s.l., Circolo culturale prenestino “R. Simeoni”, 1993. An excerpt for the year 1919-1920 was also published in G. Alatri, *Gli asili d'infanzia a Roma tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Unicopli, 2013, pp. 211-229.

which families lived in a social and cultural reality so different from her own. Her gaze is always respectful, even when she is dismayed at the lack of hygiene, at the ignorance of the mothers from whom she inquires about the birth of their children and possible family consanguinity, or when she is bewildered at the reactions of the children during the first days.

Thanks to the precision with which it is compiled - with mostly factual elements to account for the children's progress - the diary gives us a glimpse of a still unknown reality, filling a gap in the history of pre-schooling in general, and of the spread of the Montessori method in Italy in particular. Indeed, if the Montessori experiences promoted by ANIMI⁴ (in particular the work of Brunella Serpe) have been the subject of several publications, the same cannot be said of the work of the *Ente scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano*. In the book on Alessandro Marcucci by Giovanna Alatri, the Montessori schools in the Agro⁵ are only mentioned from the mid-1920s, while Erica Moretti presents the work of the Ente in a general way in her volume⁶ on the study of Maria Montessori's pacifism.

The opening of Montessori preschools in the Agro was the result of an insight of Alessandro Marcucci⁷, who had to face several challenges. Thanks to Irene Bernasconi's diary, we can verify whether this insight was a response to the real needs of the children and their families. Moreover, during her experience in Palidoro, the teacher from Ticino also compiled a private diary⁸, albeit on a less regular basis, in which she transcribed her impressions of the place and her state of mind. This document provides useful elements to complete the reconstruction of her experience and allows us to perceive her daily life outside the school.

Here we will consider only the experience in Palidoro, which will be addressed after briefly reviewing Teacher Bernasconi's educational path.

⁴ B. Serpe, *L'azione educativa dell'ANIMI e la metodologia didattica di Maria Montessori*, in F. Cambi, G. Trebisacce (edd.), *I 150 anni dell'Italia unita: Per un bilancio pedagogico*, Pisa, ETS, 2012, pp. 245-260; B. Serpe, *Appunti di una maestra durante la Grande Guerra: il diario annuale di Lina Sarri (1916-1918)*, in B. Serpe (ed.), *Scuola, infanzia e grande guerra*, Milano, EDUCATT, 2017, pp. 79-107; B. Serpe, *Il metodo Montessori negli asili dell'Associazione Nazionale per gli Interessi del Mezzogiorno d'Italia (ANIMI) in Calabria*, in F. Fabri (ed.), *Maria Montessori e la società del suo tempo*, Roma, Castelvetti, 2020, pp. 131-152; B. Serpe, *Le Case dei bambini nella Calabria di inizio Novecento attraverso l'Archivio Storico dell'ANIMI*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione» vol. 8, n. 2, 2021, pp. 97-107; F. Schirripa, *Ambienti montessoriani nei luoghi di Danilo Dolci: L'ANIMI a Trappeto (1954/1965)*, in P. Trabalzini (ed.), *Sensi immaginazione intelletto in Maria Montessori. Dimensione estetica ed espressione di sé*, Roma, Fefè editore, 2020, pp. 188-209.

⁵ *L'intesa con M. Montessori. Gli asili rurali. I corsi professionali per le maestre*, in G. Alatri, *Una vita per educare, tra arte e socialità. Alessandro Marcucci (1876-1968)*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006, pp. 133-149.

⁶ E. Moretti, *The best weapon for Peace. Maria Montessori, Education and Children's rights*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2021, pp. 18-30.

⁷ Alessandro Marcucci (1876-1964) was a central inspector for primary schools. He dedicated himself to rural education through the Ente scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano. He published numerous books, including *L'apostolato educativo di Giovanni Cena* (1928), and wrote a teaching programme adapted to the rural schools.

⁸ N. Quarenghi, «Qui... in queste terre eternamente bacciate dal sole». *Diario privato di Irene Bernasconi, maestra a Palidoro*, in Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., pp. 121-133.

1. *Training at the Montessori course*

Irene Bernasconi was born in 1886 in Chiasso into a wealthy family, as the second of ten children and the only daughter. She enrolled at the age of 28 in the *Corso di preparazione all'educazione infantile secondo il Metodo Montessori* (Preparatory Course for Childhood Education according to the Montessori Method) organised by the Società Umanitaria in Milan from December 1914 to June 1915. It is likely that she had become acquainted with the Montessori Method during the two-month apprenticeship she had done shortly before at a preschool in Chiasso. Indeed, since 1909 Canton Ticino had implemented the Montessori method on a large scale⁹ thanks to the enthusiasm of the young inspector Teresina Bontempi. After attending the first course organised at La Montesca, Bontempi was called upon by the Società Umanitaria to teach at the Montessori course organised in 1911 on Maria Montessori's instructions. She also organised two courses in Bellinzona in 1912 and 1913, for which she could boast of having received unpublished lectures by Montessori. But soon the latter no longer recognised the quality of her work: «Bontempi's pupils do not apply my method at all»¹⁰. This explains why Irene Bernasconi had to travel to Milan in order to train in the Montessori method.

Augusto Osimo, secretary of the Società Umanitaria, was in constant search of qualified personnel for the various Children's Houses opened by his institution: a School for Training in the Montessori Method was therefore set up, which was to be an «observatory, laboratory, magisterial institute»¹¹. The duration of the programme was lengthened: from the three months of the 1911 course to seven months. Again with a view to improving preparation, Osimo wished to admit people «who have completed the courses of a Scuola Normale»¹². However, it does not appear that Irene Bernasconi attended a Scuola Normale: it seems reasonable to assume that Osimo's wish was not fulfilled. A total of seventy-seven people enrolled in the course, of whom Irene Bernasconi was the only one from Ticino.

This course, and in particular her encounter with Maria Montessori's thinking, marked a real turning point in Irene Bernasconi's life. In one of her notebooks of meteorological observations and surveys compiled during the summer of 1915, lost amidst sketches of natural elements, Irene wrote her reflections: «Seven months spent there in the beautiful and noisy capital city of Lombardy for a Montessori Course changed me completely». The diary that is filled in daily throughout the course almost allows us to watch the course

⁹ W. Sahlfeld, A. Vanini, *La rete di Maria Montessori in Svizzera*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 25, 2018, pp. 163-180. In this essay Bérengère Kolly shows the complexity of the relationship between Montessori and Bontempi and the role played by the course given by Bontempi at the J.J. Rousseau Institute in the deterioration of their relationship: B. Kolly, *L'internationalisation montessorienne selon la stratégie du double gain: diffraction et problématiques de diffusion*, in R. Hofstetter, J. Droux, M. Christian (edd.), *Construire la paix par l'éducation: réseaux et mouvements internationaux au XXe siècle. Genève au cœur d'une utopie*, Genève, Alphil, 2020.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹¹ T. Pironi, *Maria Montessori e gli ambienti milanesi dell'Unione Femminile e la Società Umanitaria*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 25, 2018, p. 20.

¹² Sahlfeld, Vanini, *La rete di Maria Montessori in Svizzera*, cit., p. 169.

from the audience's side: the succession of lessons is transcribed, sometimes with a brief summary, any assignments, incidents of Montessori chronicle, personal observations, and discomforts. It is a useful tool for tracing the path of her education, or rather her transformation: did she not approach the figure of the "new teacher" proposed by Maria Montessori?

From the very beginning, on 9 December 1914, the day of the inauguration, Irene writes that she was captivated by Maria Montessori after her brief introductory speech: «The woman's magical voice enraptured me and, I confess, I heard it, I followed it, [...] it transported me, it dazed me and awakened me, something happened in me that I cannot say». The information in the diary¹³ makes us realise the high level of demand placed on the students. Irene devotes all her free time, even Sundays, to reading, studying, translating articles of interest to her from French, constructing activities or practising drawing. For Irene Bernasconi, Maria Montessori's thought is akin to a "Gospel", contrary to many students who seem more attracted to Maria Montessori's charismatic personality than to her educational proposal. Irene, upset, writes a dozen comments on the absences of her colleagues.

In the meantime, the concern grows in her to make this "moral charity work" reach everywhere: she has in mind the reality of many mountain villages where there is no running water. She took the opportunity of the paper on the preparation of the environment to envisage adaptations to these less affluent realities. She writes in her diary: «I described the furnishings for a Children's House in a poor village, and my findings made me a laughing stock, but, as the teacher [Anna Fedeli] said, they were fine and besides nothing was missing, everything was thought of with little expense». She suggests, for example, adding pretty curtains to the fruit boxes and using them as cupboards, or sawing a barrel in half to make a sink.

On several occasions, Irene makes it clear that this is a deeply transformative experience: «I didn't work with the goal of exams, no, I confess [...] I studied for me, forever, without the borderline point of leaving the bag, but for my own internal satisfaction, and I learnt very good things and that's enough for me». Only forty-nine students were admitted to the examinations and twenty-two passed, while Irene «[fails] the Pedagogy and Psychology exam» and commented: «What a pain!». Irene had to re-sit this exam in October.

2. *The opening of the first Children's Houses in the Agro*

Irene could have gone back to work in one of Ticino's many Children's Houses. This indeed she did, in Chiasso, during the school year 1916-1917 and from September 1919 to 1922, before returning to live in Mezzaselva with her husband Felice Socciarelli¹⁴, a

¹³ Irene's diary is contained in three handwritten notebooks with a total of 480 pages.

¹⁴ He published *Vita e scuola a Mezzaselva*, Roma, Associazione interessi del mezzogiorno, 1928. This book was a great success and had three editions with La Scuola. He wrote also: *Ragazzi*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1947;

primary school teacher. But a letter sent to Augusto Osimo by Alessandro Marcucci as director of the *Ente Scuole per i contadini dell'Agro Romano* changed her plans.

In October 1915, the Ente had decided to open ten preschools to improve the situation of the youngest children in the Roman countryside:

The wild children [...] live scattered and frightened around the hut, among the village huts as dark as the earth, unhealthier than a prison. The big ones work and have no time, the little ones are filthy and rustic and do not dare to go to the communal school, among the white walls and the children with their shoes, shirt and breakfast. They grow up like little bears: childhood is short, childhood is already painful, life repeats itself like an eternal sentence...¹⁵

Alessandro Marcucci, being the teacher that he was, followed «the Montessori method [...] personally to see the implementation [...] because] it seduced [himself] as an attempt in the Agro». Aware, however, that the other members of the committee board might advance some «prejudices - Rome is the characteristic city for this, but if one works with faith and modesty, one can succeed. [...] He decided, however, not to mention] the name of the method that would arouse prejudice, but one must act, indeed [we must act]»¹⁶. To ensure the success of his insight, he turned to the Società Umanitaria, in the person of Augusto Osimo, to ask if any new graduates would accept to work in the Agro. Aware of the living conditions awaiting future school teachers, Marcucci lists the elements to be taken into consideration when selecting candidates: they are required to have a «faculty of adaptation» because «the Agro has muddy and rutted roads, it requires healthy and resistant bodies». Possible candidates need «endurance, it is not trench work, but outpost work - like that of the teachers of the Agro»¹⁷. Given the many material obstacles, they need «people of sound training animated by a spirit of self-denial to create everything, the little or much that can be created from nothing». The environment is «gloomy and can be frightening», people «in love with [their] art and animated by humanitarian ideals [who want] to create life around them» are needed.

Furthermore, Marcucci is in a hurry, because he would like the preschools to open in early November when the families return. They are mostly families from Anticoli Corrado, a village in Ciociaria, who work during the cold months in Palidoro. In the second letter, Marcucci's stubbornness shines through. Not only does he have to stand up to his colleagues, but he also has to deal with a very limited budget to open ten preschools:

in three of them, because of the absolute impossibility of accommodating the teacher and because of the distance from Rome without means of transport, teachers or pseudo-teachers from the place were used and they will succeed as they will!; in two, two young ladies who had worked in the Montessori preschools of Rome, or rather in the preschools of the Case Popolari, went; in three, three nuns went, because in the Civil Organisation Committee there is a bit of everything, that is, all colours, and the

Scuola in campagna: dedicato ai maestri e alle maestre rurali, Roma, I Diritti della Scuola, 1946.

¹⁵ G. Alatri, *Dal chinino all'alfabeto: Igiene, istruzione e bonifiche nella campagna romana*, Roma, Fratelli Palombi, 2000, p. 75.

¹⁶ Letter of 26 October 1915 from Marcucci to Osimo preserved in Archivio Storico Società Umanitaria (ASSU), folder 369/1-1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

dominant colour, especially in the Roman countryside, all owned by a few princes, is rather dark. Now, against the mindset of such colleagues, I had to be tenacious and a little mysterious in arguing that I wanted to have at least two posts to be entrusted to eminent willing teachers who would come from ... Milan.

Unable to ask the Committee for funds to finance the trip for these two teachers, Marcucci organised a fund-raising campaign among friends. In the meantime, Osimo, taking advantage of the second session of examinations, became Marcucci's spokesperson to the candidates who were not promoted in June. Irene Bernasconi and Maria Arnaud¹⁸ from Cuneo proposed themselves.

On 26 November, Marcucci announces that the premises are ready, but there remains the problem of financing the Montessori materials¹⁹, for which he asks that payment be deferred. He also gives some additional details about the accommodation of the teacher who will go to Palidoro, in which one perceives the concern to offer decent living conditions. He emphasises the human factor: the schoolteacher will be a guest of the family renting the estate and «will live there as in a family [...] like a member of the household. And as such the hospitality will be complete, i.e. the young lady will spend nothing»²⁰.

A month later than hoped, due to various mishaps and the difficulties in ensuring decent living conditions for the teachers, the Children's House at Palidoro opened on 9 December 1915; the teacher Irene had arrived on 6 December, a month and a half after taking the Montessori Course examination at the Umanitaria.

3. *A pioneering experiment*

Thanks to Irene Bernasconi's short private diary in Palidoro, we can guess the many challenges she had to face from the very first day. As soon as she stepped off the train, the peculiarities of the Agro Romano, the «people different [from us] from the north in facial features and habits»²¹ leap out at her. If she says she is «won over» by the landscape so different from her own, with the sea, the vast horizon, the animals, she nevertheless immediately notices the net in front of the windows that «[reminds] her, that [tells] her and admonishes [her] that in the Agro Romano, in summer, malaria is a massacre». The first impression of desolation did not seem to frighten the Ticino schoolteacher: «it was

¹⁸ She published *Nel paese della promessa*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1923.

¹⁹ The workhouse of the Società Umanitaria manufactured the Montessori materials. Marcucci had managed to gather 400 lire to buy the materials for the several schools he planned to open, but each system cost 400 lire.

²⁰ Letter of 14 November 1915 from Alessandro Marcucci to Augusto Osimo preserved in Archivio Storico Società Umanitaria (ASSU), folder 369/1-1.

²¹ Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 41.

the place for [her], what [she was] looking for.... [She said she was] lucky to have found it and [decided] to stay»²².

When it opened, the Children's House was attended by thirty-one pupils, to which were added four new arrivals from Anticoli Corrado on 25 March 1916. Irene Bernasconi was shocked by the lack of hygiene: «The Roman countryside has only the sourness of the dirt of the people and the dreaded malaria»²³. Faced with the reality of the first day of school, she sets herself this goal: «[she will] try to do [her] best to instil in them even the imperious need, the necessity that the body has to keep itself clean, if it wants to stay healthy»²⁴. After a week she witnesses a small victory: «Toto felt the need to wash his hands», but the children remain «ruthless enemies of water»²⁵. One day when, due to bad weather, the children were fewer than usual, the teacher made up her mind: «overcoming a certain revulsion, [she] donned a kitchen apron and... go ahead! [She] washed their faces, necks, ears, hands, arms»²⁶. Her stubbornness gradually began to bring results: «everyone asked to rinse their hands». Some children do not want to turn up dirty at school and when there is no water in their hut they go in search of some puddle to rinse their faces. But their living conditions are really difficult, and in the middle of winter Irene writes: «Poor little ones, sometimes they are really pitiful; they are there full of cold, with snotty little noses, their toes out of their *ciocie* [traditional footwear], dressed, or rather covered in cotton wool rags [...] some of them wipe their noses with their hands. It is certain that here one must overcome all repugnance, roll up one's sleeves and ... forward, forward with a peaceful heart»²⁷.

Palidoro's diary was filled in every day from the first day of school to the last, on 29 June, with one exception: the day after Peppinella's death (the last enrolled) the diary was not filled in, the following note bears the dates 7 and 8 March, while on 9 March Irene Bernasconi wrote that «[she had] a feeling of exhaustion, [of being] shattered: Armando Bellardi, after 10 days of illness, died last night». On 13 March it was Alfredo who died and she writes that she did not go to see him because it is too sad a sight.

Irene was the doctor of the body: she detected the symptoms of various illnesses and fevers and identified the children to be examined by the doctor. During her hygiene lessons²⁸ in Milan, she had studied the symptoms and dangers of various childhood diseases and malaria. But the teacher was also a doctor of their minds: she had completely understood Maria Montessori's position on the importance of nourishing children's mental hunger when she wrote provocatively: «we believe that the child is happy when he plays: instead the child is happy when he works»²⁹. The diary is filled with episodes of children engaged in various tasks (collecting wood, fetching water, dusting, setting the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 124. It is a wordplay in Italian: "agro" means both countryside and sour.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁸ Dr De Din taught on 6 February "Infectious diseases and school hygiene" and on 26 February "Infectious diseases at school".

²⁹ M. Montessori, *Educazione e Pace*, Roma, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2004, p. 120.

table...) in which they do the best they are capable of. The teacher's pride is evident when she describes these situations, as for example in April: «Today little Rosina and Armando served at the table, two little children who will be three years old in July and September; you had to see how gracefully they held the bowls and how confidently they walked».

Before Palidoro, Irene Bernasconi had only worked with children in Chiasso and during her brief internship at the Casa dei Bambini in Via Solari in Milan. She had arrived in Palidoro «driven by a humanitarian feeling», bringing with her carefully prepared material; these were «albums made with pyrographed covers, in which [she had] pasted pictures cut from catalogues, representing kitchen utensils, clothing, animals». But the children had an unexpected reaction: «what an instinct of destruction in them all! [...] and everything [was] destroyed in less than two hours. As the children tore up the sheets, their shrieks subsided...»³⁰. After a month, however, Irene saw the group change: the «schoolchildren [were] quiet and industrious». The teaching materials did not arrive until 23 December, two weeks after the opening. The children were «stunned, dreamy, then little by little they wanted to touch everything» and when they returned to school after an illness several of them went directly to the cabinet «to touch everything and make sure it still existed».

Undoubtedly one of the first obstacles, which increased her loneliness, was the difficulty of understanding their dialect: «What phraseology do these *ciociari* use, I don't understand a thing, I remember the first days, stunned, out of my world, thrown here, I didn't know how to make sense of it, I didn't understand a jot». Nor does it make it easy to build an educational relationship with children who are afraid of being beaten by the teacher. The first days were full of their shrieks: «I looked around hoping to find someone who could translate what they were saying, the cook had a northern appearance, she looked like one of my sides, one day, in despair, I asked her: "Explain to me what this child means", but in order to explain, she repeated no more and no less than the same words to me, and I stood there with my mouth open, how could I get it right? the little ones were crying and shouting: "pizza voio", "sinale meo", "ello mi tata", and there I was, racking my brains, but how different from my dialect». In the private diary there are lists of new words with vocabulary useful for school life («sinale - apron; tenaglia - scissors; muso - face...»), or for everyday life, with the conversion of units of measurement («un paolo = 50 cents; un baiocco = 10 cents, un soldo = 5 cents, una foglietta = half a litre»)³¹.

She teaches the basic expressions for social life, but it will take some time before everyone is able to use the appropriate words. Irene writes that someone greets her by saying "good morning please", and when a lady comes to visit the school they greet her in chorus "good morning, Reverend!". She is surprised that the children do not know the names of colours and to enrich their vocabulary she shows them plenty of picture postcards and sings a lot.

Irene Bernasconi was a humble teacher who did not hesitate to admit that her judgement of a child had been wrong; she also wrote in her diary: «Cecchinello composes

³⁰ Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-131.

words really well, yet he seemed to me a little one without initiative, so different from all the others... I was wrong; he is affectionate»³². On other occasions she acknowledges her fears and agrees to overcome them: she feared, for example, allowing the little ones into the kitchen, but then writes: «you must never be prejudiced, ever»³³.

When she realised that the children preferred to draw on the blank sheet of paper instead of on the one with the outline of geometric shapes to be coloured, she insisted at first «on superior orders». She wrote this two days after the visit of Lina Olivero, on 4 February, her teacher at the course in Milan as well as director of the Casa dei Bambini in Via Solari, since it was an exercise to which Maria Montessori attached great importance in preparing the hand for writing. But when, a month later, she realises that the refusal persists («no one completes the drawing on the sheet of paper that has the outline to be coloured; they are then unhappy and in a bad mood if I insist on handing it to them»), she decides to let the children do the free drawing, which they carry out with «delicacy and commitment». She writes: «why stifle, restrict their thinking within the contours of a circle, of a triangle?». Irene demonstrates a true “Lombardian spirit”³⁴: she had realised that Maria Montessori’s pedagogical proposal is not a set of recipes to be applied, but a philosophy of life, a peculiar way of looking at the children, of seeing their potential, of encouraging them and relating to them. This is why she decides to expand the activities she proposes to the children, even if they are not provided for by Maria Montessori, because, she writes, «the safest guidance comes to me from the children». She does not hesitate to apply Lombardo Radice’s suggestions, with the introduction, in addition to free drawing, of reading pictures or observing the garden. She is a teacher who asks many questions, reads a lot and compares herself with other teachers, particularly Maria Arnaud, although she writes that hers was «a strictly Montessorian experience»³⁵.

The parents are grateful to the teacher for the transformation of their children: «she is more beautiful now that she comes to you»³⁶, and they show their gratitude with the means they have at their disposal, some with an egg, some with an onion. The children, on the other hand, give the teacher many bouquets of flowers every day. Her care in decorating the place has infected them, they can’t get to have lunch without flowers on the table. Irene Bernasconi has spared no effort and places no limits on her commitment. «The rural teacher, in practice, had to consider himself on duty from dawn to dusk and provide for everything [...] without making a distinction between his educational role in the classroom and his role in the village»³⁷. She shows her room to the children as an example of an «oasis of peace». She welcomes a child who comes to visit her at 6.30 am asking her to button his trousers because his mother has gone to work in the fields. Irene is at the service of all: «On Sundays after mass, mothers, brides, girlfriends come to me,

³² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁴ G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, a cura di L. Cantatore, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2022, p. 32.

³⁵ M. Arnaud, *Nel paese della promessa*, Firenze, Vallecchi, p. 109.

³⁶ Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 93.

³⁷ Alatri, *Dal chinino all'alfabeto: Igiene, istruzione e bonifiche nella campagna romana*, cit., p. 98.

I am their scrivener for the soldiers»³⁸. She is a teacher who puts no distance between herself and the families she visits in the huts, even when this closeness is reproached by many a person: «How can you go to those people: it takes guts, with so many fleas there are. We have the appearance of being clean, graceful, but perhaps, in certain things, we are less so than they are. And then why look down on these poor, good-hearted people?»³⁹.

4. *The positive outcomes*

Alessandro Marcucci's solicitude for the preschool in Palidoro was also felt through his visits. It was a way of realising how much his audacity to open a Montessori preschool, investing funds to bring in a teacher from Milan, had paid off. He was accompanied by several members of the Committee or the American Red Cross, so as to make the very positive outcome of his idea known. Irene Bernasconi, too, did not hide her delight: «Today I was delighted to see them intent, calm and joyful, on the exercises with the Fabrics, the Pink Tower and the Stairs, the Sound Cylinders, the Spindles boxes, ... pervaded by a different contentment, as if more concentrated and aware ... Five months exactly since the preschool opened its doors!». Indeed, the children have made enormous and sustained progress, many of them make up words with the letters of the movable alphabet or even write, when they are not yet six years old. Even Irene is amazed at the small "miracles" that have happened: «It's true, I still can hardly believe it, but it happened in my Children's House!». She is amazed to see the phenomena she had heard about during the course and observed in Milan happening.

In the context of such desolation, the phenomenon of the explosion of writing, which she witnessed on several occasions, makes even more sense: «How is it that if on 23 February he could compose with the movable alphabet and yet could not write a single vowel, on 28 February, when asked by several visitors, he even writes a capital "r" in the morning with beautiful handwriting?»⁴⁰. Many children are caught up in a writing frenzy, to the point of filling the floor and the door with words. And when the chalks are finished, they don't stop, they go and get «wild pumpkins» from the garden to replace them.

Alessandro Marcucci also made a few visits on Sundays, accompanied by his family. It was a way of making his caring closeness felt to the teacher who often felt the weight of loneliness: «before I look out I think I will see a person I know, and I run with that hope to the window, only to stand there with a disappointed face on the mosquito net»⁴¹.

But despite the difficulties, for Irene Bernasconi it was a very enriching experience, as the closing words of her diary show:

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁹ Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 101.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

These children, the first ones I had with me, made me learn so many things... These little white, simple hearts, these little souls so candid and neglected are caskets full of joy, of feeling; fresh, fragrant souls, souls of poets! [...] Here, in these eternally sun-kissed lands, I returned as a 15-year-old girl; here I sang again the romances I sang at the age of 20, here I returned as a pure and holy girl [...] how much, how good it has done me; how it has changed me. I have become good, my soul is young, purer, more innocent than when I was eighteen...⁴²

After a year at Chiasso and attending the Summer Course at the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, Irene Bernasconi returned to the Agro to carry out her important work at Mezzaselva from 1917 to 1919. It is a commitment that also deserves to be studied.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

“She Told Me to Read, Always Read”.

Itineraries of Reading Education through the Oral Testimonies of Teachers and Students of Yesterday

Monica Dati
University of Florence (Italy)

Introduction

Reading, in its fascinating complexity, is one of the practices on which central aspects of our cultural tradition and of our emotional and intellectual life are based and the field of studies related to its history is extremely wide, articulated, diversified and rich in very heterogeneous documentary sources. Among these, the autobiographical memories of readers, their intimate, unique and subjective experiences, their individual stories that participate in a collective story can highlight the least investigated and neglected aspects, those that have to do with feelings, emotions, and ideal impulses. The practice of reading, as we know, recurs in a plurality of activities and human situations and in response to extremely heterogeneous needs, making its history and the study approaches to it numerous and colourful in a field that can seem really inexhaustible: putting the reader's experience at the centre, necessarily taking into account autobiographical sources and new survey methodologies, is one of the many viable paths as evidenced by the studies and research of Robert Darnton (1994), Martin Lyons (2010), Alberto Manguel (2014), Jonathan Rose (2022), Edmund King (2013) and Michèle Petit (1993). The pioneer of this approach was Richard D. Altick who, in his volume *The English common reader*, dated 1957, affirms in a far-sighted and emblematic way «If only I had the autobiographical work of a butcher!»¹. Making a significant change of perspective that underlines the importance of diaries, memoirs and marginalia, with particular attention to oral testimonies where individual readers describe their reading habits and allow us to appreciate their enormous diversity. Little is said about these experiences today, as much as reading is one of the central practices of our emotional and intellectual life and despite the fact that the book remains among the main sources of learning that accompanies us throughout our lives, not only culturally but also socially, ethically and civically.

¹ R.D. Altick, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800-1900*, Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 1998, p. 5.

Based on this framework, the research aims to trace, thanks to the video testimonies contained in the “Memorie educative in video” database kept in the web portal www.memoriascolastica.it, a specific path dedicated to reading education in the school context through the point of view of teachers and former students. Topics that intersect with the pedagogical debate, educational proposals and initiatives, reflections on the textbook, and more generally with the history of the school and some of the problems that have traversed our country, including illiteracy. It is a path that certainly needs to be enriched and deepened, however, it remains to demonstrate how it is possible to build, through the use of Oral History and the return of memories and recollections, a reflection around reading, its multiple educational values with reference to one of the main contexts in which it is practiced, that of school.

1. *Oral sources and digital archives for the history of reading: some examples*

Contemporary historiography has re-evaluated autobiographical testimonies – diaries, memoirs, letters, oral sources – as a precious resource for historians because they allow them to “grasp” and understand the ideas and behaviours of the individuals who have produced them and to whom “official” sources often do not give a voice, which accompany and determine the course of an existence and almost always remain silent or remain closed off in family or collective memories. An approach based on the primacy of individual and collective experiences, which brings us closer to people’s thoughts, to what they have felt and perceived. The particular and rich declension that Oral History has had in Italy is certainly testimony and important outcome of this methodological approach and the new sensitivity towards all those categories of diversity that in the past have been clearly left silent. Born outside the strict academic context, orality represents – as Di Pasquale explains – a cognitive method, a source, a document and is also a new model of literary representation of history, sociology and cultural anthropology:

It is a method because the interview recorded and then transcribed arises from an oral communication that relates different people and subjectivities. It is a source because oral testimony, typically of a biographical tone, conveys a different version of historical events. It is based on a different temporal representation from the punctual and linear representation of official documents. A representation that has to do with the subjective experience, with group membership, with mentalities and emotions that escape the official written sources. It is a document because the testimony in its expressive power, in its original and realistic capacity, acquires an emblematic and symbolic value that goes beyond the contents².

During the twentieth century oral history affirmed, not without contrasts and oppositions, its legitimacy and usefulness, focusing above all on the history from below,

² C. Di Pasquale, *Antropologia della memoria. Il ricordo come fatto culturale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, pp. 113-114, translation by the author.

of those excluded from traditional history, giving voice to the many subjects that had so far remained marginal in the Great Narratives.

The field of studies that deals with the history of the school, within the history of education (McCulloch, 2011), has also used non-textual sources, such as photographs or paintings, with increasing conviction. A small part of these studies has also discovered, albeit with some delay, the use of oral sources (Gardner 2003; Yanes Cabrera, Meda, Viñao 2017) shifting the emphasis of the studies on people's perceptions and feelings, on the internal and community aspects of social life³.

There are also scholars who have used oral sources to investigate the history of reading from the point of view of the user, a story of men and women, their gestures, attitudes, habits and feelings: «Twenty years ago, the historiography of reading scarcely existed. Many historians at that time doubted that we could ever recover anything so private, so evanescent as they inner experiences of ordinary readers in the past»⁴. A first emblematic example is provided by Michèle Petit (Ladefroux, Petit, Gardien, *Lecteurs en campagne. Les ruraux lisent-ils autrement?*, 1993). The anthropologist, carrying out research on reading in rural French environments in the 1980s, was surprised to find that, in certain regions, reading could prove impossible, or risky, because for many farmers it represented a kind of transgression and its usefulness was not evident. Attempting this type of research based on oral sources was also Martyn Lyons, along with the scholar Lucy Taksa in the volume *Australian Readers Remember* (1992). It is a cultural history survey based on the reading habits of sixty Australian elders, who were asked to recall and analyse their relationship with reading between the end of the nineteenth century and during the first three decades of the twentieth century. A work that offers an account of the readers' memories through oral history, examines the spread of reading and how individuals had access to it, attitudes towards books, as well as the myths and prejudices surrounding the act of reading. Similar projects are represented by "Scottish Readers Remember", "Speaking of Reading" by Nadine Rosenthal and the work led by Sarah McNicol who, using an oral history methodology, explores the memories of English childhood reading experiences during the 1940s and 1950s⁵. Another scholar who made use of oral sources for her research was Janice Radway, author of the monograph *Reading the Romance*, one of the most significant academic studies on popular romantic fiction in the United States that seriously evaluates the consumption of the romance novel by involving the readers themselves and deciding to go beyond the concepts of registered reader, ideal or model and to work with real subjects.

It is a small sample of examples that testify to how the history of reading increasingly makes use of oral and autobiographical sources. However, they are not always easily

³ G. Bandini, A. Mangiatordi, *600 maestri raccontano la loro vita professionale in video: un progetto di (fully searchable) open data*, in *IX Convegno Annuale AIUCD. La svolta inevitabile: sfide e prospettive per l'informatica umanistica*, Milano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020, pp. 14-18.

⁴ J. Rose, *The history of education as the history of reading*, «History of Education», vol. 36, n. 4-5, 2007, p. 595.

⁵ S. McNicol, *Memories Of Reading in the 1940S and 1950S*, «New Review of Children's Literature & Librarianship», vol. 13, n. 2, 2007, pp. 101-116.

accessible, they are often obscure, hidden, scattered and fragmented resources and their discovery is often a matter of serendipity or the by-product of other research. How to trace the experiences of the common readers? Autobiographical and journalistic archives are a valuable aid in this regard. They constitute a particular place of collection of documents united by the will of the writer to leave a trace of their life, a testimony of their own experiences, thoughts and reflections that have accompanied particular events or simple daily life and that represent sources of research and insight into the great themes (and not only) that affect our society. In recent years, these types of archives have begun to acquire relevance in the scientific landscape, also thanks to scholars such as Philippe Lejeune, Pietro Clemente and Duccio Demetrio, who have promoted their knowledge and cultural value in countries such as France, Spain, Germany and Belgium. Among the most famous in Italy are, to name a few, the Ligurian Archive of “Scrittura Popolare”, the Historical Archive of Trento and that of the Department of Linguistic and Literary Philological Studies of the University of Rome Tor Vergata relating to Family Books, the “Archivio Diaristico” of Pieve Santo Stefano.

Within this colourful and heterogeneous panorama we also find databases reserved exclusively for reading: these are projects born especially in the Anglo-Saxon area and fortunately available online thanks to digital archives. The question of the need to create databases and web spaces dedicated solely to reading testimonies was raised by Simon Eliot, professor of the History of the Book at the University of London. The archive he devised, RED presents itself as a useful tool to help students and researchers tap into freely available resources and sources related to reading experiences in Britain over a five-century span, between 1450 and 1945. Eliot’s intuition was to suggest that the historical study of the lending registers of libraries or the sales registers of publishers and booksellers, as necessary and important, could not in itself provide an accurate history of reading⁶. Who knew what happened to the books after they had been bought or borrowed? Sources used included memoirs, letters and marginalia in books and manuscripts, magazines, journals, interrogative (e.g., court records and prison inspections) and oral sources.

Inspired by RED, projects dedicated exclusively to the collection of interviews and oral sources have also taken shape. Among these, we find first of all “Memories of Fiction” which represents an oral history archive containing 46 interviews conducted between 2014 and 2015 with members of the reading groups of the London district of Wandsworth. Particularly interesting is the study that the creator and curator Shelley Trower, obtained from the interviews: *Forgetting Fiction: An Oral History of Reading, 2014–15*. In it, it emerges that, more than the books themselves, it is the reading experience and the context in which they are read: on the bus or in the library, with a parent or alone: «The Memories of Fiction project title alluded to memories of fiction in a double sense: both to interviewees’ memories of fictional narratives they had read, and to those memories themselves as potentially fictional (for example, in remembering plots or

⁶ S. Eliot, *The Reading Experience Database; or, what are we to do about the history of reading?*, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm>, 2012 (last access: 25.01.2023)

characters inaccurately)»⁷. Trower has also promoted another project, "Living Libraries"⁸, which aims to study public libraries through the life experiences of people who use, work or manage them: between August 2019 and January 2020, a total of forty-seven oral histories were collected, archived in the British Library Sound Archive and made publicly accessible. Finally it is worth mentioning "Reading Sheffield - All the books of our lives"⁹. It is a resource to promote reading directly curated by some Sheffield readers: funded by the Sheffield Town Trust, the oldest of the local charities, the main purpose is to explore the context of the readers' experiences during the 1940s and 1950s. An initiative that acquires a particularly significant value because it was born and driven from below, from the community of readers of an English citizen¹⁰.

Those described represent some examples capable of highlighting how digital history represents a particularly suitable perspective for studies on educational memories, especially in fostering a link between academic research, learning places and life contexts. A very useful approach to incorporate stories from below in the historical narrative in ways that are not always possible in the press, in exhibitions and obviously in school textbooks that make use of new communication technologies, helping to give voice not only to individuals but also to associations and groups, just as happens in the portal that we are going to describe in the next paragraph: memoriascolastica.it

2. *Reading in the school memory database "Memoria scolastica"*

The website "Memoria scolastica" was created as part of the project of significant national interest "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation", a research project that focuses its attention on school memory, understood as an individual, collective and public practice of evoking a common school past. As we read on the project's home page:

School memory is an interpretative category that has recently been introduced in the historiographical reflection of the historical-educational sector at an international level, both in the countries of the Ibero-American area and in those of central Europe, both in the countries of the Ibero-American area and in the Anglo-Saxon world, and it has soon established itself also in Italy, thanks above all to the early presence in Italy, largely thanks to the studies carried out by the scholars who have joined this project in the last five years.

⁷ From the homepage <https://memoriesoffiction.org> (last access 22.01.2023).

⁸ See <https://www.livinglibraries.uk/> (last access 22.01.2023).

⁹ See <https://www.readingsheffield.co.uk/> (last access 22.01.2023).

¹⁰ The project conceived by the author www.madeleineinbiblioteca.it is inspired by these English databases. For more details: M. Dati, *Leggere di nascosto in età contemporanea. Un seminario costruito con fonti orali tra Public History e Library learning*, «Lifelong Lifewide Learning», vol. 17, n. 38, 2021, pp. 397-409; M. Dati, *Come nasce un lettore. Ricordi di lettura e memorie di educazione familiare a partire dal progetto Madeleine in biblioteca*, «Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare», vol. 18, n. 1, 2021, pp. 317-335.

Inside is the “Educational memories in video” repository, an electronic archive of video testimonies of teachers, students and educators who speak about their school life. Although not specifically dedicated to reading, the database allows us to investigate some aspects that are difficult to find in other projects precisely because they are linked to the world of schools and the educational context. Finding within the archive a transversal and multiform theme such as that of reading is not simple, but by making use of specific keywords you can get to some testimonies that dedicate ample space to it. Here we focus our attention on the memories and recollections that deal with the themes of reading teaching, literacy courses for adults, the textbook and its questioning and the promotion of the pleasure of reading. A first step of a path to be enriched and deepened to highlight the importance of oral sources in creating a reflection on reading, its multiple educational values with reference to one of the main contexts in which it is practiced, that of school. Below are some examples and excerpts from interviews.

2.1 *Teaching and learning to read with the syllabic phonetic method*

How and through what teaching practices do children acquire the ability to read and write? In the stories, we find strategies and stratagems that characterise the daily teaching practice of teachers, but also attitudes, postures, reflections on how professional knowledge is built that help us understand the profound characteristics of teaching practices that can facilitate learning to read. Emblematic in this regard is the interview with the teacher Mariangela Ciacagli (1956, Tuscany). As can be deduced from the title, *L'importanza delle metodologie didattiche* the central theme of the testimony is represented by school methodologies, with a particular reflection on the teaching of reading and the need to alternate the various methods according to the needs of the class and teamwork with other teachers¹¹. Starting from the 1970s in Italy, the classic alphabetical (or phonetic) method was accompanied by other “innovative” ways to teach reading, equivalent to the Whole Word method of the United States: in Italian they have had and continue to have many names and variants, such as global, visual, ideo-visual, natural, mixed method, etc., but essentially in all cases it is a matter of starting to learn to read with a visual and non-phonical approach to reading, considering the words all in their entirety, teaching them to memorise and recognise them as visual images. The teacher also recalls the method developed by Ferruccio Deva in the 1960s. Starting from Decroly’s studies, the scholar elaborated a partial revision of the global method developed by the Belgian pedagogist, based on the observation that the child learns concrete words of which he or she knows the meaning more easily than words or groups of letters without an tangible meaning or with an unknown meaning. On the graphical level, the Turin scholar also demonstrated that the learning of writing was facilitated by the use of uppercase capital letters. On the

¹¹ Of the same opinion is the teacher Donati (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/dai-decreti-delegati-ai-giorni-nostri-le-memorie-della>) (last access: 20.02.2023).

basis of this research, he developed appropriate teaching tools and techniques widely used in Italian schools and known as the "Deva method". However, the method mainly used and appreciated by the sample of teachers in the database seems to be the phono-syllabic method still considered the most effective as much as it may seem boring and dated, the Italian language has the advantage of having a correspondence between grapheme and phoneme, so the passage of grapheme-phoneme association is simpler than in other languages, such as English or French. In this regard, the teacher MariaGrazia Lazzareschi (entry to role in 1974, Tuscany) says that she has continued to use the phono-syllabic method because, in her opinion, the global method is not suitable for students with specific learning disorders (*Tra pluriclassi e metodologie scolastiche: le memorie della maestra Lazzareschi*). The teacher Danilo Serafini (1962, Tuscany) is of the same opinion. Serafini also remembers the syllables and the volumes of which he is entrusted with the task of accompanying a child from the first encounter with the alphabet to the reading of small passages (*Avevo imparato a leggere prima di andare alle elementari grazie ad Alberto Manzi: i ricordi del maestro Serafini*).

2.2 Learning to read as an adult

One of the most interesting points of Serafini's video-testimony is represented by the teacher's memory of his personal experience of learning reading skills: «I had learned to read even before going into the first year of primary school thanks to Alberto Manzi and his broadcast that I used to follow, obviously the episodes were made especially for the illiterate and or for those who had to interrupt school or who had to acquire an elementary licence instead». A testimony that makes us reflect on the relationship between school and society that characterised the post-war period and all the 1960s, on the problem of illiteracy, whose percentages remained alarming and on the important work of Manzi: his broadcast "Non è mai troppo tardi"¹² would teach the many illiterate Italians of that time the bases of understanding and social communication and would allow more than a million and a half people to obtain the elementary licence. A context rendered very well by the interview with Graziella Bartolini («*Mi disse di leggere, leggere sempre*»). Born in a rural hamlet in the province of Florence in 1949, she came from a large and numerous farming family. Her parents, who had attended school until the third year of primary school, read with great difficulty. Although compulsory schooling up to the age of 14 was provided for by law, it was disregarded until the second half of the 1960s, either due to the absence of middle schools or vocational schools nearby or, on the other hand, due to economic problems. This is also the case for Graziella who, however, evokes the school experience as deeply significant for her school career: among the teachings received, she

¹² Also remembered by the student Angela Galletti: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/non-avevamo-la-calcolatrice-noi-i-conti-si-facevano-tutti> (last access: 20.02.2023).

recalls above all the advice of the Year 6 teacher, who, aware of the impossibility for Bartolini to go any further, recommended to her that she read, read always, without losing pace and without getting disheartened if she did not have the money to buy books, because she could resort to the library or newspapers. Similar problems are found in the video testimonials collected by Jessica Lombardi for the purposes of preparing her thesis *Le scuole di Montemurlo dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (2019/2020) aimed at analysing the school context of Montemurlo, an area in the province of Prato, starting from the post-war period: «The stories they told, the difficulties they had to go through during the war and in the post-war period, school, which was not always a priority for parents dedicated to work, and childhood spent between the fields and desks, brought to light a reality that I knew existed, but whose proximity I had never realised». It is the stories of Franca and Annamaria Menici and Giancarlo Lombardi who, like many other children, ended their schooling too soon by finding themselves as adults without an adequate degree («*S'era in tanti che si andava a lavorare*»: *memorie d'infanzia di Franca Menici*). These are important memories that remind us not only how illiteracy in Italy has represented a problem of great proportions, but also of the lack of an adequate adult education system. In the 1960s, those wishing to resume their studies or carry out cultural updating activities had essentially two routes available: a) Evening courses, at public schools with severe difficulties related to rigidity and widening of the schedule. b) Public courses for adults: financed by the Ministry of Education and usually managed by private bodies to which they were entrusted. The experiences produced by associations such as the COS (Centres of Social Orientation) founded by Aldo Capitini and the CCP (Public Culture Centres) promoted by the UNLA were richer and more up-to-date from a pedagogical and cultural point of view. One problem is that of adult literacy, which would continue to be at the centre of the debate throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, with the start of public schools and the important experience of the 150 hours. Emblematic in this regard is the memory of the teacher Daniela Migliori who began his teaching role in 1972 in the small school of Fratta (Cortona, Arezzo). In retracing her professional history, she mentions the after-school teaching and the years spent in schools for adult literacy: «I did three years of literacy school, there were several illiterate and semi-literate people who needed the Primary School Certificate, so I rose to the occasion, I worked every night except on Saturdays and I taught a group of people of a certain age but also young and old who could not even sign for the post».

A memory that evidences how precarious the teacher's professional habitus was, but above all how much the problem of illiteracy was still alive in those years, a theme that we also find in the testimony of the teacher Rita D'Arpinzio (*Dalle colonie estive al ruolo di maestra*). In the interview the teacher, employed for 42 years in the primary school of Monteiasi in the province of Taranto, remembers being able to enter the role thanks to the experience gained at the school of public courses. With the help of her husband and her mother-in-law the teacher managed to set up a class for illiterate adults: «with a full year of substitution and a year of public school, one entered the role thanks to a specific law».

2.3 Criticism of the textbook

The seventies also saw a particular phase in the history of the textbook in our country, that relating to the criticism and rethinking of this important learning tool. These are the textbooks that, with particular reference to primary school, are denounced by the well-known "Stupidario" created in 1969 by some Genoese teachers; the books ridiculed by Umberto Eco in his texts *Ammazza l'Uccellino* and the *Pampini Bugiardi*; the books that the Educational Cooperation Movement and its authoritative representatives begin to criticise by proposing the alternative model inspired by the *Bibliothèque du travail* of Freinet and represented by the class library.

A ferment that can be documented not only through printed sources, but also thanks to the help of oral sources, a way to encourage the conservation and enhancement, in a historical perspective, of the experiences of those who contributed to innovation at school in those years. Thanks to some video testimonies found in specific repositories dedicated to the memory of the teaching profession (e.g. "Memorie Magistrali" by Indire¹³, "Memorie di Scuola", <https://memoriediscuola.it>) it is possible to find the voices of teachers of the Educational Cooperation Movement (MCE) that were directly confronted with educational tools, technologies and textbooks. With regard to "Memoria Scolastica" is particularly significant the interviews presented in the video *«Lessere maestro o maestra perché avevi vinto il concorso dovevi scordartelo»: memorie del gruppo Mce pisano*¹⁴ that collect a series of testimonies of teachers active in the Pisan MCE (Michela Lanciani, Isabella Moretti, Giovanna Zitiello, Tiziana Gasperi) curated by the student Francesca Petrucci as part of her master's thesis work (2020). In it, the teachers also refer to Law No. 517 of 1977 which gave the possibility of alternative choice to the textbook, a theme dear to the MCE, which conceived the book, the school manual «one of the institutional tools of passivisation of the student as of the teacher». The teachers recall that in a report of a meeting of the MCE in Pisa in 1978 the pedagogical principle was declared according to which one learns only by listening to those who know, encourages only a passive attitude, and is convinced that knowledge is transmitted from one to the other not in the sense of transfer, but literally in the sense of a filter and this implies implementing an involvement that is not only cognitive, but also emotional and behavioural. These are experiences and experiments that find a point of contact with the recent perspectives that see the digital as an opportunity to review study practices through resources and self-produced books (legitimised by Ministerial Decree no. 781/20139); an opportunity to retrace a stage in the complex history of the textbook as a learning tool in order to reflect on today and understand in what form textbooks can retain their function in the digital age.

¹³ See <https://www.indire.it/progetto/memorie-magistrali/movimento-di-cooperazione-educativa/> (last access: 20.02.2023).

¹⁴ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/lessere-maestro-o-maestra-perche-avevi-vinto-il-concorso> (last access 20.02.2023).

2.4 *The pleasure of reading*

It was Gianni Rodari, with his *Nove modi per insegnare ai ragazzi a odiare la lettura* (1966)¹⁵, who first advised adults intending to instil a love of reading to avoid exercises of constraint on the text, not to impose prohibitions and obligations, to offer a wide free choice of texts and to read aloud to children and young people. In this sense, it is 1985 that represents a turning point because for the first time in a ministerial policy text it is suggested to the teacher to ignite interests suitable for bringing out the pleasure of reading. It is an issue also addressed by Ermanno Detti in the essay *Il piacere di leggere* (1987). The writer, explicitly referring to Calvino¹⁶, states that among the various ways of reading, one in particular is aimed exclusively at pleasure and can be called “sensual” because it involves all the senses and takes us into an imaginary world from which we return to reality enriched and deeply involved. It is a “naive” experience, but the only one that can create a positive attitude towards printed paper for a lifetime. According to Detti, it is precisely the school that has the task of allowing this pleasure to be felt by eliminating the notional study just as the testimony of Cristina Totti suggests (1971, Tuscany)¹⁷. The former student recalls a teacher focused on the memorisation of poems, in particular on the recitation of the poem *I Sepolcri*, whose book had been included in the list of volumes to be purchased for the course of the lessons: «verses to be learned by heart, every morning in turn a student had to repeat all of this poem by heart, if you made a mistake, even one little word, you had to start again from the beginning». In this way, for the witness, reading even in front of passionate teachers who were able to get students to engage with works such as *I malavoglia*, *La Divina Commedia* and *I Promessi Sposi* was always experienced by her as an activity linked to school and to the requests of teachers.

The interview that has as its subject the memories of the former student Alessandro Baccani is dedicated to the pleasure of reading (Florence, 1966)¹⁸. The interviewee initially remembers the subsidiary, «a unique volume that contained all the humanities and scientific subjects» and then the love for school books: «As children, let’s put it this way, we tended to be quite solitary, this was because I started reading alone before going to school and for me books were a great source of company so when I went to school I did it with enthusiasm, I went to school very willingly». The volumes of text were usually bought used: «I think I only had new books in primary school, those few times that parents were – in quotation marks – forced to buy them. I always remember the new books eagerly, because the new books were so beautiful, even the smell that emanated from the press, when I would get a new book it was always a celebration». A memory is also reserved

¹⁵ Gianni Rodari is remembered by the student Sandra Bongio: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/ascoltando-la-maestra-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access 20.02.2023).

¹⁶ I. Calvino, *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*, Torino, Einaudi, 1979.

¹⁷ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/invasa-da-questi-album-di-figurine-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access 20.02.2023).

¹⁸ See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/quando-potevo-avere-un-libro-nuovo-era-sempre-una-festa-i> (last access 20.02.2023).

for dictionaries¹⁹ and for the encyclopaedia in particular. «Knowledge was in there», so it was there that it was necessary to turn when the homework was to “do research”. They lasted for years, they kept a photograph of the world and allowed access to the pillars of geography and science, history and culture: «the books in the house were always there as a result of the passion of my mother, which I probably inherited, of mom and of my grandmother; to do research I had the encyclopaedia, the encyclopaedia as a necessary reference for research, on the level of in-depth analysis». As emerges from the words of the witness that the encyclopedia acquired a fundamental value in terms of knowledge but also of relationship: «if someone did not have one, we found ourselves hosting those who did not have an encyclopaedia. They would come, I hosted many classmates who perhaps needed to further their knowledge of some topics». Alessandro also recalls the importance of school libraries. The school library, of every order and degree, has always been for many decades a sort of second series library, since the reference legislation does not even recognise the figure of the school librarian, usually covered by teachers and volunteer teachers. It is a collective space that in the past acquired an important role in terms of access to culture as stated in the testimony: «In this regard we have always been very lucky, in short, there were access opportunities for everyone, both in primary and middle schools, there was also a cabinet with books inside; in secondary schools there was an institute library that could be accessed»²⁰.

Conclusions

The references proposed here constitute a small sample that, although limited, trace, thanks to oral and digital history, a path of analysis on the reading practices of students and teachers. The latter can prove to be a useful tool for future generations of teachers: not only to identify the strategies that have been most productive, but also to initiate a comparison to enrich through historical awareness that important competence of teacher training represented by reflexivity. Investigating memories and reading memories can also represent an unprecedented and original way of dealing with the history of reading in the school context and the start of a possible path of advancing knowledge that provides for a strong involvement of people and their heritage of memories and experiences:

We remain convinced of the significance of historiographic research on educational memories and the continued relevance of autobiographical sources for the reconstruction of the processes of transformation of individual and collective identities. The discourse is more than open, and corresponds to the need to

¹⁹ See the work of Gastone Novelli dedicated to vocabulary (1964), <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/opere-darte/il-vocabolario> (last access 20.02.2023).

²⁰ The testimony of Fabio Tesi should also be taken into consideration: <https://www.memoriedinfanzia.it/video/fabio-tesi-ricordi-di-scuola-e-di-infanzia-negli-anni-60-e-70/> (last access 23.02.2023).

gather further elements of consolidation for the delineation of strands of research, that are perhaps still little valued, but widely accredited on an epistemological level²¹.

²¹ E. Macinai, S. Oliviero, *Le memorie di educazione familiare: voci, autobiografie, suoni e immagini. Prospettive di ricerca*, «RIEF-Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare», n. 1, 2017, p. 18.

The “Diario di una maestra”¹ of Maria Giacobbe² and the Sardinian School

Piera Caocci
University of “Gabriele d’Annunzio”
Chieti-Pescara (Italy)

«The school, as an unexpected collateral result, has given us a series of extraordinary books, for example the *Diario di una maestra* by Giacobbe», wrote Tullio De Mauro confirming the importance of this ego-document of the Sardinian writer, to be considered one of the most incisive and innovative post World War II Italian school *memoirs*³. As underlined by the linguist himself, Giacobbe is part, together with other authors such as Maria Maltoni, Leonardo Sciascia, Albino Bernardini and others, «of the rank of teachers to whom we owe a large part of the progressing path of our schools, especially of kindergarten and primary school»⁴.

1. *Biographical reports*

Maria Giacobbe was born in the 1928 in Nuoro to a wealthy family. She attended school during Fascism and in a context, like that of Nuoro, strongly marked by the

¹ On the work of Maria Giacobbe see D. Pigliaru, *Maria Giacobbe vista da G. Dessì e N. Tanda*, «Frontiera», vol. 8, n. 93, 1975, p. 312; A. Capitini, *A proposito del diario di una maestra*, «Ichnusa», vol. 6, n. 24, 1958, pp. 41-43; A. Pigliaru, *Note sul «Diario di una maestra»*, «Ichnusa», vol. 5, n. 20, 1957, pp. 13-23.

² On the life and work of Maria Giacobbe see M. Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, Nuoro, Il Maestrale, 2020; M. Giacobbe, *Piccole Cronache*, Bari, Laterza, 1961; M. Giacobbe, *Le Radici*, Cagliari, Edizione Della Torre, 1996; R.M.G. Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi (l'opera narrativa e saggistica di Maria Giacobbe)*, Thesis, Faculty of Education Sciences (Supervisor: S. Maxia), Cagliari, University of study of Cagliari, Academic Year 1998/1999; M. Pittau, *L'era fascista nella provincia italiana: il Littorio a Nùgoro e in Sardegna, con la lettera di Maria Giacobbe*, Sassari, EDES, 2011; G. Marci, *Radici e poesie della Sardegna: la scrittrice Maria Giacobbe racconta in una intervista il suo percorso umano e letterario: i due linguaggi della narrazione*, «La Nuova Sardegna», vol. 97, n. 153, 1987, p. 28; P. Alcioni, P. Degli Esposti, *Cagliari, racconti di Maria Giacobbe*, Cagliari, T Hotel, 2010; P. Caocci, *Intervista a Maria Giacobbe, autrice del Diario di una maestra*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 1, 2023.

³ On the role of the scholastic diary as a source for historical reconstruction see A. Viñao, *Las Autobiografías, Memorias y diarios como fuente histórico-educativa: tipología y usos*, «Teias», vol. 1, n. 1, 2000, pp. 223-253; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

⁴ T. De Mauro, *Prefazione*, in A. Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, Nuoro, Illisso, 2004, p. 12.

propaganda of the Regime. It must be taken into account that the “Atene Sarda”, the city of Nobel Prize winner Grazia Deledda, had become the provincial capital in 1927, a choice that had reinforced support for the dictatorship⁵. Her childhood was, in reality, anti-fascist, thanks to the influence of her family and her teacher, characterized by the yearning for democratic freedom and by a strong opposition to the dictatorship. Her father, Dino Giacobbe, was one of the founders of the Sardinian Action Party, as well as one of the best-known exponents of Nuoro anti-fascism⁶, was arrested and then self-exiled first to France, then to Spain and finally to the United States. Her mother, Graziella Sechi⁷, was a teacher who shared her husband’s anti-fascism. Giacobbe recalled how she listened secretly to the then banned Radio Barcelona⁸. Their home was raided several times by the police, and her mother was also imprisoned, although she was soon released⁹. Her elementary teacher, Angela Maccioni, was also anti-fascist, and because of her political position she was fired and imprisoned¹⁰.

Despite the worsening economic conditions and political pressure, Giacobbe managed to attend primary and secondary school, but was unable to finish her studies due to a serious illness. Years later, in 1946, she decided to prepare for the master’s qualification exam, despite the hostility of family members who considered this choice a «downgrading»¹¹.

⁵ Pittau, *L’era fascista nella provincia italiana*, cit., p. 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷ «I remember when my mother was arrested. The police had completely surrounded the house, as if to surprise a dangerous criminal. Then they came in and showed her the arrest warrant. So, mom went up to her room, I was six years old. I followed her. She was beautiful and elegant; she was preparing to be taken to prison. Prison was an ugly and dirty place, there were cockroaches. She combed her hair calmly. I hid under the bed and watched him. I was ashamed. I was ashamed that men were foolish enough to arrest a beautiful and good woman, to want to take her to prison with cockroaches» (Marci, *Radici e poesie della Sardegna*, cit., p. 28).

⁸ «Those were the years of the civil war in Spain. Almost all the people I knew sided with the “reds” and in the morning, doors and windows barred, while I was doing my braids and getting me ready for school, my mother listened to Radio Barcelona. I had confused ideas about all this, only I knew that in a town not far from Sardinia and very similar to it, the fought “for freedom”» Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., pp. 9-10.

⁹ Cf. Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

¹⁰ «The “teacher” I am referring to was Angela Maccioni, who was for those who knew her a splendid example of intelligence, culture and moral, and therefore also political, coherence in the struggle for freedom against fascism then in power. A struggle that, in 1937, cost her prison and the loss of her job, the only source of livelihood for her and for her blind and totally disabled mother, who was the widow of a master and mother of two who died during the still recent First World War World. Her “example”, like that of my mother and father, was important in the formation of my moral personality, but I don’t think I ever took it as an “example” or “inspiration” in my didactic and pedagogical choices. Two beautiful books by Angela Maccioni were published posthumously, for one of which I wrote her introduction and a volume of the series “Pensatori sardi - Antologia delle idee entrate nella Storia” is dedicated and entitled to her ed. Unione Sarda, Cagliari 2014. A school in Nuoro is dedicated to Angela Maccioni and, recently, the Nuoro anti-fascism scholar Marina Monceli organized a meeting on her» (P. Caocci, *Intervista a Maria Giacobbe*, cit.).

¹¹ «I was sorry to be a “daughter of the family” and tried to get employed. But for a girl “of my social status” it was not easy to find a job. Not a manual job in the ceramic factory that was springing up and that attracted me a lot: it would have been indecorous. Not a job because I didn’t have qualifications valid to obtain one equal in importance to the dignity of my clan...but what then?» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 17).

After some time, while still very young, she received her first teaching post as a fifteen-day substitute in a multi-class of twenty-six children suffering from ringworm and trachoma, gathered together to avoid infecting healthy classmates¹². After this baptism of fire, Giacobbe continued her teaching in some small and disadvantaged towns in and around Nuoro, with enthusiasm and interest¹³.

2. *Genesis of the Diario*

The publication of the *Diario di una maestra* was quite fortuitous¹⁴. During the first years of teaching, Giacobbe wrote: «I worked and lived in a kind of a solitude, and my need to narrate became writing. Evening writing, for myself, with no plans for publication [...]. But equally, with some of those pages, I participated in a competition in 1951 announced by UNESCO and the Union Against Illiteracy with a paper on a teaching experience in Oliena night school. And I won Second Prize».

It was a meeting with Adriana Gherardi, from Milano, which was decisive for the future of the diary: Gherardi told Giacobbe about her trip to Naples and her experiences with children marked by war and poverty. Also the *maestra* talked about her experience in Orgosolo. Intrigued by her story, Gherardi asked to look at what she had written about her experiences and gave the draft to a Milanese friend, Francesco Flora, author of the successful *History of Italian Literature*. Impressed by Giacobbe's pages, Flora sent Giacobbe's accounts to Mario Pannunzio, the editor of «Il Mondo». Pannunzio decided to publish them in installments in his magazine, entitled *Diario di una maestra*, the definitive title of the work, later published by Laterza in 1957.

3. *Topics*

After the first autobiographical chapter, she describes her first work experience as a teacher in primary schools in Barbagia in the early 1950s. After the description of her

¹² Id., *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 21.

¹³ «The tangible observation of the economic, social and cultural misery of Sardinian society at the time led me to understand that the path of teaching would have been the most direct means to get to the heart of the problem. I would have been in contact with the children, but I would have also experienced the problems of their families up close, to whom I would have gladly offered my total availability. So, I made the decision to drop out of high school, and once I obtained the master's degree that enabled me to teach, I forgot the worldly commitments due to the elegant provincial life I led, and threw myself into my work with great enthusiasm» (P. Caocci, *Intervista a Maria Giacobbe*, cit.).

¹⁴ «Novels get old, and even poetry books get old; with all the more reason and more rapidly should works like these two of mine age which have never claimed to be anything other than testimonies» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 193).

experience in Oliena, Fonni and Bortigali, she focused on the three school years spent in Orgosolo, which occupy almost half of her diary. Despite her pejorative epithet *maestrina*, from the first pages of her diary she is not seen as submissive or compliant, but combative and stubborn. Giacobbe soon found the problems that have come out of war with old problems, a society that appeals to the unwritten laws of agro-pastoral communities. As she herself writes in the preface to the 1975 edition:

more were unemployed and very many underemployed and underpaid, many were illiterate, many were the children who died in early childhood and among those who survived many were undernourished, many were those for whom school, as it was, even if attended, remained a mostly negative episode of childhood, many were those young people who ended up finding themselves in conflict with the laws of the State, very many who, to get the job that the Constitution says it was a 'right and a duty' for all citizens of the Republic, had to leave their land which was already one of the least densely populated in Europe¹⁵.

School, even in different counties, looks the same for her: miserable, basic, inadequate. Classrooms in decrepit houses on the edge of town were cold; a stagnant smell characterized them with a single small window. «The floor was simple beaten earth», the benches of rickety boards on each of which five or six children sat in a row also with men forced to kneel in front of the desk, with «their faces tense in an effort that is new and more serious for them than driving the plough»¹⁶. Blackboards, made of wood, were leaning precariously on a stool. Different areas, new faces, equal misery. Villages without a doctor, midwife, priest or cemetery. The teacher is the only person who has to carry out these roles¹⁷.

School was a luxury, and few people could attend it¹⁸. Education was not a priority because to become shepherds it was unnecessary to know how to read and write; playing in the streets or listening to conversations with adults are more fun than sitting in a classroom for hours with vetoes and constraints¹⁹.

Many pupils arrived tired from working, left an hour earlier than usual to arrive at school at half past seven in the morning, after long walks. Others could not even go to school, due to the fault of the *aggiudu*, the obligation to help at home or in the fields, which «with the lack of books and notebooks, with hunger and cold, is my most powerful antagonist» says Giacobbe²⁰.

¹⁵ Id., *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 194.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁸ Some of his pupils had become aware of this, as she writes about a child from Oliena: «one day he developed the theme "the most beautiful day of my life". It was the one in which, well cleaned and combed, he had set off, with many books under his arm, to the middle school in Nuoro. Around him other clean and elegant boys with their books. But the theme ended bitterly: "I only dreamed that day. I was one of those boys, but I wasn't with them, that day I had gone to Nuoro because my father had hired me as a servant with a shepherd, and my road was another"» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., pp. 37-38).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Children grew up like adults: they slept on the floor, the bed was considered a luxury to be ashamed of, they knew the law of retaliation, pride and honor, they had the obligation to defend themselves. All of this went against the tide of the virtues taught in school. Hygienic rules were given, cleaning and frequent bathing, healthy and varied foods were promoted, but these children lacked a hot meal more often than not²¹. While working as a substitute in Fonni, the Swiss Red Cross donated ten bars of soap to the class. Giacobbe describes the surprise and joy of that unexpected gift. For girls and boys, it meant the possibility of taking a hot bath, new in a community in which personal hygiene could not be a question of morals, good will or education²².

Mothers were often absent all day because they worked in the fields and could not look after their children. They did not even have the money to pay for their school report cards. During a general pedagogy course for women at Fonni, Giacobbe took the liberty of saying that in town the girls played too little and worked too much²³; she immediately realized that, perhaps, «she was talking too much». Almost all the mothers agreed with her statements, except one: an older woman who, with sadness on her face, had the courage to tell the harsh reality they were forced into. They loved their little girls and wanted to see them happy, but they could not do without their help. While the mothers go to the countryside or to reap, the older girls must look after the family.

The first experiments to evaluate entry skills were disastrous: compositions with «horrible scripts, spelling and syntax that are very particular and bear little resemblance to the Italian ones». Many pupils did not understand the Italian language because they only spoke Sardinian.

She confided that she had to resume, even for much older children, the practices and indications of the books designed for the first grade. With regard to her pedagogical indications, she became convinced that certain theoretical principles, while acceptable, seemed very distant from her educational reality. She observed:

there is a talk of spontaneity, of the child's "natural desire" to learn, but we think of environments in which the civilization of the alphabet has conquered a position of pre-eminence. Signs in shops, names of the street and squares, license plates on transport, boxes and wrappings with printed words, newspapers and books in every house... Here I have only seen two signs in the whole county and both say "Bar", the only public transport is the Nuoro-Mamoiada-Orgosolo, nobody has the curiosity nor need to read names of the streets because the county is patriarchal and people know each other and find each other without having to resort to addresses, the printed paper in circulation is so scarce that it still has the character of a precious thing and is not willingly entrusted to the destructive hands of children. [...] "Discover the center of interest", suggests modern pedagogy, and on this hinge all teachings. But in the school of Orgosolo what center of interest can be linked not artificially to the learning of the alphabet?²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-125.

²² «Not when the house is reduced to one or two poorly heated rooms in which parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren and animals live together. Not when basic toilet facilities are a gentleman's luxury and water a rare liquid» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 65).

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-115.

In places like this education must certainly have been a challenge. For example, during the first week as a substitute in a school in Gallura, her pupils looked at her as a usurper because she had taken the place of their beloved teacher. Initially «there were no open rebellions, only a secret hostility whose only outward manifestation was a bored indifference to my person. I made an effort to ‘do the school program’, I tried to amuse them...Nothing!»²⁵.

And yet, precisely those who had been defined as «the dregs of the town», those taller and more robust boys than her, those «peasant-sheperds who belong to the “massajos” class, workers of the land who must know how to do everything to live [...]»²⁶, those men, over time, began to talk about «their life and work experiences»²⁷. Their trust was a result obtained thanks to the cancellation of every barrier that stood between them and the teacher. In fact, she sensed that to earn their respect it was necessary to enter their world and learn about their difficulties and their interests²⁸. She began to make the most of her skills and her history when one day, during her first substitution, a large black snake entered the class. All the pupils were attracted to it. As a child, she used to play in the countryside with animals; therefore, it was not a problem to take hold of the long snake. She understood that it was an original way to win the respect of her students, incredulous that a female teacher would not only not run away from the sight of a reptile, but could even be familiar enough to praise the size of the animal!²⁹

Her personal pedagogy accompanied her everywhere she went to teach. To Oliena, for example, she talked of her first day:

I want us to be friends: I’m here to teach you something you feel you need and that up to now you haven’t had time to learn, but I’m sure you have many things to teach me too. Our lives have been different, I had books, you had a work experience that I would be interested to know about so, I don’t want to be a teacher who always talks and pupils who listen; we are almost the same age, we must be a group of friends working together. If I say things you already know, please let me know, I don’t want to waste your time...³⁰

However, her pedagogy clashed with the *unwritten* one of the educational establishment of the time. Some children advised her to beat them if she wanted to get something done as they were accustomed to this practice. Initially, she let herself be convinced of the effectiveness of this method but immediately realized that it was not part of her nature³¹. She had to deal with that feeling of ineptitude, incapacity and uselessness that pervaded the hearts and lives of those who tried hard to follow the lessons but failed. They looked at things with amazement, even the most common ones, and felt like strangers.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁸ Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

²⁹ Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³¹ «The teacher is not good at slapping and she tries not to hurt in giving them» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 46).

Sometimes, like uncertain guests, they seemed to apologize for being in the world³². And yet, there was in her young pupils an imperceptible, albeit confused, desire to belong to that civilization that the teacher represented and in which «not only the violent feelings, which are the essence of their lives, but also the little kind things can matter»³³.

Through time, with patience, they began to understand the teacher's language. They even managed to compile a small Italian-Fonnesse vocabulary and recited the *Pianto della Madonna*, a dramatic lauda. They wrote with ease about things that were important to them and «when faced with a blank sheet they no longer have that diffidence that forced them to lie with "thoughts" unrelated to their interests and their sensibilities»³⁴. Since they wrote "lasquola è bela" or "lamama e brava" [*sic*], and additions and divisions were an insurmountable mountain, a long way has been travelled³⁵.

Is the «merit mine», asks the teacher, «or rather the two years that have passed anyway»³⁶? Yes, we answer, the credit belongs to her, even if not everything has changed, even if the conditions are still poor and miserable. But we must be grateful to that teacher who lived and suffered the realities, the anxieties, the little hopes and the many pains of the people among whom she worked³⁷. «Orgosolo – she writes – is no longer the "university of crime". Everyone in the county knows me and everyone greets me; I enter their homes and warm myself by the flame of their hearths, listen to their stories and participate in their dramas. Their problems are my problems, because these are my people».

On such a delicate terrain it was not enough to be "experts", it was necessary to be significant educators, able to combine skills with a real passion for the *perfective* development of man. Giacobbe considered her pupils special, as well as particularly in need of all kinds of care. She wrote to a friend from Florence, director of the magazine ALI, edited by an Association of Young Christians, about the living conditions of her students and he obtained for her a way to have ten beds delivered, complete with mattresses and sheets, and old toys: «they won't be alms, but a lesson »³⁸ says the teacher. Radio Cagliari and the island's press immediately spread the news and several Italian cities mobilized to help its "Orgolese children". Giacobbe's desire to make the daily reality of these counties known, which seemed to be forgotten by everyone, had to collide with educational authorities, such as those imposed by the Superintendent, who forbade her

³² «The amazement with which [Don Coco] looks at things, even the most common ones, is curious, almost as if he feels a stranger to them. Sometimes, like an uncertain guest, he seems to apologize for being in the world» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 170).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁵ «Now, they love her. Even Giovanni, the rebellious and disrespectful boy from Orgosolo, after being grabbed by the wrist by the teacher who held him in her power for a quarter of an hour, admired by the teacher's strength, gave in: «from that moment on, something changed. The dislike and contempt he had shown me from the very first day had given way to a new feeling. A few days later he suddenly came up to me and taking both my hands he said, giving me for the first time the pronoun of respect: You, Teacher, are my new friend! Only in this way, as an equal, as a friend to a friend, can he love me» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 139).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁷ Pigliaru, *Maria Giacobbe vista da G. Dessì e N. Tanda*, cit.

³⁸ Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 134.

to continue writing about her pupils and to speak about their living conditions³⁹. But she did not give up and continued insistently: through contacts with the Turin Children's Literature Study Center she managed to obtain about twenty books concerning plants, animals and educational fairy tales for her pupils.

One page in particular from the diary highlights her extraordinary educational ability: she continues to hope, even in circumstances in which everyone seemed resigned. The history of these children and men cannot be predetermined, but they remain unpredictable and living realities. In order to start loving school again, their freedom needs to be encouraged by another freedom, it needs support that makes the hope of changing and starting over possible:

The last day of school arrives and when I talk about it, with ill-contained joy, despite the pleasure I feel in being at school, they look at me with spite and perhaps with jealousy. For them I am "the teacher", I do not exist as a daughter, sister or friend of other people and if I allow them to guess that I may prefer the company of these strangers to theirs, they feel a sense of unease and disappointment. So every Saturday they need to ask me: - will you come tomorrow? - and every evening there is someone who explodes against the school keeper when he knocks at ten p.m. to warn that the lesson is over. I have no illusions that all this interest, all this desire to stay in school as long as possible are the result of a particular fascination of mine or of my exceptional teaching skills. I rather believe that, even if they have to give up smoking for a few hours – and this is one of the biggest sacrifices –, even if they have to submit to a certain discipline which is all the more difficult to bear because they are raised without any constraints, in this school, perhaps for the first time, they feel they are part of a civil society in which man is distinguished from beasts not only because they know how to defend themselves a little better from the elements but above all for their ability to understand and express the essence of things⁴⁰.

4. *Success of the Diario and its distribution*

Published by Laterza, the book immediately achieved great success. It had six editions in a decade, and a total of nine thousand copies sold⁴¹. She was among the winners of the *Viareggio Opera Prima 1957* award (*ex-aequo* with Felice Del Vecchio and Angelo Magliano; Giacobbe's name appears among those of Sandro Penna, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alberto Mondadori, Italo Calvino and Natalia Ginzburg⁴²) and the *Palma Gold of the Union of Italian Women*. This success attracted the attention of many journalists, intrigued by the difficulties and social dramas of Sardinia. The reviews and essays dedicated to her diary multiplied. «It was like a stone thrown into the water – such is the metaphor of a

³⁹ Cf. Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

⁴⁰ Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 42.

⁴¹ From the archives of the publisher G. Laterza it appears that the circulation between May 1957 and December 1966 reached 9,000 copies.

⁴² *Il «Premio Viareggio»: fra i candidati sono Giuseppe Dessì e Maria Giacobbe*, «La Nuova Sardegna», vol. 67, n. 196, 1957, p. 3; *Dodici premiati al «Viareggio». Tre poeti, tre narratori, tre «principianti»: la sarda Maria Giacobbe tra i vincitori col suo «Diario di una maestrina»*, «La Nuova Sardegna», vol. 67, n. 204, 1957, p. 3.

Roman magazine —: all the frogs in the pond inevitably began to croak!»⁴³. In Italy, after the various reprints of the Laterza (the last one in 1975), the book was then reissued only by Sardinian publishing houses⁴⁴.

Finally, it is necessary to mention the unfortunate lack of cinematographic transposition of the volume. In an interview⁴⁵ with prof. Antioco Floris of the University of Cagliari, Vittorio De Seta revealed that he had read with admiration Giacobbe's *Diario di una maestra*, which would have been useful for him to better understand Barbagia society, in his film *Banditi ad Orgosolo* (1961). As revealed by Giacobbe herself, as soon as her school diary was published, the Sicilian director was not only impressed by the volume, but also contacted her because he wanted to make a film about it. They met few times in Sardinia and Rome but, due to a contractual misunderstanding, nothing came of it. Later, when the writer was living in Denmark, Nanni Loy also asked her to make a film inspired by her diary. They talked and wrote about it for a long time, but in the meantime, he had funding for another film, and the project fell through.

These are missed opportunities, which certainly would have helped to make the contribution of this ego-document even more effective in reconstructing and innovating the collective representation of the Italian school.

⁴³ Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

⁴⁴ It is an element which, also according to Simonetta Soldani, represents a limit of its diffusion, which, after the national echo, was relegated to a more isolated dimension. Simonetta Soldani, professor of Contemporary History and of Political and Social History of the Contemporary Age at the University of Florence, one of the founders of the Italian Society of Historians (SIS) and of the Italian Society for Contemporary History (SISSCO) and member of the contemporary history magazine «Passato e presente» (active since 1982), during the penultimate appointment of the review *Un libro per la vita*, at the Auditorium in Piazzale della Resistenza in Scandicci, on 8 April 2018 she said she was already struck to the gymnasium from Giacobbe's diary but it was later readings, at different moments in her life, that made her (re)discover its profound meaning and its potential to be current, so much so that the professor admits that she used it during her university courses, to speak, for example of illiteracy and functional illiteracy.

⁴⁵ A. Floris, *Diari da Orgosolo*, 5 ottobre 2011, <http://www.cinemecum.it/diari-da-orgosolo> (last access: 17.02.2023).

Formation and Transformation. Memories around Early Childhood Educational Services in an “Educationally Poor” Context

Maura Tripi
University of Catania (Italy)

Introduction

This paper explores some findings about ongoing research, focused on public 0-3 educational services in Palermo and Catania (Italy). The aim of the research is to deepen the local pedagogical dimension, to reconstruct the history of early childhood education (ECE) services¹, to achieve a more profound understanding of the different processes which contributed to the transformation of ECE services and the territory. This perspective implied a methodological approach oriented towards in-depth study and multidimensional analysis, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research, diversified and heterogeneous sources.

The main research dimensions are:

- the *normative dimension*, referred to the Italian early childhood pedagogical models; the national and regional early childhood educational laws with a particular focus on the most recent trends; the national, regional and local quantitative data, collected by different sources, based on specific parameters;
- the *interpretative dimension*, aimed at investigating the local historical transformations of public 0-3 services in Palermo and Catania municipalities, by analysing the narratives emerged from focus groups and oral interviews, involving different practitioners, and by analysing written local sources, archives, publications, institutional documents and conferences proceedings;
- the *critical dimension*, inspiring the approach of the whole research, the fieldwork and the following analysis, as well as the position and role as a researcher. The critical dimension is developed by enhancing an alternative discourse on Sicilian ECE

¹ In this paper, the term *ECE services* is used, instead of the most spread *ECEC services*, because «the expression “education and care” is used to open up the limitation of both terms that are perceived as complementary but at the same time separate [...]. Behind the choice of adopting the word “education” in a holistic sense stands the concern to overcome this conceptual split between education and care». (A. Lazzari, *Reconceptualising professional development in early childhood education*, Roma, Aracne editrice, 2017, pp. 12-13). See also P. Moss, *Power and resistance in early childhood education: From dominant discourse to democratic experimentalism*, «Journal of pedagogy», vol. 1, 2017, pp. 11-32.

services, commonly defined as “poor”, through the critical analysis of the collected counternarratives, the fieldwork, and the following analysis.

1. ECE services and normative dimension

The normative dimension includes standards, quality parameters, prescriptive laws, general theories and quantitative data that validate the previous aspects. The quantitative data confirm that in Palermo and Catania municipalities there are at least two main shortcomings: low provision of public 0-3 services in both cities and low enrollment requests, particularly in Catania services (see Figure 1). For example, in the 2020/2021 scholastic year, the provision was almost triple than the received enrollment requests.

2020/2021 s.y.	Palermo	Catania
0-3 public services	26	11
provision	870	312
enrollment requests	1.371	128
0-2 population	16.654	7.703

Fig. 1. ECE 0-3 public services in Palermo and Catania (Italy). Sources: *Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat)*; *Department of School and Office of Statistics (Municipality of Palermo)*; *Department of Social services (Municipality of Catania)*

The normative dimension also refers to national and regional laws: in this case, the most recent national laws on the integrated 0-6 system and the following guidelines² were considered. In these official documents, pedagogical coordinators are identified as one of the most important strategic actions to realise an integrated 0-6 system. Referring to Palermo and Catania municipalities, pedagogical coordination shows many limits³.

Finally, referring to the national pedagogical models, it may be significant to underline that the mostly known and legitimated 0-6 pedagogical paradigms were developed in Central and Northern Italy. Southern regions are considered “underdeveloped”, “not yet developed” compared to the national and international standards and quality requirements. For example, in the local dimension, the absence of a shared and common

² Legislative Decree 65/2017 *Istituzione del sistema integrato di educazione e di istruzione dalla nascita sino a sei anni*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», general series, n. 112, 16.05.2017; Linee pedagogiche per il sistema integrato “zerosei”, <https://www.miur.gov.it/linee-pedagogiche-per-il-sistema-integrato-zerosei/> (last access: 10.09.2023); Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l’infanzia, <https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-06/orientamenti-nazionali.html> (last access: 10.09.2023).

³ In Palermo, the 0-6 municipal services are organised into 3 U.D.E. (Unità Didattiche Educative, *Educational Didactics Units*), but the responsables deal with both administrative and pedagogical dimensions, with a consequential tasks overload.

pedagogical identity among 0-3 ECE services, as well as of an integrated and defined regional governance emerged⁴.

Considering all these aspects, related to the normative dimension, we can absolutely affirm that Palermo and Catania municipalities are “educationally poor”⁵.

2. Two counter-narratives: ECE services as democratic levers

In the mainstream discourse, people in poverty are portrayed as Others, «perceived as objects who lack complexity, motivation, rationality and capabilities [...] being “different” from others [...]. Idioms such as “culture of poverty”, “underclass”, “culture of dependency”, “welfare queen” and the distinction between “deserving” and “undeserving poor” have served to further this tendency of stigmatization»⁶. At the same time, the educational practitioners are still undervalued, their professional competences are unrecognised, assimilated to a maternal role⁷. The historical and interpretative lens gives the opportunity to look at the local community not composed of problematic, invisible, ignorant poor people, but permits to find a plethora of local stories, democratic experimentalism, community self-empowerment inside and around the 0-3 public educational services⁸.

The historical process regarding building constructions, inauguration, closing and – in some significant cases – re-opening of public 0-3 services shows the active participation of entire urban districts, neighbourhoods communities, different social and political actors. The following example highlights how a *nido*⁹ can become a democratic lever

⁴ A common and defined pedagogical identity and a shared approach among ECE services weren't individuated in both local contexts. Furthermore, after 5 years from the 0-6 national law, a regional institutional commission for the 0-6 integrated system was established in October 2022.

⁵ The expression “educationally poor” is borrowed from the concept of “educational poverty”, measured by adopting a “Indice di Povertà educative” (*Educational poverty Index*). The ECE services provision is included as one of the Index parameters. See Save the children, *La lampada di Aladino*, <https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/la-lampada-di-aladino>, 2014 (last access: 02.09.2023); Save the Children, *Liberare i bambini dalla povertà educativa. A che punto siamo?*, <https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/liberare-i-bambini-dalla-poverta-educativa-che-punto-siamo.pdf>, 2016 (last access: 02.09.2023).

⁶ M. Krumer-Nevo, O. Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, «Current Sociology», vol. 58, n. 5, 2010, pp. 3-4.

⁷ See L. Malaguzzi (ed.), *Esperienze per una nuova scuola d'infanzia*, Roma, Editori riuniti, 1971; E. Goldschmied, S. Jackson, *Persone da zero a tre anni. Crescere e lavorare nell'ambiente del nido*, Parma, Edizioni Junior, 1996; E. Catarsi, A. Fortunati, *Nidi d'infanzia in Toscana. Il bello, la qualità e la partecipazione nella proposta del “Tuscany Approach” per i bambini e le famiglie*, Bergamo, Edizioni Junior, 2012.

⁸ Moreover, an implicit connection between nidi and poverty can be retraced in the history of ECE services, especially for 0-3 years old children, born and developed as charitable places to support poor and disadvantaged families.

⁹ *Nidi* (nurseries) are the most common Italian 0-3 educational services. The Italian integrated system also includes other supplementary educational services (*servizi integrativi*) and dedicated sections for children aged between 24 and 36 months, located in pre-primary 3-6 schools (*scuole d'infanzia*), and called “spring sections”

for a community. The urban district of Danisinni, located in Palermo, is characterised by a long main street and a big square, where public transport doesn't pass. All the main services are lacking: there aren't any hospitals, shops or offices. Although not peripheral – it is 5 minutes far from the Sicilian Parliament headquarters –, it is isolated from the rest of the city. Economical, social and educational poverty define this suburb.

In this district there is one of the first founded public *nidi*. It was built at the centre of the big square, between 1958 and 1960, thanks to the theatre entrepreneur Luigi Biondo's donation. It was inaugurated in 1960 and donated to O.N.M.I. (*Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia*)¹⁰. In the same building there was a *nido* and a counselling service for women. It was closed several times: during the last 62 years, it was closed for 25 years in total. From the women's life stories, collected by a social worker who I have interviewed, the most recent closure, in 2007, is considered – still now, after 15 years – a deep wound, something unexpected, something stolen, without any reasons or explanations. In fact, the *nido* was temporarily closed for a water loss. But it never reopened.

In the last decade, Danisinni community has been experimenting with a complex process of transformation and emancipation¹¹. The first effort and commitment engaged by the community was focused on reopening the *nido*. A group of women wrote a public letter, delivered to the Assessor of Social services. A fundraising was organised to collect further funds to obtain a technical project for the renovation of the vandalised building: then, it was delivered to the mayor. Finally, a small group of inhabitants and social workers went to the town council meeting, during which the final project had to be approved or rejected. Their presence was effective to see the project approved: during the same meeting, the other two submitted projects to reopen other two *nidi* were refused. The renovation works officially started in September 2022.

The second example refers to a specific practitioners' in-service training, considered as one of the most powerful and effective experiences of their professional development by almost 100% of interviewed educators. This second example emerging from the interpretative dimension shows pedagogical identity and professional development as a complex and multidimensional individual and collective process, influenced by different levels, actors and factors.

In the second half of the 80's, Palermo experienced a special period, called «The Spring of Palermo», characterised by several political changes, an active civic society and a flourishing cultural period¹², emancipating from the mainstream representation

(sezioni primavera).

¹⁰ O.N.M.I. – *Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia* was the national 0-3 service, established during the fascist government (1925) to fight against infant mortality, and abolished in 1975.

¹¹ About the process of urban regeneration – and its contradictions –, and the bottom-up experiences and projects, see M. Mondino, *La rigenerazione urbana a base culturale tra rinascita e retoriche: il caso Danisinni a Palermo*, «Tracce Urbane», n. 13 (in press); C. Giubilaro, F. Lotta, *Quartiere in transizione. Il caso di Danisinni (Palermo) tra marginalità socio-spaziale e rigenerazione di comunità*, «Confini, movimenti, luoghi: politiche e progetti per città e territori in transizione», Roma-Milano, Planum Publisher, 2019, pp. 481-487.

¹² Robert Putnam suggested the correlation between a tradition of social differentiation with low levels of civic engagement and inequalities in terms of life styles and educational opportunities (*Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993).

linked to the Mafia. Early childhood education was identified as a symbolic and concrete dimension to promote civil, moral and political redemption. The local municipality, with Leoluca Orlando as mayor, financed and supported many networks and cultural activities; meanwhile, a shared synergy and commitment spread, strongly animated by the desire to develop a new innovative vision of community, education and childhood. From 1971, when the national law of *nidi* was enacted, many buildings were edified¹³ but the first *nido* for 0-3 years old children was inaugurated in Palermo in 1989. In the same year, by the will of the Assessor Marina Marconi, other 11 *nidi* were opened, after restoring the abandoned and vandalised buildings.

From 1993 to 2000, Leoluca Orlando, the political leader of the *Spring of Palermo*, was reelected as mayor. In 1993 Alessandra Siragusa became the Assessor of School: she aimed her commitment not only at opening new *nidi*, but also to emancipate the 0-3 services from their exclusive caring mission, to consider them, for the first time in the local context, as educational services. Professional development was a key-element in this process. Between 1996 and 1998, a twinning between Palermo and Pistoia (Tuscany) was realised. The design of this professional development programme focused on peer-learning among practitioners: in the first phase, 6 one-week study visits with fieldwork observation and thematic workshops in Pistoia let the educators from Palermo know better the pedagogical identity and the colleagues' practices; in the second phase, a one-week study visit of educators from Pistoia became another effective and significant opportunity for a mutual benefit: the EC educators from Pistoia benefited from both observing the colleagues working in such a diverse context, and discussing their practices with them.

Moreover, Donatella Giovannini, who was the responsible of the *nidi* of Pistoia, continued until 1999 to give pedagogical support to the educators, with many visits, observation and supervising meetings.

This experience culminated in 2000, when the national conference of the association "Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia", founded by Loris Malaguzzi in 1980, was held in Palermo. More than 1000 participants came from different Italian regions.

Although not totally shared, fragmentary and developed by educators, without a defined and structured pedagogical coordination, the pedagogical identity of the *nidi* in Palermo is deeply rooted in this twinning. Its value resides not only in that historical happening. It was like a stone thrown in a pond, the waves are still moving. Almost all of the collected professional stories are marked by the consequence of this training: some practitioners decided to get a degree, to have the opportunity to reflect, to know the theories on child development or didactics techniques; some of them started to travel, visiting other 0-3 educational services around Italy; some of them join the association "Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia", till to form a regional official group in 2015.

¹³ The national law 1044/71, which established *nidi* as «a social service in the public interest», provided national funds to regions seeking to develop municipal infant-toddler services, aimed both at the building construction and the services management.

3. *Emancipatory pedagogical research for an alternative discourse*

The first research findings retraced the mainstream representation of South Italy as poor, including the multidimensional aspects of poverty: social, economic, cultural, educational poverty. The perspective has been traditionally absorbed by the political discourse, as well as by the academic and scholastic one, by the nonprofit sector and the banking institutes and foundations. This dominant discourse shows and underlines the lack and the limits of the Southern regions, motivating the priority of intervention and investment. Describing people in poverty as “damaged”, possessing «negative characteristics, deficits and weaknesses such as low self-esteem, low intellectual achievement, or weakness of will»¹⁴ may imply the risk to veil the possibility of identifying different forms of life, different local stories, the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below and a multitude of perspectives. Moreover, the economical investment is almost motivated by economical reasons and labour market benefits: «such an investment, it was argued, would disrupt the inter-generational transfer of poverty and form more competitive, productive and competent human resources tomorrow, to face the social challenges presented by a constantly ageing population»¹⁵. The “story of quality and high returns”, that characterises the dominant discourse, is based on «a simple equation [...]: “early intervention” + “quality” = increased “human capital” + national success (or at least survival) in a cut-throat global economy»¹⁶.

Which kind of pedagogical paradigm is shaped by such a dominant discourse? It coincides with the “prophetic pedagogy” described by Loris Malaguzzi, which «knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen. It knows everything and it has no uncertainty, it is absolutely imperturbable, it contemplates everything and prophesies everything and sees everything»¹⁷.

A dominant discourse, a conservative narrative of poverty and a prophetic pedagogy are deeply interrelated. «If only outcomes and results are to be considered, should our investments privilege younger children and disregard older ones? For that matter, we may ask, why invest in making tomorrow’s more productive adults and not in tomorrow’s democratic citizens, or tomorrow’s more cooperative and responsible individuals?»¹⁸.

Furthermore, should we conceive pedagogical research as a tool to encourage «power and resistance in early childhood education»¹⁹, promote democratic experimentalism and an alternative discourse? A possible way is through enhancing counter-narratives,

¹⁴ Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, cit., pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ B. Casalini, *The Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Debate in the EU*, «Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies», anno XIX, vol. 1, 2014, p. 85.

¹⁶ P. Moss, *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 3.

¹⁷ P. Cagliari, M. Castagnetti, C. Giudici, C. Rinaldi, V. Vecchi, P. Moss (edd.), *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993*, Oxford, Routledge, 2016, p. 421.

¹⁸ Casalini, *The Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Debate in the EU*, cit., p. 85.

¹⁹ Moss, *Power and resistance in early childhood education: From dominant discourse to democratic experimentalism*, cit.

to push towards a transdisciplinary re-conceptualisation of traditional and dominant epistemologies²⁰. Counter-narratives²¹ allow us to focus on the same local contexts, the same educational services, the same practitioners and local communities immersed and involved in a historical multidimensional process. Counter-narratives

always situate individual experience and voice within material and discursive contexts, on the one hand, and policies and institutional practices, on the other. They also indicate that often avoiding Othering is related to researchers' deep commitment to social justice [...] and is based on close contacts with social activists [...] Thus, the new poverty knowledge is based [...] on acknowledgement of its inherently political nature and the recognition and legitimization of knowledge grounded in practice, activism and experience²².

The alternative discourse tells stories «of democracy, experimentation and potentiality»²³ in every city, suburbs, school. In this framework, a degree of coherence, equality and accessibility to early childhood services has to be provided – not to be forgotten the need for a normative dimension –; but equally important, it provides the conditions needed for diversity and experimentation of ideas, projects and practices in services themselves – «a plethora of local stories. [...] the enacting of different stories, with people working on a diversity of projects inspired by different ideas, desires and circumstances»²⁴.

²⁰ See M. Urban, *From “closing the gap” to an ethics of affirmation. Reconceptualising the role of early childhood services in times of uncertainty*, «European Journal of Education», vol. 50, n. 3, 2015, pp. 293-306.

²¹ About counter-narratives – and their contradictions –, see Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, cit.

²² Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, cit., p. 16.

²³ Moss, *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality*, cit.

²⁴ Moss, *Power and resistance in early childhood education: From dominant discourse to democratic experimentalism*, cit., p. 16.

School Architecture and Furniture in Italy, 1950-1970. Forms and Spaces of a Collective Memory

Giulia Cappelletti
Roma Tre University (Italy)

1. *The origins of modern schools: classrooms with large windows and tubular steel chairs*

As analysed in the pioneering work of Maria Paola Maino on children's furniture, limited attention has, as yet, been paid to studying environments specifically designed for children by artists, architects, designers and industrialists, figures who have contributed to modifying our vision of childhood and school¹.

From a methodological perspective, this investigation has been shored up by a different range of sources ranging from specialist journals and exhibition catalogues to previously unseen documentation found in private archives and those of institutions such as Triennale di Milano that devoted its first thematic exhibition to school and home in 1960².

Grasping the various ideological attitudes and design practices applied to school requires starting not simply from certain building models used in the first half of the 20th century, which were used by post-war architects, but also by testimony left by these same architects on the school world.

Italian Fascism paid great attention to school and the role of the state as primary educator. In the 1930s the rationalisation of spaces and furniture, at the expense of ornamentation, for the purposes of fostering functionalism and the construction of new public buildings entrusted to a new generation of architects, fed into the modern school myth. This was the cultural milieu in which Giuseppe Terragni was working when, in 1936, after praising the regime's school building plans and Opera Nazionale Balilla in the «Quadrante» journal, he stated:

It would seem that school is also now moving in the direction of its own architecture. But care is needed in small town buildings. Money saving, that eternal enemy of healthy initiatives, is too often used as

¹ M.P. Maino, *A misura di bambino: cent'anni di mobili per l'infanzia in Italia, 1870-1970*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003.

² This paper is the result of research and cataloging activities of numerous works of art, architecture, photography and design conducted on the occasion of the PRIN project "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)" by the research unit of Roma Tre University and published in www.memoriascolastica.it.

a pretext for inadequate architecture and it thus happens that the “stylish façade” preconception eats up the cash required for a simple, light-filled building. Four walls are all a school building needs. True saving consists of opening up four great windows in these four walls so that light and air bursts in, the only medicine children need³.

Light, air, large windows replacing the stylish façade: these were principles that Terragni himself turned to in these years for one of his masterpieces, “Asilo Sant’Elia” in Como, for which he also designed the furniture, including desks and chairs for pupils and teachers. His use of materials such as plywood and steel as chair supports were, even at the time, hailed as ultra-modern evolutions from the old school classrooms and wooden desks. With a vision influenced by modernist Northern European design, Terragni set aside traditional desks for a model made with materials satisfying the need for mass production and designed to be user-friendly by small children.

2. Italian school buildings and furniture in the 1950s: the Zanuso model

In the wake of the inevitable production and consumption collapse caused by Second World War, the style of the late 1930s remained the primary model prior to the new material experimentation of the economic boom era. The debate set in motion in the 1940s in some of the main architecture journals around mass furniture production, including for children and schools, and their intrinsic recreational component, is interesting in this regard⁴.

Post-war reconstruction required not just a change in style but also an effort to redefine school spaces in design and town planning terms, a task which architects and designers from all over Italy were called on to take part in. These included Marco Zanuso, who built a nursery school with attached housing for single mothers in a suburban Milanese district. The building is in the Lorenteggio district in south-west Milan and was built in 1953-1954 on commission by Pio Istituto per i Figli della Provvidenza. For this type of commissions, Zanuso turned to architects, designers and artists. A very young Cini Boeri, who had just joined his studio, was commissioned by Zanuso with the task of «interpreting the project» to «accord dignity, comfort and help to mothers and children»⁵. This attention to the needs of a small community makes for a human scale work that covers both the building itself and the design and ad hoc production of the furniture with personalised and modular solutions a world away from the cold and anonymous places of assistance and aseptic atmosphere of Fascist-era schools. The Lorenteggio nursery school

³ G. Terragni, *Scuole e bimbi*, «Quadrante», nn. 35-36, October 1936, p. XIV.

⁴ On this subject see Carlo Mollino’s article in the «Stile» magazine edited by Gio Ponti, in particular the section *Vera psicologia del bambino* in which he theorises the mass production of children’s furniture that was to be interchangeable and stackable: «Stile», n. 31, July 1943. See Maino, *A misura di bambino: cent’anni di mobili per l’infanzia in Italia, 1870-1970*, cit., p. 130.

⁵ C. Boeri, *Progettare con gioia*, in A. Piva, V. Prina (edd.), *Zanuso: architettura, design e la costruzione del benessere*, Roma, Gangemi editore, 2007, p. 124.

can thus be considered one of the most interesting examples in the Italian panorama of second post-war period school architecture in which building and furniture were designed by the same person.

A few years later, in 1959, Zanuso took part in the competition held by the Milan Municipality and the Triennale di Milano to promote research into primary school furniture design. The Milanese architect participates together with Richard Sapper, his young collaborator at the time. Their design research took Zanuso and Sapper around five years, in which time they drew up an initial proposal for a curved plywood chair that they then decided against. They then turned to sheet steel used precisely at that time by Zanuso for his “Lambda” chair but this turned out to be too costly and unsuited to children. The solution came when they contacted Giulio Castelli’s firm Kartell, which specialised in the production of plastic objects, a material which came to definitive everyday use prominence in the 1960s in the fields of fashion, art and design. In 1964, then, they decided to opt for a lightweight and user friendly colourful polyethylene chair that culminated in “Seggiolina K 4999” (previously called K1340)⁶. The chair was thus conceived of as a child-friendly school furniture item and for play. It was a modular chair whose legs could be taken off and stacked up just like Lego, which could be made into a multiplicity of real or imaginary architectural structures, the same ones that appeared in some of the product’s famous advertising campaigns.

Modular, replicable, lightweight, mobile, playful and, above all, colourful: the Zanuso and Sapper children’s chair set in motion a lively experimentation with plastic for school furniture, as comes across in the many articles in the main sector journals, such as «Domus» and «Casabella», which published multiple manufacturer advertising campaigns, above all from Northern Italian firms⁷.

3. *The XII Triennale di Milano in 1960*

In the years in which the political debate on state school reform was raging, the theme of the XII Triennale di Milano held in 1960 was home and school. Interest in childhood had already been shown at the 1954 Triennale, for which the BBPR studio (Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers) created a specially designed maze for children to play in at Parco Sempione, decorated by Saul Steinberg’s graffiti and with a mobile sculpture by Alexander Calder that was later demolished and which today can be studied in full through photos and archival documentation⁸.

⁶ M. De Giorgi (ed.), *Marco Zanuso: architetto*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale di Milano, 24 marzo-30 maggio 1999), Milano, Skira, 1999, pp. 248-251; Piva, Prina (edd.), *Marco Zanuso: architettura, design e la costruzione del benessere*, cit. The chair is now part of the Triennale permanent collection. I would like to thank Archivio del Moderno in Balerna for supplying me with the photographic documentation from the archival fund “Marco Zanuso” during my research.

⁷ «Domus», n. 502, September 1971, p. 42.

⁸ Triennale Milano Archives, file TRN_X_15_0925.

The dissent shown by Movimento degli Studi per l'Architettura (MSA) against the 1957 Triennale raised issues destined to usher in radical change in this event over the years that followed and, more generally, to be reflected in the crisis that struck the whole Italian design cultural milieu from the years immediately following on from the controversial 1957 Triennale. In 1959-1960 a great many scathing criticisms were, in fact, levelled at design, basically revolving around accusations that it had betrayed its roots and given in to market logics. This was the basis of the MSA's proposal to return the Triennale's program to the primary contemporary cultural issues, an objective they proposed to achieve by setting up a study centre and radically changing the event's exhibition framework from a commodity and sector basis to a thematic and unitary format. The 1960 edition was thus organised on the basis of these demands for change, abolishing the classic commodity-based sectors and traditional disciplinary categories – which were accused of making it one of Italy's many trade fairs – and focusing on a single theme of political and social importance, home and school, to be developed in accordance with a coherent and unitary narrative capable of getting the public actively involved in an exhibition that was to be divided up into three macro contexts: urban, rural and suburban⁹.

The Italian section was presented through a unitary path in which real school environments were reconstructed, complete with furnishings, following a careful urban planning and anthropological investigation of the Italian context, which prompted the organizers to bring together architects, engineers and educators in an international congress on school building, which took place within the event¹⁰.

Reconstructions of the multi-age classroom characteristic of small rural schools designed to contain groups of pupils of different ages and levels and modern city school classrooms with their spaces set aside for group work, workshops and other active education models are evocative of the Italian school context¹¹. It is also of interest that the two classrooms were furnished with products selected for that year's edition of the "Compasso d'Oro" (Fig. 1).

In fact, some of the objects on show also won the prestigious prize set up by the Associazione per il Disegno Industriale (ADI) which had been the brainchild of Gio Ponti – such as the "T12" desk and chair designed by architects Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni (Fig. 2) for the occasion of the 1959 national competition that Zanuso had also taken part in.

This desk and chair, together with a teacher's desk model, all designed on the same occasion in plywood and steel tubing, appeared in a great many photos now accessible at the Triennale di Milano's archives. These photos also show children and teachers present

⁹ See the archive units relating to the exhibition's arrangement, the reports of the study commission and the meeting minutes: Triennale Milano Archives, files TRN_12_DT_104_P, TRN_12_DT_062_C, TRN_12_DT_004_VE.

¹⁰ Archives of Triennale Milano contains a copy of the typewritten transcriptions of the speeches and the publication of the conference held from 13 to 16 October 1960, file TRN_12_DT_169_P.

¹¹ G. Ciliberto, *La Triennale di Milano fra costruzione e critica del design in Italia*, Degree Thesis, Visual and Multimedia Communications, Venice, IUAV, A.A. 2011/2012, pp. 84-89.



Fig. 1. Example of common classroom in elementary school with school desk and chair in curved steel and curved plywood by Achille Castiglioni, Pier Giacomo Castiglioni and Luigi Caccia Dominioni, 1960, produced by Palini firm, XII Triennale di Milano, *Home and school* section, TRN_XII_10_0554. Photo Publifoto. Courtesy © Triennale Milano – Archivi



Fig. 2. Achille Castiglioni, Pier Giacomo Castiglioni and Luigi Caccia Dominioni, school desk and chair in curved steel and curved plywood, 1960, produced by Palini firm, XII Triennale di Milano, *Home and school* section, Installation and “production islands”, TRN_XII_08_0429_01. Unidentified photographer. Courtesy © Triennale Milano – Archivi

at the inauguration who had been called in to bring the classrooms to life and use the objects set out in the Italian section, in a quasi-simulation of school life¹².

A reading of reviews of the 1960 Triennale shows that the greatest praise was accorded to the prefab primary classroom presented by Great Britain in Parco Sempione, donated to Milan city council and set up in the Milanese suburbs, testifying to the fact that prefabs were seen by many as a solution in several schools in Italy.

The criticisms levelled at the school exhibition organised by the Italian committee were, on the other hand, scathing, with the most famous coming from Bruno Zevi who, in his magazine «L'architettura. Cronache e storia» criticised the un-unitary and un-national character of the 1960 edition in his usual fervent way and accused the Italian section's school installation as an «orderly book for walls» burdened down by lengthy texts and a great many display cases¹³. But his biggest accusation was the Milan-centric nature of the event's organisation and its school furniture exhibitions at the expense, as he saw it, of Rome and the South: «The Milanese perspective generally has this fault. It represents the problems of other regions, and the South in particular, in a paternalistic way. In the case at issue here, in a reactionary way». Zevi's review was therefore designed to prompt thinking on the North-South imbalance, including in visibility and publicity terms, and thus analysis of the communications strategies of the firms producing school objects and furniture in those years. The Palini firm, one of the best known chair and desk manufacturers of that period, based in the Lombard town of Pisogne, packed the main design magazines of the era with its advertisements and also appeared in the 1960 Triennale's official catalogue¹⁴, which also welcomes the official poster designed for the occasion by Roberto Sambonet, a further Milanese area architect, graphic designer and consultant for La Rinascente, a firm that was, in these years, taking an active part in organising and sponsoring events such as this as well as selling products exhibited at the event in its stores. In the economic boom years, advertising was the most effective way of spreading the word on demands for change at school and in school furniture, perfectly capturing the complexity of the intersections between art, childhood, education, school, design and everyday life as a TV advert by Aristide Bosio commissioned by Olivetti company in 1965 shows. This advert was set in a school classroom in which children were quickly learning how to type on Marcello Nizzoli's famous «Lettera 32»¹⁵.

¹² Triennale di Milano Archives, file TRN_XII_10_0523.

¹³ B. Zevi, *La XII Triennale di Milano: dodici punti fermi per la XIII*, «L'architettura. Cronache e storia», September 1960, pp. 290-293.

¹⁴ *12. Triennale di Milano: esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne e dell'architettura moderna*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale di Milano, 16 July-4 November 1960), Milano, Arti Grafiche Crespi, 1960.

¹⁵ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kN_qwLC-_c (last access: 11.12.2022).

4. *Art, school and city: visual suggestions from an essay by Giulio Carlo Argan*

Whilst it had been architects, engineers and designers who had made their voices heard thus far, in the late 1960s the 1968 cultural revolution, the political debate and the long-drawn-out school and university reform process prompted young students themselves to take possession of these school settings and act directly on these architectures. The slogans and graffiti of the 1968 youth protests that burst onto the Valle Giulia scene, both inside and out, are still visible on the façade of the Faculty of Architecture of “Sapienza” University of Rome in Valle Giulia (1925-1964), designed by Enrico Del Debbio. The work was attributed to a collective of creative young students going by the name “Gli Uccelli” led by Paolo Ramundo. The idea was to leave creative testimony of these days of protest, using urban graffiti in accordance with the artistic tradition of Mexican mural painting but also with New York writing and street art. A woman’s face in profile eating a bunch of grapes, a hand and a series of grape vines on which a naked man is climbing were painted onto the façade in a language that conjures up the themes and linear and stylised motifs of early Christian wall painting. These young people also involved Renato Guttuso, an internationally famous artist and eminent figure in the Italian left, who supplied some of the preparatory designs for the façade. This was work inspired by live broadcasts of the events, by dialogue with the era’s centre stage players and an awareness of the revolutionary nature of the student protests then exploding in the squares, schools and universities, in the firm belief that, as Guttuso argued, artists «cannot separate “poetic reason” from what Vittorini (Elio, ndr) called “civil reason”»¹⁶. The active contribution of artists to history and contemporary society was the subject of a 1968 essay written by Giulio Carlo Argan in the magazine «Metro»¹⁷, in which he stressed the human, educational and political vocation of designers and artists, calling on them to teach in the schools in the same years in which the university students were invoking «anti-authoritarian pedagogy» in the name of the 1968 protests¹⁸.

5. *“Autoprogettazione” and play: considerations on childhood via the work of Enzo Mari and Cini Boeri*

Artist *faber* or *ludens*? In an essay released in «Metro», Argan’s answer is that the artist is «increasingly and more convincingly *politicus*»¹⁹. Designers themselves also gained greater political consciousness of their trade, in particular Enzo Mari whose «self-design» idea

¹⁶ R. Guttuso, *Preface*, in Id., *Mestiere di pittore. Scritti sull’arte e la società*, Bari, De Donato, 1972, p. 7. On Valle Giulia’s graffiti see G. Muratore (ed.), *Graffiti sui muri della Facoltà di architettura Valle Giulia, 1968-2004*, Roma, Kappa, 2006.

¹⁷ G.C. Argan, *Arte, scuola e città*, «Metro», n. 496, March 1971, pp. 4-12.

¹⁸ *Per una pedagogia antiautoritaria. Documento elaborato da un gruppo di studenti e di insegnanti dell’Università Statale di Milano*, «Marcatré», pp. 222-226.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

juxtaposed to merely commodity-based logics, conceived of furniture design, like that of toys, as an individual exercise designed to stimulate individual creativity and construction abilities without ever losing sight of entertainment value. Gillo Dorfles was one of the first to take note of this in 1968 in the magazine «Metro» on the subject of certain work in cardboard such as “Il posto dei giochi” or a bookcase of just four elements and «ultra-easy to assemble»²⁰.

The playful and transversal nature of the Italian design of these years can, as we have seen, be found in many of the advertising campaigns of the manufacturers who often chose children to act as testimonials for their products, even those whose target audience was not directly children or schools. An example of this was the “Serpentone” sofa, a chair prototype that was never actually put into production, designed by Cini Boeri for Arflex in 1971. This was an adaptable sofa designed to be sold by the metre and made of polyurethane foam which, in some of the photos kept in the archives of the «Domus» magazine, was mobbed by children curious to explore a new object in the shape of a snake in the courtyard of their school, perhaps during recreation.

Cini Boeri herself was also the author of an unrealized project, preserved in her archive, for a «punishment-less and prize-less» primary school: an ideal school, surrounded by greenery and organized on the basis of circular classrooms with the teacher’s desk in the middle and the pupils’ desks arranged around it on rails, to make them moveable. Boeri envisaged teachers or pupils themselves as deciding on organisation as this would educate them in notions of autonomy and responsibility.

6. “Human architectures” dialoguing with the cities: Aldo Rossi’s schools

From the 1950s to the 1970s, a great many Italian architects began taking an interest in school and school building, frequently during their training and earliest university teaching years. This was the case of Aldo Rossi, who was invited to the 1960 XII Triennale di Milano and designed his first school in 1968, a middle school in Trieste, the scholastic institute “Giuseppe Caprin”, near the “San Sabba’s Risiera”, an area of strong urban expansion, in which the building was supposed to build a civil and educational “bulwark”. In 1969-1970 he set to work extending and restoring the “Edmondo De Amicis” school at Broni, work which was completed in 1971. This was a late 19th century building to which Rossi added a large, covered portico, an atrium and a staircase, enabling the distribution of the classrooms to be changed. One of its ground floor entrances features a recurring theme of his work, a triangular structure over the entrance resembling a classical temple tympanum whose solid geometries substituted all decorative elements and poetically conjured up a metaphysical and de-Chirico-esque atmosphere with its pure and minimalist volumes. His focus on this specific element of the composition is tangible

²⁰ G. Dorfles, *I giochi di Mari*, «Metro», June 1968, pp. 169-173; *Enzo Mari: la biblioteca in cartone*, «Domus», n. 496, March 1971.

in the project's preliminary designs. As Rossi himself confirmed later, his intention was to create «human» architectures dialoguing with and emulating the cities they were located in, as showcased by the central focus on the town square in his designs for the “Salvatore Orrù” primary school in Fagnano Olona (1972-1976), photographed in the late 1980s by Luigi Ghirri, as a multi-functional space for lessons, sporting activities and the district's cultural events²¹.

These were years in which the 1949 “Law 717”, known as the “2% law”, was still in force, legislation with which the Italian state attempted to foster public art work by encouraging joint working between architects and artists – mainly sculptors – in the creation and decoration of public buildings, including schools. This law remained in force for schools until 1975. Whilst the quality of the outcomes was not always superlative, the “2% law” was, at least in its intentions, a significant opportunity to rethink, regenerate and renovate shared urban spaces in Italian towns and cities, from north to south²².

7. *Design as an interpersonal and educational space: Riccardo Dalisi and the children of Naples's Traiano quarter*

In the years in which the *Decreti Delegati* came into force, in 1973-1974, figures such as Neapolitan architect and designer Riccardo Dalisi worked to foster the democratisation of schools in peripheral and disadvantaged contexts by getting local children directly involved in multi-disciplinary artistic activities, capable of critiquing the town planning, educational and political macro-systems of the day.

Dalisi's workshops with the children of Naples's Traiano quarter constituted a design and interpersonal experience demonstrating that art and design can make a political mark and have an ethical, social and educational mission capable of making a profound difference to the lives of children and young people called on to get directly involved in collective art work. Examples of this are the Secondigliano and Scampia murals based on an idea of Felice Pignataro's or the chairs made by children with affordable materials and leftovers together with Dalisi, once again in Naples²³.

These are, in actual fact, the very same years in which Bruno Munari set up his educational workshops in Milan and proposed teaching even nursery-age children to design objects in a 1974 article in «Domus»²⁴.

²¹ A. Ferlenga (ed.), *Aldo Rossi. Tutte le opere*, Milano, Electa, 1999, pp. 44-45.; Id., *Aldo Rossi / I miei progetti raccontati*, Milano, Electa, 2020, p. 37.

²² M.G. Messina, *Lo “stile 2%”*, in *2%/717/1949: la legge del 2% e l'arte negli spazi pubblici*, volume edited by Direzione generale arte e architettura contemporanea e periferie urbane, Roma, Cura.Books, 2017, pp. 17-37.

²³ Many archival materials and photographic documentation of Dalisi's work from his personal and professional archive have recently been shown at the *Utopia Dystopia: the myth of progress seen from the South* exhibition in the section devoted to the peripheral spaces (Naples, MADRE, 9 July-8 November 2021).

²⁴ B. Munari, *Proposta per una scuola di design che comincia dall'asilo*, «Domus», n. 538, 1974, p. 9.

The challenge on the “school” environment taken up by these eminent exponents of Italian material and visual culture in the second post-war period, briefly reviewed here in a first but not exhaustive investigation, remains an open challenge for today’s pedagogues, architects, artists and designers and for anyone who wants to question themselves on this subject of urgent socio-cultural relevance.

Plaques and Statues as School Memories. The Case of the Monumental Tributes to Giovanni Cena

Valentino Minuto
University of Macerata (Italy)

1. *Monumental sources as documents of the official school imagery*¹

There are the events, the memory of the events and the history of the events. The difference is that between being, remembering and knowing. There is also the history of the memory of the events to consider. This is a new research frontier: the history of the public memory of school. This history is told through multiple categories of typical sources – which include stamps, coins e banknotes, street and school names, plaques and statues. Here it has been chosen to focus on epigraphic and sculptural memorials, which have been cumulatively defined as «monuments». Monuments are particularly suitable for explaining the nature, ways and purposes of public memory and the role that this memory has had in the cultural history.

It is worth pointing out that the word «monument» is here not used to refer to the vestiges of the past having the character of grandeur. The Latin verb «monère» means to «remind», but also to «admonish» and «educate»: plaques and statues are therefore monuments in the etymological sense of the term, that is, they are objects designed to hand down the memory of figures or events of the past, and their task, like for any kind of admonition, is pedagogical.

Taking into account the material configuration of monumental sources, their peculiarities are: singleness, fixedness, permanence over time and public facies. First of all, each monumental piece is unique, without copies. Monuments are then stationary, immovable, permanently linked to the environment. Furthermore, being ideally conceived to be forever, plaques and statues challenge the wear of time: school memory is destined to last when it is set in marble or bronze; the materials for making monumental artefacts approach the idea of immortality. Finally, the perpetuation of memory has to be combined with the installation of plaques and statues in plain sight, in places impossible to miss, so that the narration of the school past is addressed *erga omnes* or at least to as

¹ This paragraph deals with the theoretical and methodological premises for the study of monuments to the memory of school personalities. These premises were defined in my PhD thesis: V. Minuto, *Memoria e potere. I monumenti a personalità della scuola dall'Unità agli anni '70 del Novecento*, PhD thesis (supervisors: A. Ascenzi, F. Targhetta), Macerata, University of Macerata, a.a. 2021-2022.

many recipients as possible. While the consultation of archival or printed documents is done voluntarily by an individual expert, the contact with plaques and statues is almost always unintended and potentially massive. The involuntariness of the encounter with epigraphic and sculptural memorials is functional to the primary aim of disseminating the content of monumental communication as much as possible.

In addition to defining the material characteristics of plaques and statues, it is necessary to build a theoretical map for orientation in the areas of the conservation of school memory through monuments; the guidelines of this map are drawn by responding to six fundamental inquiries relating to monumental memorialization.

The first question is: in whose hands does the monumental narration of the school past lie? As the maximum owners of public spaces, the constituted authorities order the installation of monuments. Even when the initiative to commemorate with plaques or statues comes from below, political-institutional endorsement is required: no one – it is worth emphasizing – can enter the circuits of public memory without support from above. The leading strata therefore have the monopoly on monumentalization practices: power establishes the rules of monumental communication, i.e. who should be commemorated and to what extent.

The second question is: what are the admission criteria to the monumental narration of the school past? Plaques and statues are dedicated to personalities who excel in their pursuits. However, the outstanding outcomes achieved in the educational field are not the only credentials to access to monumentalization practices. The requirement of conformity to the hegemonic cultural positions is needed together with the meritocratic one: the possibility of being the object of monumental memorialization depends on the axiological correspondence to the *weltanschauung* of the ruling classes.

The third question is: what narrative of the school past is done by plaques and statues? Monuments reflect a dignified school past: a chosen and therefore partial vision of school emerges from epigraphic or sculptural memorials; the monumental tributes to those who constitute an aristocracy of merit do not document the deficiencies existing in the educational reality. But it is not just the school past of low worth not having a place in the monuments. Even deserving figures may be absent from the monumental narration of the school past if they are not fitting with the hegemonic order paradigm. The monumentalized school past therefore expresses the dominant values and as such it is functional to the survival of power.

The fourth question is: what are the monumental communication strategies to narrate the school past? The monumental medium is syncretic: varied languages – the materiality of the monuments, the words of the epigraphs and the iconography of the statues, as well as of the decorative sculptures on the plaques – operate all together. It is possible to speak of the material component of monumental communication because the very physical presence of plaques and statues is significant: the materials used, the dimensions, the location, the techniques applied, all contribute to persuading the public of the historical importance of the characters commemorated. As regards the verbal component of monumental communication, the epigraphic writings have the following features: the brevity, which is for enticing to read; the high linguistic register, which is appropriate for

the solemnness of formal commemorative codes; the narrative textual typology, which is intended to expose the events causing certain figures to be deemed worthy of memory. And as for the figurative component of monumental communication, the power of images is exercised mostly unconsciously; in other words, little or no attention is paid to iconic suggestions; thus, much of the visual information is uncritically absorbed. The communicative effectiveness is therefore ensured by a global approach, where the material, verbal and figurative components are unitedly intent on expression.

The fifth question is: what is the function of the monumentalization of the school past? The aims pursued through monuments are certainly commemorative, but also political-educational and political-celebratory. Monumental artefacts are the most persistent means of public display of school memory, due to the durability of the materials they are made of and to the visibility of the places where they are located. However, the commemorative ends are intermediate: the ultimate reason for the *laudatio* of the figures commemorated is pedagogical-civil; drawing their etymology from the Latin verb «monère», monuments are warnings to follow certain examples of virtue; the significance of monumental memorialization is ethical-normative; the intention is to present an axiological horizon towards which to strive, more than to keep the past alive in memory. The model proposed to the recipients of monumental communication is a compendium of dominant ideas about the good citizen. It can therefore be said that monuments are cultural devices for social reproduction. When the monumental narration has as its protagonist a teacher, it is not limited to the representation of a model citizen: a plaque or statue also conveys the ideal elaboration of the concept of education. Needless to say, the having-to-be of school – in the way it is epitomized by monuments – is conceived accordingly to the hegemonic social paradigm: the teacher profiles emerging from the monumental narration are organic to the dominant cultural trends. Turning to the political-celebratory implications of monumentalization practices, commemoration through plaques and statues is an instrument of legitimation of strong social groups: commemorating certain characters means celebrating certain values – the dominant values: the school past monumentally staged is therefore the confirmation of the validity of the hegemonic vision of the world. If the gaze remains directed at the school personalities commemorated, monumental artefacts merely say something about their excellent biographies. Instead, it is necessary to move the viewpoint to the commemorating social environment. In this way it turns out that each monument is a mirror of how the dominant social forces want to be seen. It is as if the prestige of the commemorated personalities reverberated on the actors of monumental memorialization. Juan González Ruiz remarked that the doubt often arises whether the real beneficiary of praise is whoever is honored or even more whoever honors².

The sixth and last question is: what is the significance of the pioneering historiographic feat of resorting to the epigraphic and sculptural artefacts of school memory or, said differently, what historical knowledge is brought by the use of monumental sources? To

² See J. González Ruiz, *Memoria y gratitud: el reconocimiento de la docencia a través de escrituras expuestas*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 12, n. 1, 2017, p. 280.

deal with commemoration through plaques and statues involves more than recovering noble portraits of figures of the school past: to describe the memory preserved by monuments is not a satisfactory result. It is rather a question of explaining the why of monumentalization practices. The critical operation underlying the historical research on monuments must be to recognize the ingredients forming the commemorative matter and the political-cultural causes of this combination of ingredients. It has already been stated that every plaque or statue is the repository of a school image consistent with the hegemonic cultural assets: monumental sources bear a testimony shaped by the ideological influences exerted by power on the official historical narrative. Monuments can therefore be used as documents of the school imagery produced by the leading groups in the succession of different cultural seasons; like reflecting surfaces, plaques and statues absorbed – and can return – the representations of school to which the constituted authorities provided their stamp of approval. What I called «monumental archeology of the official school imagery» is a new cultural history approach: by studying the monumental heritage, a historian reconstructs the official idea of school, as if he were an archeologist, and, by sequentially ordering epigraphic and sculptural evidence, he traces the evolutionary line of this idea. However, it is not enough to glean the official school representations from monuments; it is necessary to make plain the political use of memory in these representations by deepening the critical reflection on the connections of public commemorative practices with the needs of the dominant culture.

There is a brief methodological clarification I need to make. In addition to monuments, the public elaboration of memory permeates certain cultural artefacts organically linked to the inaugural ceremonies of these monuments, I mean the commemorative speeches. It is clear that these two types of sources are of a different nature: speaking to us in their own language – which is both material, verbal and figurative –, monuments are historical epitomes of official school representations; giving explicit cultural indications on the meaning attributed to public commemorative action, speeches are an excellent complement to the interpretation of monumental data. The procedures for acquiring these two categories of sources are also different: monumental testimonies are visually identified through an environmental investigation, what in archeology is called «surface reconnaissance»; to find commemorative speeches, instead, requires conducting bibliographic search, that is, a method a historian is decidedly more used to. The historiographical potential of monumental sources, anyway, is fully developed by integrating the testimonial materials presented by these sources with those deriving from commemorative speeches.

Below there are the study findings about the case of the monumental tributes to the memory of Giovanni Cena to exemplify the historiographic fruitfulness in using epigraphic and sculptural sources.

2. *Monumental memory of Giovanni Cena*

Giovanni Cena prematurely died in Rome on 7 December 1917. After his passing, the name of «apostle of education» was consolidated in common usage to refer to him – testifying to the public esteem to which he had been raised thanks to his educational commitment in favour of the peasants of the Ager Romanus and the Pontine Marshes. Three monumental artefacts were devoted to the memory of Cena with solemn ceremonies: the plaque on the façade of the school in Colle di Fuori in 1918; the plaque under the porch of the school named after him in Casal delle Palme in 1921; the funeral monument in his native Montanaro for the tenth anniversary of his death in 1927. The wide symbolic production to honour the memory of Cena requires to examine these monumental artefacts together with the related printed documents, in particular the commemorative speeches: the one by the director of the Schools for Peasants, Alessandro Marcucci, in Colle di Fuori (1918); the one by Marcucci in Casal delle Palme (1921); the one by the Minister of Public Education Pietro Fedele in Montanaro (1927). The chronological period of Cena's monumental fortune (1918-1927), although short, allows to observe the variations in his posthumous consideration. Through a multidimensional analysis of the sources, it is possible to reconstruct the evolution of the commemorative narrative about Cena from his late-liberal civil glorification to his fascist religious transfiguration. In 1918, Marcucci defined Cena the «Saint» who made the miracle of the peasants' redemption from ignorance in the Ager Romanus: a saint, but of those who are non-religious. Nevertheless, the representation of Cena changed as the signing of the Lateran Pacts approached: Fedele filled the portrait of the apostle of education with evangelical traits at the Montanaro Cemetery in 1927; corresponding to his words, the funeral monument to Cena, by the sculptor Leonardo Bistolfi, had the face of Christ forged in bronze. The study of Cena's official imagery through monuments is also a channel of access to the political use of memory: the inaugural ceremonies provided the actors of Cena's memorialization with an opportunity to bring public attention to certain political key issues: the unconditional support to the Great War, which was reinforced by the hope of the post-war distribution of the land to the fighting peasants (Marcucci in Colle di Fuori in 1918); the bitter disappointment for the betrayal of the promise of agrarian reform (Marcucci in Casal delle Palme in 1921); the advantage of the fascist restructuring of rural education (Fedele in Montanaro in 1927). On these commemorative solemnities, Cena's name resounded mixed with the noises of the historical events following his death; paraphrasing Maurice Halbwachs, the practices of recalling the past were functionally intertwined with the needs of the present³.

³ See M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Mouton, 1975, p. XVIII.

2.1 *The commemorative plaque in Colle di Fuori*

At the foot of the School for Peasants in Colle di Fuori, near Rocca Priora, there is a commemorative plaque – as it can be read in the inscription – of «who wanted and prepared» the peasants' redemption. At the time of the inauguration of the stele – which was held on 26 May 1918, almost six months after Giovanni Cena's death –, Colle di Fuori was only a village of huts, which was «renamed Concordia» by this propagator of the «light of love and civilization». Duilio Cambellotti carved the travertine: at the top of the slab, the artist placed the iron of a plow. The epigraph was dictated by the historian Pietro Fedele, who would have become Minister of Public Education: Cena brought into the unfortunate immutability of those «poor huts» the «good word» of literacy, which ignited the «constructive faith in the future» by arousing the awareness that another life was possible (1)⁴.

(1)

FROM THE TOPS OF THE ALBAN HILLS
GIOVANNI CENA
DISCOVERED THE POOR HUTS IN COLLE DI FUORI
HERE HE CAME
TO SPREAD THE LIGHT OF LOVE AND CIVILIZATION
WITH THE GOOD WORD
TO COMFORT HUMAN MISFORTUNE
WITH THE CONSTRUCTIVE FAITH IN THE FUTURE

IN THIS SCHOOL ERECTED BY THE INHABITANTS OF THE VILLAGE
HE RENAMED CONCORDIA
GIOVANNI CENA STOOD
FORGETTING THE HARD LIFE
IN YOUR AFFECTION OH PEASANTS
WHO WILL VIVIDLY AND PERPETUALLY REMEMBER
WHO WANTED AND PREPARED
YOUR REDEMPTION

⁴ As for this plaque, see: *Una commemorazione scolastica di Giovanni Cena*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 19, n. 21, 20 May 1918, p. 334; *Per Giovanni Cena nelle scuole dell'Agro*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 19, n. 22, 30 May 1918, pp. 299-301; *Onoranze a Giovanni Cena*, «Nuova Antologia di Lettere, Scienze ed Arti», ser. 6., vol. 195, n. 1113, 1 June 1918, p. 299; A. Marcucci, *L'apostolato di Giovanni Cena*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», section: *Pagine gentili*, vol. 19, n. 23, 10 June 1918, pp. 183-185; F. Acerbi, *La scuola Giovanni Cena a Casal delle Palme, MCMXVII-MCMXXI*, Roma, Tip. Editrice Laziale A. Marchesi, 1921, p. 6; P. Minetti, *Giovanni Cena. Poeta e apostolo dell'istruzione. Note biografiche*, Torino, G.B. Paravia & C., 1927, pp. 20-21; V. Minuto, *Lapide a Giovanni Cena a Colle di Fuori (1918)*, in «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/392, published: 30/10/2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-giovanni-cena-colle-di-fuori-1918> (last access: 25.01.2023).

(1)* Original version in Italian: «Dall'alto dei Colli Albani / Giovanni Cena / scoprì le povere capanne di Colle di Fuori / Qui venne / a diffondere con la parola buona / luce d'amore e di civiltà / a confortare le umane sventure / con la fede operosa nell'avvenire / In questa scuola eretta dagli abitanti del villaggio / al quale dette nuovo nome Concordia / Giovanni Cena sostava / obliando la vita faticosa / nell'affetto vostro o contadini / che serberete vivo e perenne / il ricordo di chi volle e preparò / la vostra redenzione».

On the day of the unveiling, 26 May 1918 – as mentioned above –, the director of the Schools for Peasants Alessandro Marcucci reminded in his speech⁵ that Cena was the «Saint» of the peasants' redemption from ignorance: «he had an active faith, for which he fulfilled his duties to the point of self-sacrifice, even if it cost him his life»⁶. Despite the extensive use of religious vocabulary to describe him, Cena was regarded as a civil saint: although at the bottom of his conscience there was a justicialist instinct imbued with an evangelical spirit, Cena's educational apostolate was non-denominational. The director explained the way Cena conceived education: school was a workshop of citizenship, an antidote to the paralyzing fatalism that dulled the consciousness of the proletariat in the Roman countryside; once he became literate, the labourer entered into a critical relationship with his harsh living conditions:

every improvement could only come from the peasants themselves, after they had defeated their greatest enemy: *ignorance*. If peasants do not become aware of themselves, their humanity, their right to civil life, they believe that their unchanging destiny is drinking water from ditches, eating polenta, sleeping on a humble pallet in a hut, eating enough to stay up and to work, being exploited and despised [...]. Oh peasants, ignorance kills you, so Giovanni Cena brought you school [...]. And you come out of it changed, because you know, you hope, you ask, and soon you will want...⁷

Marcucci did not just praise the educational heritage left by Cena. It was late May, 1918: the country was in the vortex of war. The director of the Schools for Peasants bent the commemorative occasion toward the purpose of war propaganda. Shortly after the outbreak of the Great War, Cena, – it is worth emphasizing – took the side of interventionism. This is important because – following the Halbwachsian intuition that the publicly remembered past is the most suitable to legitimize the interests dominant in the present society – it is reasonable to claim that Cena would not have been commemorated if he had been pacifist. Marcucci mixed an extra commemorative theme of great topical interest with the memory of Cena, exalting the reasons for war to fuel the will not to give up:

Giovanni Cena wanted war; [...] he wanted it because, despite all the horrors [...] that it unleashes, [...] it will mark the triumph of the free peoples, the liberation of the oppressed peoples. [...] Woe if we lose [...]. German victory would be the victory of all the dark and evil forces [...]. Oh! Peasant soldiers, [...] we must overcome the enemy of our homeland and humanity there as we overcame ignorance here»⁸.

After invoking the need for salvation from German imperialism, Marcucci illustrated an ongoing process: the integration of rural masses into the nation-state; before the

⁵ An extensive summary of Marcucci's speech was featured in the magazine «I diritti della scuola» shortly after the inaugural ceremony: Marcucci, *L'apostolato di Giovanni Cena*, cit., pp. 183-185. The full publication – in booklet form – was in 1919: Id., *Giovanni Cena e le scuole per i contadini*, Roma, Off. Poligrafica Italiana, 1919.

⁶ Marcucci, *L'apostolato di Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 183.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

Great War, the feeling of national belonging was foreign to the subordinate classes in the countryside; once they were called to the front, the proletarians of the land discovered their homeland:

war enlightened you like and perhaps more than school, oh peasants! [...] on the Piave front [...] you were the purest and the most disinterested supporters of a God who was still unknown to you: *the Homeland*. [...] Well, this Homeland [...] immediately inflamed him with love. He saw the mountains, the rivers of the sacred border, and he said: they must be conquered and defended, because they secure even the miserable hut where I was born, where my children stay at⁹.

The people of the countryside had begun to perceive themselves as Italians on the battlefields. But it was not just a matter of having the patriotism enhanced. The rural workers were also acquiring citizenship rights by fighting: the contribution in blood to victory would have created a future of justice for them. Marcucci said, continuing to motivate war: «your redemption [...] will be really achieved with victory. [...] when you return triumphant and free to dictate the laws of the new life of Italy and of the world, we who remained here will bow to you»¹⁰. The director alluded to the agrarian reform the Government had promised to enact, once war had been won: after the defeat of Caporetto, the slogan «land for peasants» was circulating at the front to encourage the commitment to fight. But the expectations of land distribution would have been frustrated, as we will see.

2.2 *The commemorative plaque in Casal delle Palme*¹¹

Under the porch of the School for Peasants in Casal delle Palme, in the Pontine Marshes, a plaque remembers that – as stated in the epigraph dictated by Alessandro Marcucci – «Giovanni Cena traversed this countryside spreading / the light of the alphabet»; in addition to the commemorative intent, this marble slab acts as a toponomastic sign because it warns the reader that «this schoolhouse» – erected «where the first school for peasants of the Pontine Marshes was modestly opened in 1911» – is «entitled to» Cena's «blessed name»¹². On the top of the plaque, sculpted by Duilio Cambellotti – who had taken care of the embellishment of the school building –, a decoration was engraved: a book, a spade and two ears of ripe wheat suggested the role played by literacy «in order that the Latian peasants / could rise from the misery of their life to / the dignity of citizens and free farmers» (2)¹³.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

¹¹ What you see in Casal delle Palme today is a copy. After restoration, the original plaque was moved to the entrance of Giovanni Cena Middle School in Latina.

¹² Placing the naming plaque under the portichetto of Giovanni Cena School conferred an honorific character upon the entire edifice: the schoolhouse itself paid homage to the memory of the apostle of education.

¹³ As for the plaque to the memory of Cena in Casal delle Palme, see: Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., p.

(2)

IN ORDER THAT THE LATIAN PEASANTS
 COULD RISE FROM THE MISERY OF THEIR LIFE TO
 THE DIGNITY OF CITIZENS AND FREE FARMERS
 REDEEMING ALONG WITH THEMSELVES THEIR BEAUTIFUL AND FERTILE
 LAND SUBJUGATED TO THE LATIFUNDIUM PLAGUED
 BY MALARIA, GIOVANNI CENA
 TRAVERSED THIS COUNTRYSIDE SPREADING
 THE LIGHT OF THE ALPHABET
 AND THEREFORE ENTITLED TO HIS BLESSED NAME IS
 THIS SCHOOLHOUSE
 FOUNDED BY WILL AND WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PEOPLE
 HERE WHERE THE FIRST SCHOOL FOR PEASANTS OF THE
 PONTINE MARSHES
 WAS MODESTLY OPENED IN MCMXXI

CASAL DELLE PALME
 NOVEMBER
 MCMXXI

Giovanni Cena School was inaugurated on 20 November 1921¹⁴. The rhetorical fulcrum of the inaugural ceremony was the speech given by Marcucci¹⁵. The director recalled the deeply empathic spirit of his friend Giovanni: in the Pontine Marshes, Cena «recognized the goal of his frantic research. It seemed that pain fascinated him, it found an infinite resonance in his heart and he was looking for it to share and to relieve it [...]. And these Pontine lands, as well as those of the Ager Romanus, [...] grabbed his soul and seemed to be excellent for exercising his piety, his love, his ardour¹⁶». According to Marcucci, Cena was a «poet» even in his educational work¹⁷: a «poet» in the etymological

21; V. Minuto, *Lapide a Giovanni Cena a Casal delle Palme (1921)*, in «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/394, published on: 30/10/2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-giovanni-cena-casal-delle-palme-1921> (last access: 25.01.2023).

(2)* Original version in Italian: «Perché il contadino del Lazio / salisse dalla miseria della sua vita alla / dignità di cittadino e di libero coltivatore / redimendo con sé la sua bella e ferace / terra asservita al latifondo flagellato / dalla malaria, Giovanni Cena / percorse questa campagna diffondendo / la luce dell'alfabeto / E però al nome benedetto di lui / si intitola questa casa della scuola / sorta per concorso e volere di popolo / qui dove umile nel 1911 si aperse / la prima scuola per i contadini delle / Paludi Pontine / Casal delle Palme / novembre / 1921».

¹⁴ As for the initiative to erect another masonry schoolhouse after the one in Colle di Fuori, see: *Per una scuola al nome di Giovanni Cena nell'Agro*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 19, n. 24, 20 June 1918, p. 381; Acerbi, *La scuola Giovanni Cena a Casal delle Palme*, cit.; *L'inaugurazione della Scuola "Giovanni Cena"*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 23, n. 6-7, 27 November 1921, pp. 96-97; A. Marcucci, *La scuola in gloria di Giovanni Cena*, «I Diritti della Scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», section: *Pagine gentili*, vol. 23, n. 8, 4 December 1921, pp. 50-53; Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 21.

¹⁵ This speech was published in the magazine «I diritti della scuola»: Marcucci, *La scuola in gloria di Giovanni Cena*, cit., pp. 50-53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Giovanni Cena published the short poem *Madre*, the volumes of verses *In umbra* and *Homo* and the novel *Gli ammonitori*.

sense of the term, that is, «author» – author of human formation. In order to have a chance of changing his life, the inhabitant of the Pontine lands had to be deprived «of his beastly appearance», «a clear thought of humanity» had to emerge «from his torpid and closed minds»; the introduction of the latest technical discoveries of our civilization would have been of no avail without the humanizing work of education; «whether [a peasant] uses [...] an agricultural machine or thrusts a piece of iron into the ground with his painfully hunched back», nothing changes for him if «he does not have his will, his dignity, his moral and economic freedom»¹⁸.

And also on this commemorative occasion, as during the unveiling ceremony held in Colle di Fuori in 1918, Marcucci got through the perimeter of remembrance. Three years had passed since the end of the war. The intention of giving the land to the peasants had not been followed through; the dream of turning the labourers «who do not sow and harvest for themselves»¹⁹ into free farmers had been broken. Three years earlier, the director had led the rural audience in Colle di Fuori to believe in a future of righter social relationships. But his hopeful oratory was replaced by controversial tones in Casal delle Palme: Marcucci railed against the breaking of the promise to carry out the agrarian reform. Bitterly recalling the illusions, he had helped to foster, he said: «About three years ago, in May 1918, when we were anxiously still fighting, we believed [...] that we were going faster and the promised changes in the social order better distributed justice and wealth. [...] We were mistaken and deluded! [...] You peasants did not gain any rights or raise your dignity an inch»²⁰. The inability of the liberal State to respond to the demand for social legitimacy of the rural subordinate classes would have contributed to the advent of fascism.

2.3 *The funeral monument in Montanaro*

The funeral monument to Giovanni Cena, a work by the sculptor Leonardo Bistolfi, is located at the Montanaro Cemetery. A bronze bust of Christ rests on a simple grey granite parallelepiped: the Redeemer gazes «before himself from his half-closed lids that veil to him the aspects of the earthly world and unveil to him the ultimate truths»²¹. In the back of the monument, a lunette arch is hollowed out in a granite slab, as it wanted to accommodate the effigy of Christ: in this way «the Divine figure emerges from the background with his eyes fixed on a goal: the redemption of humanity»²². On the left, at the base of the pseudo-niche, there are a few bronze decorative elements: an open book surrounded by a thorn wreath – a symbol of the oppression of ignorance as well as

¹⁸ Marcucci, *La scuola in gloria di Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²¹ M. Bernardi, *Il ritorno di Giovanni Cena a Montanaro. Il monumento di Bistolfi*, «La Stampa», 11 December 1927, p. 3.

²² Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 26.

representing the preparation of emancipation; then, two closed books resting on laurel leaves to signify the triumph of knowledge. Down on the right, an inscription dictated by Bistolfi himself is engraved in granite and filled with gold pigment; the words of epigraph clarify the beyond-human vision that had driven his hand as an artist: Cena – whose life was «burned with humility and charity», whose heart «wanted to give the redemption / of thought and labour to all humble people» – is recognizable «in the simulacrum of the Supreme Man / who lived and died for all men». So, we are dealing with the identification Cena-Christ (3)²³.

- (3) GIOVANNI CENA, POET AND APOSTLE!
 THIS IS THE ALTAR OF YOUR LIFE
 BURNED WITH HUMILITY AND CHARITY,
 THE ALTAR OF YOUR IMMORTAL DEATH.
 AND HERE WE WILL COME TO RECOGNIZE YOU
 IN THE SIMULACRUM OF THE SUPREME MAN,
 WHO LIVED AND DIED FOR ALL MEN.
 AND HERE WE WILL COME TO KISS THE STONE
 WHERE FINALLY RESTS YOUR HEART,
 WHICH WANTED TO GIVE THE REDEMPTION
 OF THOUGHT AND LABOUR TO ALL HUMBLE PEOPLE:
 A HALO TO ALL MOTHERS: A STAR
 TO ALL THE PATHS OF LIFE.

In constructing the funeral monument to Cena, the sculptor Bistolfi reproduced part of a work he had made in the late nineteenth century: *The Christ of the waters*. That full-figure bronze – which would have been later placed in the park of Villa Contarini in Piazzola sul Brenta, near Padua – had aroused the interest of the young Cena while living in Turin. Bistolfi says:

²³ As for the funeral monument to Giovanni Cena in Montanaro, see: Bernardi, *Il ritorno di Giovanni Cena a Montanaro*, cit., p. 3; E. Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro. La commossa orazione del ministro Fedele*, «La Stampa», 12 December 1927, p. 1; Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., pp. 25-26 (these biographical notes on Cena – which were commissioned to the teacher rev. Pietro Minetti by the Committee for the honours to Giovanni Cena in Montanaro on the tenth anniversary of his death – were also published in a periodical: Id., *Giovanni Cena. Poeta ed apostolo dell'istruzione*, «Latina gens. Rassegna mensile illustrata», vol. 10, n. 1, January 1932, pp. 26-37); V. Minuto, *Monumento funebre a Giovanni Cena a Montanaro (1927)*, in «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/395, published on: 30/10/2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/monumento-funebre-giovanni-cena-montanaro-1927> (last access: 25.01.2023).

(3)* Original version in Italian: «Giovanni Cena, poeta e apostolo! / Questo è l'altare della tua vita / arsa dall'umiltà e dalla carità, / l'altare della tua morte immortale. / E qui noi verremo a riconoscerti / nel simulacro dell'Uomo Supremo / che visse e morì per tutti gli uomini; / e qui verremo a baciare la pietra / dove infine riposa il tuo cuore, / che volle dare a tutti gli umili la / redenzione del pensiero e del lavoro: / a tutte le madri un'aureola: a tutti / i sentieri della vita una stella».

I was working on my Christ [...]. It was 1891: I was young and at the time few visitors came to my studio, near Corso Francia [...]. One morning I heard a knock on the door. I opened it. I saw before me a little man younger than me [...]. He looked at me with kind eyes; and with a low, slightly hoarse, voice: «I was told that you are carving a Christ. Let me see it». He came in. We talked together. Half an hour later, we were friends as if we had always known each other [...]. And our friendship lasted until he died ten years ago²⁴.

In the mind of the artist, the memory of the birth of friendship between him and the apostle of education was related to the effigy of Christ. Bistolfi saw the signs of the evangelical message embodied in the self-denial of his friend Giovanni; the sculptor explained to Marziano Bernardi, the art critic of the newspaper «La Stampa», the symbolic reasons behind the metamorphosis of Cena into Christ:

When I was asked to make the monument to Giovanni Cena for the cemetery of his Montanaro Canavese, I thought that the poet of «Mother» had really been a Christ for his goodness, his suffering, his ardent and beneficent faith [...]. And [...] it seemed nice to give up the corporeal appearances (what was the body for poor Cena but a tough, narrow and miserable prison?) and to let only the spirit speak to the living, instructing them on how one must live²⁵.

The inauguration of the funeral monument took place in Montanaro on 11 December 1927. Published by «La Stampa» the day after the ceremony, the inaugural speech was given by the Minister Fedele as the representative of Mussolini. Under the symbolic power the Christ by Bistolfi radiated from Cena's tomb, the speaker's words took on an evangelical ardour. The Minister evoked Cena who like Christ «made himself humble with the humble, little with the little ones, and said: "Let the derelict children come to me"»²⁶. Fedele also reminded that Cena came from the same land that had «given birth to two other apostles, Giovanni Bosco and the venerable Cottolengo»²⁷. The attribution of a religious aura to Cena's philanthropism testified the changed historical conditions in which the gaze was retrospectively directed at the apostle of education. After the consolidation of the regime into a dictatorship, the fascist government and the Church had initiated those friendly relationships that would have led to the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929. We can therefore recognize in the equation Cena-Christ the harbingers of Mussolini's instrumental opening to the Catholic culture: the classification of Cena's educational work under the Christian label was affected by the modification of the dynamics between the Italian State and the Holy See.

And continuing his speech, Fedele declared «Mussolini's particular sympathy for Cena»²⁸. This sympathy would certainly not have been granted if Cena's socialism had not been sentimental-humanitarian, non-doctrinal and non-partisan, far from any form

²⁴ Bernardi, *Il ritorno di Giovanni Cena a Montanaro*, cit., p. 3 (the story of Bistolfi's meeting with Cena is quoted in the article by Bernardi).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro*, cit., p. 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1. The Minister of Public Education Pietro Fedele delivers his speech during the inauguration of the funeral monument to Giovanni Cena in Montanaro (1927)²⁹

of subversion of the established order³⁰. The Minister illustrated the presumed «deep spiritual affinities» between the two men:

they both had modest origins from rough workers and their lands; they both welcomed the great voice of the fields, perpetually keeping it saved in their hearts; they both suffered, fought and overcame the harshness of youth, then they felt the rebellion against all the injustices created by the malevolence of the men and they felt animated by the aspiration to a better humanity, to everything that could serve the good of the Italian people³¹.

²⁹ Museum of School and Education “Mauro Laeng” (Department of Education, Roma Tre University), *Le Scuole per i contadini, Raccolta fotografica, Le Scuole per i contadini, Foto di gruppo*, «Adunate e cerimonie», photo 184 «Commemorazione di Giovanni Cena (1926) [sic] al Cimitero di Montanaro Canavese presso la tomba del Poeta (opera di Leonardo Bistolfi). Tiene il discorso Pietro Fedele, Ministro per la Pubblica Istruzione».

³⁰ See in this regard: E. Scialla, *Il socialismo umanitario di Giovanni Cena*, «Studi piemontesi», vol. 3, n. 1, March 1974, pp. 17-31.

³¹ Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro*, cit., p. 1.

The Minister's speech was a masterpiece of posthumous appropriation of Cena at the service of the exaltation of Mussolini: the memory of the apostle of education was exploited to benefit the cult of the Duce³². The reference to the «modest origins», the «rough workers» and the «great voice of the fields» was to promote the fascist policy of ruralizing Italy: the rhetoric of the rural nation was functional to obtain the consensus from the multitude of the land workers, not to mention that the call to living in the fields was intended to counter the phenomenon of industrial urbanization as a potential hotbed of proletarian insubordination: Mussolini regarded the countryside as more reassuring than the city, the peasant as more tameable than the factory worker.

Fedele took the opportunity of the remembrance of Cena also to propagandize the reform of rural education he was conducting:

If we men of government [...] are given to take pride in our acts conceived for the sake of the Nation, I take pride in the law that promotes the establishment of rural Schools throughout Italy [the Royal Decree 20 August 1926 – no. 1667]. It represents a wide educational program the fascist government proposes to completely implement. [...] The establishment of rural Schools is the first push towards the spiritual renewal of our countryside³³.

Fedele stated that the ratio of the Royal Decree 20 August 1926 – no. 1667³⁴ was based on Cena's example; the official narrative was that the schooling model in the Ager Romanus and the Pontine Marshes had been extended by the fascist government to the whole of Italy. In reality the purpose of the fascist educational policy in rural settings was not – as we read in the epigraph on Cena's tomb – «the redemption / of thought and labour to all the humble people», but on the contrary it was the enfeoffment of rural masses to fascism. Cena's name, instrumentally pronounced by the Minister, was used as a seal of legitimacy on the work of fascistization the regime was carrying out on rural schools.

³² Alessandro Marcucci echoed Fedele in his speech delivered in Sala Borromini in Rome on 22 December 1927 for the tenth anniversary of Cena's death; the director of the Schools for Peasants ascribed ante litteram fascist roots to the mission of the apostle of education: «The Fascist school consecrates and celebrates him today» because «he was a precursor of the spiritual rebirth of the Homeland. [...] His work [...] starts to have the virtue of a tradition since the Fascism [...] has considered it as part of its history». In order to corroborate this fascist interpretation, Marcucci insisted on Cena's extraneousness towards socialism: «someone roughly mistook» Cena's humanitarian ideal «for socialist doctrine. Ah! no! In those fifteen years of tireless apostolate, he was alone, alone with his few companions; none of the political parties in contention at the time, no socialist was there with him in his work and his sacrifice». A. Marcucci, *L'apostolato educativo di Giovanni Cena*, Roma, Le scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano e delle Paludi pontine, 1928, pp. 14-15.

³³ Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro*, cit., p. 1 (square brackets enclose information added to the text by me).

³⁴ As for the rural education policy under the ministry of Pietro Fedele, please refer to L. Montecchi, *I contadini a scuola. La scuola rurale in Italia dall'Unità alla caduta del fascismo*, Macerata, eum, 2016, pp. 116-142.

Conclusions

To observe school memory from the monumental perspective entails the use of new sources – i.e. plaques and statues –, as well as the consideration of historiographically neglected symbolic realities – i.e. the ways in which the elites represented the school in ideal terms. The monumental history of Giovanni Cena shows that the memory of a deceased is not fixed in time: the content of public commemoration varies with the hegemonic cultural models. The monumentalization of the past – as it emerges from the commemorative speeches here examined – is an instrument for consensus-building on the burning issues of the present: the French sociologist Halbwachs was right when he wrote that the time of memory «is not identical to the events that have occurred within it. [...] The traces of past events and people are present insofar as they have answered, and still do answer, an interest or concern of the group»³⁵.

³⁵ M. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, p. 118.

Child-Care Institutions. Memories between Public Celebrations and Collective Representations

Sofia Montecchiani
University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-
Pescara (Italy)

Introduction

Memory represents one of the main points in contemporary historical-educational research, whose study allows to analyse and to define the ways how «the present looks at the past and interprets or re-interprets it»¹ – as also indicated in the guidelines of the PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)” –. Therefore, associating the question of memory with the childhood one, especially in reference to the educational and school fields, which are considered as contexts able to recall a common cultural dimension, in order to restore a shared sense of belonging and to enhance the role and the value of each person acting in them, appears emblematic, so to speak.

However, these more “traditional” dimensions are the evolution of another field intrinsically linked to childhood, namely the care one, which has been for centuries the only one to provide for some kinds of participation, be it private, collective or public at the service of the children’s protection and care, especially for those who belonged to marginalized conditions.

¹ With regard to the objectives and the characteristics of the PRIN project, which was launched in 2019, please refer to the official website <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/il-progetto> (last access: 16.01.2023) and the following publications: L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica. A proposito del primo seminario nazionale PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 1047-1053; Eadd., *Le forme della memoria scolastica: interventi nazionali e prospettive internazionali. A proposito del secondo seminario PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XV, n. 1, 2020, pp. 809-816; L. Paciaroni, *Memoria scolastica ed educativa: questioni metodologiche, buone pratiche ed esperienze digitali. A proposito del terzo seminario nazionale PRIN (Firenze, 17 settembre 2020)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, pp. 755-765; S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica e i primi affondi interpretativi. A proposito del quarto seminario nazionale PRIN (Milano, 26 febbraio 2021)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVI, n. 2, pp. 785-797; R. Sani, J. Meda, «*School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation*». *Un progetto di ricerca innovativo e a marcata vocazione internazionale*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, pp. 9-26; V. Minuto, *Presentazione ufficiale delle banche dati sulla memoria scolastica. A proposito del quinto seminario nazionale PRIN (Roma, 5 novembre 2021)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, pp. 545-555.

Furthermore, studying the more general question of orphaned and abandoned children and all that number of institutions devoted to them allows us not only to understand the significance of the changes undergone by some specific concepts, such as childhood, family, care and education, as well as by economic, political and cultural contexts, which have been determining a renewal of the whole national social organization over time, but it also allows us to return a more *real* representation of the complex civil and pedagogical role, which was played by these shelters and pious places and, somehow, to celebrate the lives of all those children, who are tragically condemned to an uncertain existence full of obstacles.

1. *The evolution of the problem about abandoned children in Italy between the 19th and 20th centuries*

Before going into the merits of analysing memory and collective imaginary linked to child-care institutions, it is necessary to summarily outline the profile of the phenomenon of child abandonment in Italy, with a specific reference to its evolution between modern and contemporary age. Indeed, this problem has represented for a long time one of the most dramatic questions of social history, which has taken on different characteristics according to the period and the context of reference and has always animated anthropological, political, social and pedagogical debates and reflections in the communities involved².

² For a general reconstruction of the problem of child abandonment and care, without any claim to exhaustiveness, please refer to some of the most significant works about the question, including: M. Gorni, L. Pellegrini, *Un problema di storia sociale. L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nel secolo XIX*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1974; G. Da Molin, *L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nell'età moderna*, Bari, Università degli Studi, 1981; G. Di Bello, *Senza nome né famiglia. I bambini abbandonati nell'Ottocento*, Pian di San Bartolo (Firenze), Luciano Manzuoli Editore, 1989; J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1988, It. tr. F. Olivieri, *L'abbandono dei bambini in Europa occidentale. Demografia, diritto e morale dall'Antichità al Rinascimento*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1991; G. Da Molin, *Nati e abbandonati. Aspetti demografici e sociali dell'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nell'età moderna*, Bari, Cacucci editore, 1993; Ead. (ed.), *Trovatelli e balie in Italia secc. XVI-XIX. Atti del Convegno Infanzia abbandonata e baliatico in Italia (secc. XVI-XIX). Bari, 20-21 maggio 1993*, Bari, Cacucci editore, 1994; P. Zocchi, *L'assistenza agli esposti e alle partorienti nell'Ospedale Maggiore di Milano e nell'Ospizio di S. Caterina alla Ruota tra Sette e Ottocento*, «Bollettino di Demografia Storica SIDES (Società Italiana di Demografia Storica)», n. 30-31, 1999, pp. 165-184; N. Terpstra, *Abandoned children of the Italian Renaissance: orphan care in Florence and Bologna*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2005; S. Polenghi, *Fanciulli soldati. La militarizzazione dell'infanzia abbandonata nell'Europa moderna*, Roma, Carocci, 2005; M. Canella, L. Dodi, F. Reggiani (edd.), *Si consegna questo figlio. L'assistenza all'infanzia abbandonata e alla maternità dalla Ca' Granda alla Provincia di Milano: 1456-1920*, Milano, Università degli Studi di Milano-Skira, 2008; F. Lomastro, F. Reggiani (edd.), *Per la storia dell'infanzia abbandonata in Europa. Tra Est e Ovest: ricerche e confronti*, Roma, Viella, 2013; F. Reggiani, *Sotto le ali della colomba: famiglie assistenziali e relazioni di genere a Milano dall'età moderna alla Restaurazione*, Roma, Viella, 2014; D. Boati, R. Cavallo, G. Uberti (edd.), *Una vita per l'infanzia. Il Pio Istituto di Maternità di Milano: una esperienza di 150 anni*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017; S. Montecchiani, *Per una storia dell'assistenza ed educazione dell'infanzia abbandonata nelle Marche. Il brefrotrofo di Osimo dal*

On the other hand, the same conception of childhood has undergone reformulations and revisions over time, which were caused by different representations of childhood mostly uniquely developed by the paradigms dictated and determined by adulthood. Only after what is defined by scholars as a real «discovery of childhood», understood not only as a cultural operation, but also as a sort of «historiographical event», it was possible to promote a concrete understanding of the *real* childhood and a deeper knowledge of it, which has also made it possible to strengthen the studies on childhood, to recognize its social value and also to systematically assume its responsibility for support, education and protection³.

Although the history of child abandonment sinks its roots in the classical era, it was especially starting from the Middle Ages that its profile considerably changed thanks to the implementation of increasingly systematic and targeted Christian charitable interventions. In fact, in this period, numerous pious places were established and mostly run by religious orders and congregations, which were led by the principles of the Christian apostolate and decided to devote themselves to child-care as a matter of priority. Moreover, the use of the foundling wheel system, a device which was able to guarantee the anonymity of those who chose or were forced to resort to exposition – and was also widely used and abused for this reason –, spread throughout Europe at the same time. The wheel tool, which was created prematurely in the Hospital of the Canons of Marseilles in France in 1188, was set in the *Archiospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia* of Rome in Italy for the first time in 1198 and then it was rapidly inaugurated in numerous other small and big Italian institutes such as, for example, at the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence, the *Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata* in Naples, *Santa Caterina alla Ruota* in Milan, the *Istituto di Santa Maria della Pietà* in Venice, or the *Ospedale dei Bastardini* in Bologna.

However, childhood began to be no longer considered as a mere transition phase towards adulthood, but rather as the centre of educational and pedagogical action in the wake of the eighteenth-century revolutions and through the development of what Philippe Ariès called the «feeling of childhood»⁴. However, this conceptual evolution and the theorization of a child-centred educational perspective did not automatically correspond to a concrete reduction in the phenomenon of child abandonment, at least

primo Ottocento al secondo dopoguerra, Macerata, eum, 2021.

³ About this question, please see in particular E. Becchi (ed.), *Storia dell'educazione*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1987; M.C. Giuntella, I. Nardi (edd.), *Il bambino nella storia. Atti del Seminario di Studi Interdisciplinare (Perugia, 14-15 giugno 1991)*, Napoli, ESI, 1993; E. Becchi, D. Julia (edd.), *Storia dell'infanzia*, 2 vols., Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996; P. Guarnieri (ed.), *Bambini e salute in Europa 1750-2000 (Children and Health in Europe 1750-2000)*, «Medicina & Storia», n. 7, 2004, pp. 57-100; F. Cambi, C. Di Bari, D. Sarsini (edd.), *Il mondo dell'infanzia. Dalla scoperta al mito alla relazione di cura. Autori e testi*, Milano, Apogeo, 2012; H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, London, Routledge, 2014, 2 ed.; E. Scaglia, *La scoperta della prima infanzia. Per una storia della pedagogia 0-3*, 2 vols., Roma, edizioni Studium, 2020.

⁴ About the evolution of the child conception continuing towards a more realistic and empathic understanding and representation of childhood, which led to the definition of a «feeling of childhood», please refer to the first part of the important work by Ph. Ariès, *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, tr. by M. Garin, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006, 4 ed.

initially. On the contrary, in a paradoxical way, with the increase of specific institutions, which were devoted to child-care and set up to prevent *locis publicis* exposition in the first place and to lower the mortality rate of *progetti*, there was a completely opposite effect so much that the phenomenon assumed the profile of a real «massacre of innocents» between the modern and contemporary ages.

In Italy, the heterogeneity of political and social contexts, the variety of complex historiographical events – among them, the process of national unification *in primis* – and the total absence of an organic structural and legislative link among charitable experiences caused deep differences and fractures in the evolution and the management of an Italian healthcare network, which was reconverted in a centralized perspective with great limitations and critical issues only in the late nineteenth century.

During what was not defined as *the century of foundlings* by chance, the traditional institutions devoted to child-care, such as homes for waifs and strays, *brefotrofi*, pious places, orphanages and hospitals, did not actually undergo substantial changes and continued to be mostly linked with the local hospital and charitable activity. Nonetheless, thanks to the elaboration of a renewed and more modern perception of childhood and the enhancement of developing the psycho-physical and sensory dimensions of children, new and important initiatives, which definitively changed the mere healthcare intervention in educational intervention guaranteed within the dimension of public charity, made their way into cultural and social fields. Starting from the nineteenth century, for example, Aporti's kindergartens spread and the first *presepi* were established by Giuseppe Sacchi and created upon the model of the French *crèches*, which represented the first real heart for the subsequent development of future nursery schools⁵.

Therefore, between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, there was a transition phase, which determined the definitive closure of foundling wheels, as well as the opening of delivery offices, a general reform of institute statutes and the beginning of specific regulations referring to care, wet-nursing and childhood. Among the most significant ones, we can certainly include the Crispi law of July 17th, 1890, with which pious places were changed into public charity institutions placed under the control of the State through local authorities, and the *General Regulations for the care service of foundlings* of December 1923, which marked the definitive closure of foundling wheels in Italy and the introduction of some specific hygienic-sanitary and professional standards all the services devoted to child-care had to respect, in addition to introducing changes in the administrative sphere⁶.

⁵ With regard to the birth and the evolution of Aporti's kindergartens and nursery schools in the Italian context, please especially refer to: F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici e lettere. Con introduzione di Angiolo Gambaro*, edited by M. Sancipriano and S.S. Macchiotti, Brescia, La Scuola, 1976; C. Sideri, *Ferrante Aporti: sacerdote, italiano, educatore*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1999; L. Sala La Guardia, E. Lucchini (edd.), *Asili nido in Italia. Il bambino da 0 a 3 anni*, 2 vols., Milano, Marzorati, 1980; M. Piseri, *Ferrante Aporti nella tradizione educativa lombarda ed europea*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2008; S. Polenghi, *Aportiana*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. IV, n. 2, 2009, pp. 387-396; N.S. Barbieri, *Asili nido e servizi educativi per la prima infanzia in Italia. Lineamenti storici, fondamenti pedagogici, modalità operative*, Padova, CLUEP, 2015; D. Caroli, *Per una storia dell'asilo nido in Europa tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016.

⁶ In order to completely read the regulatory texts, please refer to «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia»:

Beside the legislative field, the intellectual evolution of child conception gave way to a dutiful rethinking about other concepts firmly linked to the topic of childhood, including family and parental responsibility⁷, and even a reorganization of the whole network of the services addressed to it. In turn, this process caused the emergence of a growing attention towards hygienic-sanitary and pedagogical questions and the appropriate training of the staff, who was employed within care and educational institutions. Then, this topic was taken up with greater intensity during the twentieth century again, when the process of centralizing charity, care and education in the hands of the State made the need to have the staff equipped with a precise training and professional requirements evident⁸.

Subsequently, care and educational commitments in Italy changed their profile again with the rise of the Fascist regime: in fact, during these twenty years, they became the expression of a specific demographic policy and a particular ideological need⁹. Having

<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1890/07/22/171/sg/pdf> and <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1924/01/18/15/sg/pdf> (last access: 18.01.2023); while for a deep examination of the changes undergone by institutes, please see S. Lepre, *Le difficoltà dell'assistenza. Le Opere Pie in Italia fra '800 e '900*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1988; F. Della Peruta, *Le Opere Pie dall'Unità alla Legge Crispi*, «Il Risorgimento. Rivista di storia del Risorgimento e di storia contemporanea», vol. XLIII, n. 2-3, 1991, pp. 173-213; and M. Taccolini (ed.), *Dalla beneficenza alla cultura del dono*, Rudiano, GAM, 2012.

⁷ The complex question of parental responsibility has greatly influenced the phenomenon of abandonment and, above all, the definition of the civil *status* of foundlings and orphans. About this topic, please refer to D. Lombardi, *Essere madri, essere padri nella società di antico regime*, in Canella, Dodi, Reggiani (edd.), «*Si consegna questo figlio*». *L'assistenza all'infanzia e alla maternità dalla Ca' Granda alla Provincia di Milano 1456-1920*, cit., pp. 13-34; D.I. Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor. Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1993; the monographic number, D. Lombardi (ed.), *Legittimi e illegittimi. Responsabilità dei genitori e identità dei figli tra Cinque e Ottocento*, «Ricerche storiche», vol. 27, 1997; M. Gerber, *Bastards: Politics, Family and Law in Early Modern France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁸ On this regard, for example, we can think about the itinerant chairs of child hygiene, the hygienic institutes and the complementary hygiene courses created by Ernesto Cacace in the early twentieth century with the aim of training not only the staff of the time, who was employed in childcare services, but also promoting a general education of mothers and ordinary women regarding the main hygienic and childcare indications and the use of some “technical” aids to be exploited for the sterilization or the preparation of milk and other foods (see Caroli, *Per una storia dell'asilo nido in Europa tra Otto e Novecento*, cit., pp. 264-268). About the topic of professional training, please also see E. Betta, *Animare la vita: disciplina della nascita tra medicina e morale nell'Ottocento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006 and R. Raimondo, *Gabinetti anatomici, fantocci e manuali: la formazione della levatrice nella storia sociale dell'educazione*, «Studi sulla formazione», n. 23, 2020, pp. 331-342.

⁹ At the time, a rather important role in the care field was played by ONMI-Opera Nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia [National Organization for the protection of motherhood and childhood] and the services, which were activated and controlled by it; the body intended to strengthen the traditional value of family, promoting support for motherhood and childhood, and to respond to the needs of growth and stability of the regime, following the directives of a precise demographic and procreative policy. In relation to the relationship between Fascism and early childhood and ONMI and its work, it is worth recalling some works including: A. Lo Monaco Aprile, *La legislazione assistenziale nel diritto fascista*, Roma, Anonima Romana Editoriale, 1928; ONMI, *L'Opera nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia dalla sua fondazione*, Roma, ONMI, 1962; C. Ipsen, *Demografia totalitaria. Il problema della popolazione nell'Italia fascista*, tr. by G. Cuberli, Bologna, il Mulino, 1997; A. Bresci, *L'Opera nazionale maternità e infanzia nel ventennio fascista*, «Italia Contemporanea», n. 192, 1993, pp. 421-442; M. Minesso (ed.), *Stato e infanzia nell'Italia contemporanea. Origini, sviluppo e fine dell'Onmi 1925-1975*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007; M. Morello, *Donna, moglie e madre prolificata, L'Onmi cinquant'anni di storia italiana*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2010; M. Minesso, *L'Onmi negli anni del fascismo. Temi e problemi*, «Storia in Lombardia», vol. 39, n. 1-2, 2019, pp. 116-131.

therefore abandoned the ancient charitable commitment in an exclusive way, care had been changed into a sort of tool, which was used to broaden the basis of political consensus and to guarantee a more “populous” handful of soldiers, while education had been placed at the service of every Fascist dimension of social life.

The progressive improvement of economic conditions and the dismantlement of traditional cultural *habitus* linked to child-care certainly led to the definitive assignment of some care activities and the closure of the institutions devoted to orphaned and abandoned children during the 20th century and, above all, in the 21st century. However, the delay in a prompt political intervention on this topic and the lack of adequate compensatory and/or regulatory measures, which more or less completely compensated for the function of ancient institutes, contributed to complicate the resolution of the critical issues related to the evolution of a care and educational dimension both from a bureaucratic and social and organisational point of view.

2. *The collective and public memory of care institutions and their different representations*

The topic of abandoned and orphaned children in collective memory usually refers to a general feeling of pity and desolation and, sometimes, even “repulsion”, a perception which mostly comes of the representations offered over time by testimonies, literature and cinematography, which return a rather lugubrious, gloomy and sad image of the ancient care places and people who had inhabited them. These institutions are often remembered almost exclusively as places of abuse, rigor, discrimination, detention and constraints, as institutions which are completely unable to understand children’s needs and to activate adequate responses to the needs of their guests, on whom corporal punishment and repeated psychological mistreatment were imposed. This representation seems to take the way of conceiving children back centuries, when they were still considered as “secondary” and almost inert people, who were not allowed to take part in the social life of their community of reference in any way and to whom no possibility and decision-making authority on their own existence and their own future was up.

For demonstration, for example, it would be enough to refer to the imaginary figure of the orphan, who was returned to us by literature, which often also arouses a shared sense of pity, exculpation or aversion towards the protagonists and their personal story. On this regard, it is worth mentioning some main characters belonging to works, such as the classics *Oliver Twist* (1838) by Charles Dickens, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, which was firstly published in 1847, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by her sister Charlotte Brontë; or the most recent *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, which was published starting from 1997 and where just two orphans, Harry Potter and Tom Riddle, who later became Lord Voldemort, contrast, or the even most recent *The Orphans of Warsaw* by Kelly Rimmer (2022).

Beside literature, cinematography also deeply contributed to outline a precise imaginary of orphaned children: for example, we can refer to various theatrical and cinematographic adaptations of *Oliver Twist*, the 1953 short film by Guido Guerrasio with the emblematic title *Hanno bisogno di noi*¹⁰, the propaganda videos about ONMI-Opera Nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia [National Organization for the protection of motherhood and childhood], baby rooms, schools and orphanages, which are still kept in the Film Archive at the Istituto Luce¹¹. Please, see also the recent Danish film *The Day will come* (2016), filmed by Jesper W. Nielsen, or *Lion*, released in the same year and filmed by Garth Davis.

However, this repertoire of images – and even feelings, of course – does not do justice to the complex and extremely significant social, civil and pedagogical function assumed by shelters and pious institutions over the centuries at all; on the contrary, this relevance emerges from scientific reconstructions on the topic, as well as from commemorations and public celebrations, or self-representations provided by modern organizations on some special occasions now, such as centenaries or museum exhibitions.

Therefore, an eloquent and deep hiatus emerges between public memory and collective memory in reference to child-care questions, which is able to restore a more real and intrinsic understanding of the solidarity and the educational value for both the structures and the interventions activated, if it is critically analysed. This investigation needs to jointly take into account local and national dimensions, as well as the ideological and empirical factors determining this explicit caesura between the two kinds of memory, which drives us to re-think and to reinterpret the considerations formulated so far about the memory related to child abandonment and the institutions, which welcomed orphaned and abandoned children in the past.

Therefore, sources and tools suitable for overcoming this fracture, which are also useful for a reformulation of a collective imaginary, are currently represented, for example, by various plaques devoted to baby hatches or to the memory of institutes, commemorative busts of individual personalities, who acted in the educational and care fields¹²; or still, they are provided by the museums devoted to the history of some big important institutions. Among them, we can certainly mention the Museum of the Innocents in Florence, which offers the possibility of undertaking various exhibition itineraries linked to the history of the ancient *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, the first real *brefotrofo* in the European context, but

¹⁰ The film made with the contribution of the province of Milan was restored and digitized in 2005. Its vision is available on the following links https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O43YIQVUXQ&ab_channel=Medialogo and <https://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/portale/news/Hanno-bisogno-di-noi/> (last access: 18.01.2023).

¹¹ <https://www.archivioluce.com/archivio-cinematografico-2/> (last access: 18.01.2023).

¹² In particular, this kind of source is fully in line with the number of sources, which have been recently taken into consideration and analysed within the PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”. By way of example, we can mention the tombstones erected in the former orphanage of Iglesias in Sardinia, which has been abandoned since the late twentieth century and was originally reserved for the orphans of miners and soldiers, or the ones near the ancient baby hatches in Calle della Pietà in Venice, in Santa Maria della Stella in Crema or in via Ognissanti in Padua.

also the precious architectural, pictorial and archival heritage of the institute¹³; or the Martinitt and Stelline Museum in Milan, which was opened in 2009 and equipped with a particular interactive exhibition methodology able to retrace the history of institutions, organizations and personalities, who offered their support to the Milanese orphaned children in the medical, training, working and care fields¹⁴. Although it is not in Italy, the Foundling Museum in London also has a great impact and importance: in addition, in 2016 it welcomed the exhibition *Drawing on Childhood* devoted to the illustrations on abandoned, orphaned or adopted children by the most important artists in the last 300 years. The museum also houses a special and rather relevant section devoted to marks dating back to the eighteenth century, with which foundlings were abandoned at the ancient Foundling Hospital; in addition to conveying the hope of a future reunion with one's own child, this symbol of identification and recognition represents an important source for the analysis of the phenomenon of child abandonment today, which is able to return some information about the origin of the orphans, the uses and the customs of the time and the religiosity of their families of origin¹⁵.

¹³ With regard to the heritage in the Museum, please refer to the official page <https://www.museodeglinnocenti.it/> (last access: 18.01.2023) while, in relation to the question of the Foundlings in Florence, see: G. Di Bello, *L'identità inventata. Cognomi e nomi dei bambini abbandonati a Firenze nell'Ottocento*, Firenze, CET, 1993; L. Sandri (ed.), *Gli Innocenti e Firenze nei secoli: un ospedale, un archivio, una città*, Firenze, SPES Studio per edizioni scelte, 1996; A. Lucarella, *Lo Spedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti. Ospizio degli Esposti*, Bari, Laterza, 1999; M. Brunelli, *Five hundred years of the history of childhood and the family at the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence. Two exhibitions*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. II, n. 2, 2007, pp. 463-466; G. Macario (ed.), *Dall'istituto alla casa. L'evoluzione dell'accoglienza all'infanzia nell'esperienza degli Innocenti*, Roma, Carocci Faber, 2008; L. Rosati, A. Schena, R. Massacesi, *Childhood and adolescence between past and present. Using knowledge organization to bridge the different channels of a cultural institution: the case of the Istituto degli Innocenti*, Firenze, «Knowledge Organization», vol. 40, n. 3, 2013, pp. 197-204; S. Filippini, E. Mazzocchi, L. Sebregondi (edd.), *Il Museo degli Innocenti*, Firenze, Mandragora, 2016.

¹⁴ The Martinitt and Stelline Museum, which collects a significant heritage of documents dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries, is obviously linked to the experience of the two male and female orphanages, which marked the care history of the city of Milan. For a deep examination on the two institutions and the exhibitions and the educational activities, which were proposed by the Museum, please see: <https://cultura.gov.it/luogo/museo-martinitt-e-stelline> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.museomilano.org/museo/museo-martinitt-e-stelline/> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.milanoperibambini.it/rubriche/ciabbattine-piccine/2239-il-museo-dei-martinitt-e-stelline.html> (last access: 18.01.2023); L. Dodi, *L'Orfanotrofio dei Martinitt nell'età delle riforme*, Milano, Electa, 1992; E. Baio Dossi, *Le Stelline. Storia dell'Orfanotrofio femminile di Milano*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1994; *Le Stelline: storia e vita di un palazzo*, Sondrio, Gruppo bancario Credito Valtellinese, 1995; M. Belvedere, C. Cenedella, *La storia va in scena. Appunti di museologia dal percorso di realizzazione del Museo Martinitt e Stelline di Milano*, Sondrio, Ramponi Arti Grafiche, 2012; E. Catania, *I Martinitt. La Milano cuore in mano dall'epoca degli Sforza a quella dei Rizzoli, Bianchi e Del Vecchio*, Milano, BookTime, 2012; C. Cenedella, L. Giuliacci (edd.), *La vita fragile. Infanzia, disagi e assistenza nella Milano del lungo Ottocento*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2013.

¹⁵ With regard to The Foundling Museum in London, please refer to the official website <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/> (last access: 18.01.2023), the page devoted to the marking section <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/our-art-and-objects/founding-collections/tokens/> (last access: 18.01.2023), the link https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/founding_01.shtml (last access: 18.01.2023) and some important works, including: R. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981; C. Oliver, P. Aggleton, *Coram's Children. Growing Up in the Care of the Foundling Hospital: 1900-1995*, London, Coram Family, 2000; G. Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*.

Furthermore, in addition to these museums, various exhibitions are particularly significant, because they are precisely organized by cultural, municipal or provincial institutions about the topic of abandonment and often focus on the heritage of the foundlings' marks, introducing the set of objects, symbols and letters, with which children were abandoned, or the artistic and documentary heritage of various institutions. In order to only cite a couple of examples, we can mention the 2014 exhibition *L'eredità dei Bastardini: dall'assistenza all'arte* linked to the ancient *Ospedale dei Bastardini* in Bologna or the exhibition *Appesi ad un filo. I Contrassegni della Congregazione di Carità di Camerino*, which was organized at the section of the State Archive in Camerino in 2022¹⁶.

Of course, in addition to showing a marked interest in local history and the fate of the so-called «children of guilt», these initiatives also testify how and to what extent the topic of child abandonment, care and education still continue to animate cultural and political debates and social conscience. The paradigms of reference have naturally changed, and now the attention and the commitment aimed at childhood are exclusively addressed to the children's protection in their integrity, paying attention to respecting their primary needs, as well as their psychological, moral, educational and legal needs; services and interventions correspond to the modern democratic habit and the new *welfare* concept and are now strictly regulated and organized within a precise network.

Conclusions

Of course, the social, economic and political context in Italy and, more generally, in Europe has radically changed compared to the past and the question of abandoned children no longer represents an emergency situation, nevertheless the problem is not completely eliminated. For example, there are still the so-called «cradles for life» today, a sort of modern evolution for the ancient baby hatches – whose judgment is particularly conflicting –, and the need for having services and institutions devoted to parental and child care persists, such as communities for unaccompanied foreign minors, protected

Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital, Cheltenham, The History Press, 2007; A. Levene, *Childcare, health and mortality in the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800. 'Left to the mercy of the world'*, Manchester-New York, Manchester University Press, 2007; J.A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Unwed Mothers: Victorian Women and the London Foundling Hospital*, London, Continuum, 2012.

¹⁶ For a brief description of the exhibitions mentioned, please refer to the following links: https://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/portale/Home/Archivio_news/8220Leredita_dei_Bastardini_dallassistenza_allarte (last access: 18.01.2023); https://www.bolognametropolitana.it/Home_Page/Archivio_news/001/8220Leredita_dei_Bastardini_dallassistenza_allarte (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.lastampa.it/cultura/2014/01/13/news/l-eredita-dei-bastardini-dall-assistenza-all-arte-opere-scelte-dal-patrimonio-della-provincia-di-bologna-1.35934626/> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://archiviodistatomacerata.cultura.gov.it/2022/06/08/appesi-ad-un-filo-i-contrassegni-della-congregazione-di-carita-di-camerino/> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.beniculturali.it/evento/appesi-ad-un-filo-i-contrassegni-della-congregazione-di-carita-di-camerino> (last access: 18.01.2023).

homes for imprisoned parents and children, centres for children with disabilities, anti-violence centres and shelters for the abused ones.

Therefore, the value, which the historical-pedagogical reflection on the memory of institutions and care and educational interventions currently assumes, is undoubted: in fact, in addition to contributing to a general renewal of a collective imaginary on the topic, which is far from pietism, prejudices and the mere charitable attitude of the past, it allows to enrich and to strengthen contemporary pedagogical thought and actions through a critical attitude towards the potentialities and the difficulties already experienced in the past and thanks to an increasingly trans-disciplinary approach in the wake of which we can build services, which are concretely devoted to the quality of life of children and their well-being.

The “Raggio di Sole” Open-Air School and Its Directors in Collective and Public Memory

Giulia Fasan
University of Padua (Italy)

Introduction

The paper is divided into two parts: the first briefly introduces the experience of the “Raggio di Sole” open-air school and of Alessandro Randi, the president of the committee that promoted its foundation, in an attempt to present this experience against the backdrop of the time and in the historical, pedagogical and cultural context of Padua in the early 20th century. The second part of the speech is dedicated to the public and collective memory today of Alessandro Randi and the “Raggio di Sole” school, in the desire to present a piece of the historical reconstruction that has unfolded, and then to highlight the public narrative that arose around Randi and his open-air school, which today comes to us in the form of “memory”.

The city of Padua in the early 20th century was a leader in the field of public hygiene and focus on the health of the population, and this was due in large part to doctors, city administrators and philanthropists, who were interested in care, prevention and hygiene education¹. From the 19th century onwards, the study of tuberculosis aroused lively interest in Italy, especially with regard to treatment and preventive action to be taken, primarily because of the living conditions in city centres (overcrowding, poor hygiene, poverty, polluted air, inadequate nutrition, and so on). Secondly, there was still a widespread belief among the population that tuberculosis was a kind of exposure to the cold, a “colpo d’aria” (a blast of cold), and for that reason it was thought that it had to be treated in a heated and enclosed environment.

There was a need for a movement towards both a social safeguard against the disease and towards the opening of treatment centres, but also for information and health education. Indeed, even before Robert Koch identified the bacterium responsible for the disease in 1882, the beneficial contribution of natural environments and “air cures” in both the prevention and treatment of the disease had already been ascertained in the medical sphere: it was from the second half of the 19th century that sanatoriums, seaside hospices and open-air schools were established in Europe and the United States².

¹ Cf. G. Aliprandi, *Un cinquantenario dimenticato. Iniziative padovane nella lotta contro la tubercolosi*, Padova, Erredici, 1961, pp. 7-8.

² The institution of the first seaside lodging on today’s Italian territory dates back to the pre-unification period, established in Viareggio in 1856. In Padua in 1869, Associazione degli ospizi marini di Padova (Padua

At the dawn of social medicine, the innovative contribution, both academic and civic, of doctors from Padua proved decisive for the birth and development of educational and school structures in the city³, but it also became the inspiration for similar experiences that spread throughout Italy from the early 20th century onwards. The intertwining of education, hygiene and medicine emerged within the trend of Italian and European positivism⁴, in the exaltation of scientific progress as the panacea for all ills, and was promoted by educators, doctors, hygienists, anthropologists and philanthropists from the second half of the 19th century onwards⁵: the word “science” was juxtaposed with the word “humanity” in large letters, «to symbolise the joint ideal of a civilisation considered unfailingly progressive»⁶. A scientific work, therefore, that expanded towards a civil and educational commitment.

1. *The open-air school “Raggio di Sole”*

It was in this context that Alessandro Randi (Pordenone, 1858 - Gorgo di Cartura, 1944) came on the scene, a graduate in medicine and from 1885 honorary assistant to the chair of the Clinica Medica Propedeutica (Propedeutic Medical Clinic) at the University of Padua, employed from 1887 until 1890, when he resigned his academic post⁷. In 1891 he was appointed interim health officer at Padua City Hall, where he then held the position of Chief Physician at the Office of Hygiene from 1895 for the next forty years. It

Seaside Hospice Association) was founded, which by Royal Decree of 25 October 1893 was united with the Associazione ginnastica di Padova (Padua Gymnastics; founded in 1889) into a single institution, named the Padua Seaside Hospice and Rickets Institute. In 1881 the city of Milan founded an institution for alpine climatic cures for poor children. The first Italian anti-tubercular sanatorium was built in 1903, at Pineta di Sortenna, a hamlet of Sondalo (Sondrio).

³ Cf. G. Zago, *La pedagogia positivistica a Padova*, «Studium Educationis», vol. 16, n. 1, 2015, p. 27.

⁴ The University of Padua is recognised as one of the “cradles” of Italian positivism. Among the most illustrious presences at the University of Padua are: Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920), undoubtedly the most representative Italian exponent of this current, whose magisterium at Padua stands out in both the philosophical and pedagogical spheres; Giovanni Canestrini (1835-1900), lecturer in zoology and comparative anatomy at the University of Padua, promoter in Italy of the dissemination of Darwin’s evolutionary thought; Achille De Giovanni (1838-1916), dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Padua from 1885 and for the next eleven years, then rector between 1896 and 1900: he believed that the origin of “morbidity” lay in the morphological disharmony between the parts or in an anomaly in the process of evolution; De Giovanni in particular was involved on both the academic and social-political fronts, especially in the fight against tuberculosis. Cf. G. Berti, G. Simone (edd.), *Il positivismo a Padova tra egemonia e contaminazioni (1880 - 1940)*, Treviso, Antilia, 2016; M. Quaranta, *Il Positivismo Veneto*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2003.

⁵ Cf. M. D’Ascenzo, *Le esperienze di scuole all’aperto in Italia nel primo Novecento. Avvio di un’indagine*, in M. Tomarchio, L. Todaro (edd.), *Spazi formativi, modelli e pratiche di educazione all’aperto nel primo Novecento*, Santarcangelo di Romagna, Maggioli, 2017, p. 101.

⁶ G. Cosmacini, *L’arte lunga. La storia della medicina dall’antichità ad oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011, p. 218.

⁷ Cf. P. Dal Zotto, *Biografie*, in V. Dal Piaz (ed.), *“Raggi di Sole” sulle mura di Padova: scuole e strutture ospedaliere contro la tubercolosi*, Padova, Il Prato, 2013, pp. 116-117.

was during his years at the city municipality that he promoted important studies and city initiatives, with a commitment to health and hygiene but also imbued with a pedagogical and educational vision.

In January 1902, Randi contributed to the founding of the "Comitato di soccorso ai tubercolosi poveri" ("Committee for the Relief of Poor Tuberculosis"), of which he was President from 1904 to 1908, which in July 1908 merged, together with the "Comitato padovano della lega nazionale contro la tubercolosi" ("Padua Committee of the National League Against Tuberculosis"), into the "Associazione padovana contro la tubercolosi" ("Padua Association Against Tuberculosis"); this was later named the "Raggio di Sole" ("Ray of Sun") Association after the open-air recreation centre of the same name was inaugurated in 1905 on the Bastione degli Scalzi (thus on the city walls) and, on 24 May 1907, it finally became the open-air school⁸.

It is precisely the "Raggio di Sole" open-air school that historiography recognises as the first open-air school in Italy, almost contemporary with the "Waldschule" in Charlottenburg, the school-sanatorium started in Germany in 1904, the first example in Europe⁹. In the following years, Randi coordinated the opening of other open-air recreation centres-schools in the area: the "Camillo Aita" school on Bastione Santa Croce (1910), the "Enrichetta Luzzatto Dina" school on Bastione Venier (1920), the "Giovan Battista Da Monte Lysiatric Ward" on Bastione Cornaro (1915)¹⁰. The choice of the city walls for the establishment of these institutes was, of course, not accidental: in the dusty city, the walls were the only green, elevated but also easily accessible place that could be reached by foot from the centre. They were also suitable locations for the installation of verandas and terraces for "air treatment".

Randi calls such experiments «works that strive to give children the best way to develop», also accusing the Italian school of the time as a generally unhealthy place:

The school not only disseminates knowledge, but also feeds and sows the seeds of disease, due to the deplorable conditions of the environment, the crowding of pupils, and the excessive work imposed on evolving brains. It has been said and repeated: less brain work and more material work, harmoniously combined; [...] air and sunshine for all. [...]. In this way, school will no longer be seen as a danger to health, but as a useful gymnasium¹¹.

⁸ Cf. A. Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, «Igiene della scuola», vol. 45, December 1914, pp. 3-4.

⁹ A. Gutierrez, *Scuola all'aperto*, in G. Marchesini (dir.), *Dizionario delle scienze pedagogiche. Opera di consultazione pratica con un Indice semantico*, vol. II, Milano, Società Editrice libraria, 1929, pp. 452-453. Regarding today's educational historiography, we cite, by way of example, a text referring to the Italian context and one of international scope: M. D'Ascenzo, *Per una storia delle scuole all'aperto in Italia*, Pisa, ETS, 2018; A.-M. Châtelet, D. Lerch, J.-N. Luc (dir.), *L'école de plein air. Une expérience pédagogique et architecturale dans l'Europe du XX siècle/ Open-Air Schools. An Educational and Architectural Venture in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Paris, Éditions Recherches, 2003.

¹⁰ Cf. G. Lenci, *La lotta contro la tubercolosi a Padova tra Ottocento e Novecento: scuole all'aperto e il "Da Monte" sulle mura cinquecentesche*, in V. Dal Piaz (ed.), *"Raggi di Sole" sulle mura di Padova: scuole e strutture ospedaliere contro la tubercolosi*, cit.

¹¹ A. Randi, *Le stazioni diurne di cura d'aria nella lotta alla tubercolosi*, Padova, Stabilimento tipo-litografico Fratelli Salmin, 1906, pp. 10-11.

In 1908, in *Ricreatori e Scuole all'aperto per fanciulli deboli* (*Recreation Centre and Open-air Schools for Weak Children*), an excerpt from the report that the doctor presented at the Italian Paediatric Congress held in Padua in 1907, he clarifies the perceived need to «modify the school environment, adapting teaching methods and proportioning intellectual work to the needs of weak organisms, resolving in a word the problem of improving their physical condition without prejudice, indeed to the benefit of their education»¹². Hence the value placed on walks, excursions «of pleasure and treatment»¹³. For Randi, this should have been the situation in the municipal schools, spaces that were in any case different from those places primarily intended for the care of the weak and the sick – generally with continuous hospitalisation – recognising the benefit of being able to return home in the evening hours and conduct care in the family as well.

The transformation from recreation centre to school occurred in 1907, partly prompted by the local involvement in primary schooling that the 1904 Orlando Law had enshrined, setting compulsory schooling until 12 years of age. From November 1908, among other things, the open-air school fell under municipal control, and from the 1910-1911 school year, *open-air after-school clubs* were started, allowing pupils to stay on site until 6 p.m., enjoy two meals and occupy their time between study, play and rest; this institution was so successful that in the 1912-1913 school year, 787 pupils were enrolled¹⁴.

2. Alessandro Randi's legacy: public and collective memory linked to “Raggio di Sole”

In order to understand the perception and legacy of the experience Randi and “Raggio di Sole” (as well as the public and social image it developed), we will consider some elements of the public and collective memory linked to Randi and his open-air school.

In recognition of his commitment to social, educational and prevention work, Alessandro Randi was awarded the “Gold Medal of merits in Public Education” (1912) for «enhancing the education of individuals, a prerequisite for a better social life» and «for rare and unremunerated services for the benefit of infant and primary education» and the “Silver Medal of Merit in Public Health” (1923) «for outstanding scientific and organisational skills».

Evidence of the first words of recognition of the pioneering Paduan experience can be found in local essays of the time. Alberto Graziani, a doctor and successor to Randi's work at the city hall, writes about the significance of “Raggio di Sole”: «It is a legacy of good and blessings that the Association will leave to the municipality, not a passive legacy

¹² A. Randi, *Ricreatori e scuole all'aperto per i fanciulli deboli*. Estratto dagli Atti del VI Congresso pediatrico italiano; Padova, Ottobre 1907, Padova, R. Stab. P. Prosperini, 1908, p. 5.

¹³ Randi, *Le stazioni diurne di cura d'aria nella lotta alla tubercolosi*, cit., p. 11.

¹⁴ The recreation centre was started in 1905 with 54 pupils in its first year. The open-air school had 90 pupils when it opened in 1907.

as one might believe; a legacy in which the fruits are in the seed stage, but will grow and ripen in the sun in a few short years»¹⁵.

The Royal District School Inspector of Padua, Pietro Trotto, in *La scuola elementare a Padova negli ultimi cent'anni* (*The primary school in Padua over the last hundred years*) (1805-1906) published in 1909, also highlights how:

The credit for the initiative of this ingenious and philanthropic institution belongs to Dr. Alessandro Randi, chief physician of the municipality of Padua, who was able to implement his noble idea, despite many serious difficulties, because he was endowed with a fervent intellect, a broad and clear scientific culture, a big heart and a firmness of purpose¹⁶.

It also seems interesting to review a few excerpts from the visitors' book of the "Raggio di Sole" school and recreation centre, published in 1914 as an appendix to Alberto Graziani's essay, it boasts more than one authoritative voice of the time, including Giovanni Marchesini (1868-1931), who at the time of the visit (1914) held the position of full professor of Pedagogy at the University of Padua. Marchesini writes:

I wish (although I know I am boldly indulging in fantasy) that all primary and secondary schools were outdoors, because I believe that youth should never be deprived of air and sunshine, especially if we recognise the complaint that excessive intellectual work in our schools threatens physical development and fertile mental vigour at the age that should be considered most sacred to the future of families and the nation¹⁷.

Marchesini emphasises how the medical-educational and social policy innovations implemented in Padua are praised and taken as an example, demonstrating how their merit is also recognised in the educational sphere. In this excerpt, certain key ideas from Marchesini's thinking clearly resonate: the role of moral instruction on the part of educational institutions as part the duty of building the nation, the education of the child as a psycho-physical being, and example and habit as methods to shape morality¹⁸. The value placed by Marchesini on Randi's work and more generally on open-air schools as a pedagogical-social device (in addition to its civil relevance and «undisputed praise») is clear by the inclusion of a specific sub-heading – "Open-air school", under the broader heading "School" – within the *Dictionary of Pedagogical Sciences*, which was edited by him in 1929¹⁹.

¹⁵ Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, cit., pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ P. Trotto, *La scuola elementare a Padova negli ultimi cent'anni (1805-1906)*, Firenze, R. Bemporad, 1909, p. 514.

¹⁷ Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, cit., Part IV "Estratti dall'album dei Visitatori - Onorificenze - Bibliografia", pp. 22-23.

¹⁸ Cf. G. Zago, *Il pensiero pedagogico di Giovanni Marchesini e la crisi del positivismo fra Otto e Novecento*, in Id. (ed.), *Il pensiero pedagogico di Giovanni Marchesini e la crisi del positivismo italiano*, Lecce-Rovato (BS), Pensa Multimedia, 2014, pp. 15-66.

¹⁹ The entry is written by Alfredo Gutierrez, a collaborator on the project, who does not fail to emphasise the fruitful relationship between medicine and pedagogy in these places: «The work of the teacher must be supported by the school doctor, who must see, study and check the pupils, to detect their physical conditions and any shortcomings, and to indicate cures [...]. And in turn the teacher gives the doctor all the information

There were many visits by many personalities from the educational-institutional world linked to Ministries and to medical and social associations, journalists and writers. But the commentary signed by Pio Foà stands out. He was a doctor and professor of pathological anatomy, first at the University of Modena (from 1875) then in Turin (from 1884), a Senator of the Kingdom from 1908 and a remarkable individual in terms of civil and political commitment. Following his visit to the “Raggio di Sole” in 1914, he left a long commentary in which we read:

It is rare to find the coincidence of so many minor impressions capable of generating a concise and grandiose one. Useless ramparts of the city concerted into parks for weak children to study in the free air. A beneficial ray of sunshine in the surface of the earth that generates a ray of sunshine bestowing good works in the soul of a gentle apostle who neither speaks nor writes, but works like a saint. [...] Nature, in whose presence the child grows free and healthy, develops more fully the sphere of cerebral functions and nurtures the little man of the future, who will, in a more or less distant future, demand the extension of the benefit to other ages of development and other schools²⁰

Even the press, local but also national, did not fail to report on the experience in question. Four examples are given:

Nothing similar has been set up so far in any other city in Italy – to find something reminiscent, for its intended purpose, of the recreation centre in Padua, one must look to Germany and France [...]. The creator and soul of this most noble institution is a doctor, as modest as he is knowledgeable, Dr. Alessandro Randi, director of the Municipal Sanitary Office.

Il Resto del Carlino, Bologna, 31 May 1907

The Municipality of Padua, always a vigilant promoter of every healthy initiative, could not remain deaf to the call of the well-deserving “Raggio di Sole” principals and, under their auspices, was the first in Italy to implement those open-air schools that Rome, Milan and Venice copy today. Therefore, praise be to you Sir Randi, standard bearer of the good fight, praise be to your companions in faith and work.

Il Veneto, Padua, 8 May 1910

In Italy, the first outdoor school was organised in Padua by Dr Randi, a fervent and tenacious apostle of the idea [...] who immediately realised the great benefit that open-air schools could bring to children.

L'Avvenire d'Italia, 13 September 1912

But the best organised outdoor school, which has yielded surprising results, is the one founded in Padua in 1905 under the name “Raggio di Sole”. Those who read the report by Dr Randi of Padua, who was the soul of the institution, are moved and filled with admiration for the immense benefits derived from the ingenious modern reform.

La Provincia di Mantova, n. 95, 1914

about the child and reports the findings he makes on the educational results of his work»; Gutierrez, *Scuola all'aperto*, cit., p. 452, 454.

²⁰ Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, cit., Part IV “Estratti dall'album dei Visitatori - Onorificenze - Bibliografia”, p. 22.

To date, some 30 or so excerpts from newspapers and printed publications, both local and national, have been found, which between 1906 and 1914 report on the experience. They all praise Randi's work, almost always mentioning him as the director and founder of the "Raggio di Sole" school.

As we conclude, we propose a further reference to Randi's legacy starting with a study of the backpack desks preserved in the Museum of Education belonging to the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology at the University of Padua, from the "Gioconda" open-air school founded in Este, in the province of Padua, on 24 May 1922. Not only was "Gioconda" an open-air school, it was also a "mobile" school, as desks, blackboard and Italian flag were transportable by "backpack" from one place to another depending on the weather, the seasons and hygienic and teaching requirements. Unlike the "Raggio di Sole" facilities, which were fixed.

Some iconographic and documentary sources illustrate the instructions for opening and closing the desks: indeed, in 1928, a small booklet was prepared containing instructions for setting up and dismantling the classroom but also with the prices for starting such a school²¹. Inside, the teacher was shown a usage diagram indicating "warning commands" and "execution commands" for preparing and disassembling the class, which took the form of actual repetitions of outdoor gymnastic exercises. Each "warning command" (e.g. "desk on the shoulder", or "desk on the ground") recalled the action to be performed with the desk, and was linked to four "execution commands", which were punctuated through the repetition of the numbers "one" "two" "three" "four". There is a clear reference to a march and a repetition of exercises in a military setting. Thanks to the instructions, the teacher could learn the commands and corresponding actions, and also teach them to the pupils using the enclosed photographs.

The conception and start-up of the "Gioconda" is due to the ingenuity and commitment to education of head teacher Mario Cacciavillani. Cacciavillani became a head teacher at only 23 years of age, even before he actually obtained his Diploma as Head Teacher, for which he was following a course at the University of Padua. In 1903 he arrived in Este, a town 30 km from Padua, as Director of Primary Schools. In 1922 he realised his plan to start a "mobile" open-air school, which he named "Gioconda". He designed the abovementioned "backpack desks" himself²², the drafts and sketches of which are still preserved at the Gabinetto di Lettura Association in Este, and he supervised its realisation by commissioning a local carpenter, master craftsman Ettore Bressan.

²¹ *Scuole comunali di Este: La Gioconda dei Balilla*, Este, Tip. A. Apostoli, 1928.

²² It seems that "backpack desks" were already in use in the open-air schools of Rome. Indeed, they appear in a 1911 Paravia catalogue of teaching aids (*Catalogo del materiale scolastico per gli asili infantili e le scuole elementari. Anno scolastico 1911-1912*, Torino, Paravia, 1911). Paravia calls them "Grilli backpack desks", on sale for 20 lire, marketing as «the model chosen by the Municipality of Rome for the open-air schools it has established». Three different sizes were available, depending on the age of the schoolchildren: 6 to 8 years; 8 to 10 years; 10 to 13 years. The photographs in the catalogue show some substantial differences between these backpack desks and those of the "Gioconda" school: above all, in this case the desk and chair were fixed together, and opened with a single sweeping movement. We presume, however, that Cacciavillani drew inspiration from this already existing patent.

Cacciavillani's intuitions, brought to life in the mobile open-air school, became famous in the Veneto region, so much so that the "Gioconda" school, in the meantime renamed "La Gioconda dei Balilla" due to the changed political and cultural context²³, was awarded a gold medal at the 1926 Regional Educational Exhibition in Venice, for the unique and excellent educational and training experience that was offered to the pupils. This resulted in the organisation of a "propaganda and educational trip" (in May 1928) between the provinces of Padua, Vicenza and Treviso, with the aim of publicising the experience, which was pioneering in the Veneto region due to its "mobile" nature. In each town centre the pupils stopped to give a demonstration of their travelling classroom set-up.

Today we still have Cacciavillani's memoir *Lontani Intimi Ricordi di un Ottuagenario* (*Distant Intimate Memories of an Octogenarian*), 1959, which unfortunately does not describe the background and ideas that led to the creation of the mobile open-air school. Certainly, however, the head teacher, moving between Este and Padua, had had the opportunity to witness and appreciate the experience of the "Raggio di Sole" and was probably also familiar with the other experiences that had arisen in the meantime in Italy²⁴. In any case, his diary stands today as a valuable source to trace the beginnings of the professional career of a teacher who very quickly also became a head teacher.

Conclusions

In the testimonies reported through ideas and practices linked to the "Raggio di Sole" school and Alessandro Randi, the interest in social medicine, hygiene education and prevention can be viewed in a historical framework of a country in which, in the pedagogical sphere, a greater awareness of the needs of childhood and attention to "outside" places for education and training were developing²⁵.

The intertwining of social medicine and education that emerges from the "Raggio di Sole" experience, of a scientific approach that promotes organic and civilised improvement and of preventive education that acts as a conduit for such instances in responding to social needs, fits well into the framework of Italian positivism, in both the medical and pedagogical spheres, thanks, in the latter case, to the importance given (albeit in a secondary and functional way) to educational settings, to the very ideas of education, socialisation and play²⁶. These assumptions in the subsequent encounter with

²³ During the Fascist regime, the term "Balilla" referred to boys from 8 to 14 years of age, but also more broadly to youth.

²⁴ Regarding a historical-pedagogical reconstruction of the first open-air school experiences in Italy, we refer to the works already cited here by Mirella D'Ascenzo.

²⁵ Cf. G. Fasan, *Medici-pedagogisti nella Padova del Positivismo. L'impegno sociale e educativo di Achille De Giovanni e Alessandro Randi*, in G. Zago (ed.), *Le discipline filosofiche e pedagogiche a Padova tra positivismo e umanesimo*, Roma, Studium, 2021, pp. 219-240.

²⁶ Cf. Zago, *La pedagogia positivista a Padova*, cit., p. 27.

the activism of European pedagogy have had an important influence on the traditional idea of the school, and for this reason the medical-pedagogical experiences of open-air schools remain a notable stage in the history of education and educational institutions, but also in the social history of childhood²⁷, in their pursuit of an idea of re-appropriation and care of the body directed towards psychophysical, and, by extension, social well-being.

Compared to the "Raggio di Sole" school, the "Gioconda dei Balilla" school was clearly influenced by Giovanni Gentile's school of thought and programmes, of an education of the body and morals which was held to be indispensable for the very education of the spirit. There are, therefore, fundamental differences in the ideological assumptions underpinning the development of these open-air schools: the "Raggio di Sole" school under the influence of medical and pedagogical positivism, the "Gioconda dei Balilla" school in a neo-idealist climate influenced by the emerging fascist ideal. Both are outdoors, but one is mobile and the other has fixed structures. However, they are united in the idea of caring for the educational environment as a place for the transmission of cultural and moral values, a place for training and education that cannot be separated from physical well-being.

It is precisely the aspects of continuity and divergence that make it possible today to enrich the study of these experiences with different types of memories and representations, different types of images of these schools linked as much to the various types of sources we have today to study them as to the different pedagogical theories they describe. But it becomes clear that, even leaving completely aside the positivist school, the influence of the ideas and inheritance of Randi and the "Raggio di Sole" school was destined to endure in pedagogical thought, both locally and among other head teachers, with ever-increasing attention placed on the harmonious development of children, on their physical and psychological well-being, on decent living conditions, and on the educational place as a space for relationships and training.

Furthermore, in view of the heritage relating to open-air schools preserved at the Museum of Education in Padua, one can see some of the educational value and potential that the use and exercise of memory can have today in university teaching venues. Indeed, memory and its forms appear to be closely connected to the promotion and construction of critical thinking and a sense of belonging which, in educational venues, can become both an exercise in active citizenship and the foundation of a professional, individual and collective identity. "Inhabiting" these forms of memory also becomes a cornerstone for the development of democratic and humanising thinking in the training of educational professionals²⁸.

²⁷ Cf. M. D'Ascenzo, *Per una storia dei diritti dell'infanzia. Le scuole all'aperto nel primo Novecento in Italia*, in M. Tomarchio, S. Olivieri (edd.), *Pedagogia militante. Diritti, culture, territori*, Pisa, ETS, 2015, p. 680.

²⁸ Cf. G. Fasan, *Storia della pedagogia e materialità educativa. Un connubio per la didattica al Museo dell'Educazione*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 93-107.

Villa Emma in Nonantola, between History and Public Memory

Silvia Panzetta
University of Bologna (Italy)

Introduction

This contribution is part of a much broader and more solid research area focusing on the forms of school memory understood as public practices of re-evoking a common past through the study of the monumental heritage of schools¹. The study

of monumental artefacts seems particularly suitable for explaining the purposes for which public commemorative practices have been implemented, how they have developed, how they have changed over time, who has been involved and what significance they have had in making the cultural history of school².

The study conducted covers a long period from 1937 to 1985 and the educational practices and events occurring in a small town in the province of Modena, Nonantola. It refers, in particular, to four emblematic experiences of the pedagogy of Don Zeno

¹ On the concept of public and monumental memory, refer to the following publications: M. D'Ascenzo, *Linee di ricerca della storiografia scolastica in Italia*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. III, n. 1, January-July 2016, pp. 249-272; Id., *Creating Places of Public Memory through the Naming of School Buildings. A Case Study of Urban School Spaces in Bologna in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, «El futuro del pasado», vol. 7, 2016, pp. 441-458; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; M. D'Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as a resource in history of education*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, 2017, pp. 633-657; A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...». *Public memory and awards of honour of public education in Italy from the Unification to the end of the 19th Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 185-205; M. Brunelli, J. Meda, L. Pomante (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times* (special issue), «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019; M. D'Ascenzo, *Esperienze di Public History of Education nell'Università di Bologna, tra ricerca scientifica e didattica*, in G. Bandini, S. Oliviero (edd.), *Public History of education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2019; J. Meda, *The "Sites of School Memory" in Italy between memory and oblivion: a first approach*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 25-47; V. Minuto, *L'educazione al patrimonio monumentale della scuola*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive. Atti del II Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Padova, 7-8 Ottobre 2021)*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 151-168, V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255.

² V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, 2021, p. 214.

Saltini³, significantly interpreted by Don Arrigo Beccari⁴; the pedagogic experience of school in the Jewish children's community at Villa Emma in 1943 and 1944; the professional training school, later the unified middle school that Don Arrigo Beccari ran from 1949 to 1968; the "Trains of Happiness" hospitality project run by the Italian Communist Party of Modena and Nonantola, which from 1946 to 1949 welcomed poor and disadvantaged children from Southern Italy and the Modena Apennines, and finally the experiences of the educational and cultural services run by the Municipality of Nonantola in the period 1960-1985. The research was then applied to the dissertations of the Primary Education Sciences degree programme at the University of Bologna⁵. Tracing the history of the teachers in question and the stone plaques devoted to them, as well as the inauguration speeches and public commemorations organised by local and national institutions aiming to obtain consensus and strengthen the sense of belonging to the community of Nonantola, the methodology used was mainly that of historical research, focusing on printed sources from newspapers and archives, many of which private, as well as those treasure chests of memory which are the registers of the primary school teachers in Nonantola from 1947 to 1949 held in the school archives of the "Fratelli Cervi" Comprehensive Institute in Nonantola. Great importance was also given to oral and photographic sources, «sources that are not found in the usual archives but in people», which offered an approach

to the local community, the common people and the schools, with a dual function: to trace these sources and contribute to their preservation and enhancement for the local community. This is one of the key sectors of international community of the academic historian as a citizen, the ethic and civil dimension of his work as a scholar and member of a local, national and international community,

³ Don Zeno Saltini was born in Fossoli di Carpi on 30 August 1900, the ninth of twelve children, in a well-off farming family. Aged fourteen and a half, he left school to work in the fields. He was called to arms on 20 March 1918, serving until 7 March 1919. In 1923, he passed the classic high school diploma at the "Ludovico Antonio Muratori" school in Modena as a private student, enrolled in the Faculty of Law in Modena in 1923 and in 1926 transferred as a fourth-year student to the Catholic University in Milan, where he graduated in 1929. He went on to become a priest, and was ordained in 1931 by Mons. Giovanni Pranzini, Bishop of Carpi. He celebrated his first mass in the city cathedral on 6 January that year, and during the ceremony he adopted a seventeen-year-old boy who had already been arrested several times by the Carabinieri. He began his mission in Fossoli, in the province of Carpi, dealing particularly with children. In June 1931 he moved to San Giacomo Roncole, a hamlet outside Mirandola, belonging to the diocese of Carpi and, on 22 January 1933, he founded the Opera Piccoli Apostoli. After the war, he worked in the former prison camp in Fossoli and set up Nomadelfia. He died in 1980.

⁴ Don Arrigo (his real name was Ario) Beccari was born in Castelnuovo Rangone on 24 August 1909. In 1933 he was ordained and celebrated his first mass on 8 June 1933 in the church in Castelnuovo Rangone. He was immediately appointed as a teacher at the Seminary in Nonantola and on 1 January 1940 became Rector of the parish of Rubbiara in Nonantola. A highly active member of the Civil Resistance along with Giuseppe Moreali, Don Ennio Tardini, Don Ivo Silingardi and Don Elio Monari, Righteous Among the Nations for helping to save the Jewish children at Villa Emma. Arrested in Nonantola on 16 September 1944, he was imprisoned in San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna, and freed from Sant'Eufemia prison in Modena on 22 April 1945. In 1946 he founded a professional training school, and was the parish priest of Nonantola. He died in Nonantola on 27 December 2005.

⁵ S. Panzetta, *Nonantola dei bambini, Nonantola dei ragazzi. Storie di pedagogia d'avanguardia, di solidarietà, di servizi educativi e di servizi culturali a Nonantola 1937-1985*, Modena, Edizioni Il Fiorino, 2021.

as well as the dimension demanded also by the university culture in terms of “third mission” and promotion of active citizenship⁶.

In this sense, it falls within the idea of «overcoming a history of schools and education focusing on the “ideal” pedagogic model or mere legislative reconstruction»⁷ giving space to “real” schools.

The research was initially set around a question: how was it possible that, in a period of fifty years, such significant pedagogic experiences were embodied in a tiny town in the Po Plain. It is deemed that memory can be of fundamental support in recovering the great voids in school culture and everyday practice, able to help historians to investigate unexplored terrains. As Monica Galfrè stated in her intervention entitled *School, memory and history*,

20th century school historians certainly cannot avoid the relationship between history and memory, which is marked by an indissoluble bond, however without forgetting that history is one thing and memory is a source, and a such must be dealt with and subjected to a strict, severe critique of its sources⁸.

I was not aware of this professional experience in such a recent and innovative field of study like those relating to the study of the historical-educational heritage and public memory. But it was clear that I would have had to investigate completely different pedagogic experiences, even though I can certainly refer to them as active educational practices; I therefore related directly to these. Starting from

the first fundamental works of the French historian Dominique Julia and overcoming traditional studies into pedagogic theories in favour of those relating to educational practices, this type of heritage – which constitutes a kind of “sub-category” of the cultural heritage – was formally accredited as an essential source for historical-educational research. According to the definition proposed by Meda in 2013, specifically, the term school material heritage refers to that “set of tangible and/or intangible assets used and/or produced in formal and/or non-formal educational contexts over time”⁹.

Printed sources were examined to investigate the pedagogy implemented in the experience of Don Zeno Saltini and the Hashomer Hatzair. The aspects concerning Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati¹⁰, Don Zeno Saltini and Don Arrigo Beccari were dealt with

⁶ M. D’Ascenzo, *Esperienze di Public History of Education nell’Università di Bologna, tra ricerca scientifica e didattica*, in Bandini, Oliviero (edd.), *Public History of education*, cit., p. 216.

⁷ M. D’Ascenzo, *A caccia di storia nella scuola di ieri. Per una memoria educativa collettiva tra ricerca e didattica nella scuola primaria*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, cit., p. 65.

⁸ L. Paciaroni, *Memoria scolastica ed educativa: questioni metodologiche, buone pratiche ed esperienze digitali. A proposito del terzo seminario nazionale PRIN (Florence, 17 September 2020)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, pp. 755-762.

⁹ S. Montecchiani, *Le fonti storico-educative per il rinnovamento della didattica universitaria. L’esperienza del laboratorio di Storia dell’Educazione dell’Università degli Studi di Macerata*, in Ascenzi, Covato, Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, cit., p. 364.

¹⁰ Ottaviano Pelati was born in San Felice sul Panaro (Modena) on 28 September 1885. His ecclesiastical

by examining archive as well as oral sources; to investigate the “Trains of Happiness” I explored the school archive of the “Fratelli Cervi” Comprehensive Institute in Nonantola and conducted some interviews with figures from that period; in relation to the birth of cultural and education services, both public and private archives and oral sources were investigated.

As the research continued, I realised that although not all but many of the sources identified could also be used by the children in history teaching projects. Precisely these sources,

if safeguarded as a historical-educational heritage, can be used for active history teaching purposes at all school levels, in the wake of the educational renewal in schools developed significantly also by history teachers after the Second World War. Precisely the sources of historical-educational research, so close to the concrete experience of students in schools, can be used to renew history teaching, as also suggested in the *National Indications* of the Ministry of Education (MIUR) which specifies the need to use sources [...] which can thus become the starting point for inductive teaching and, at the same time, a resource to be saved in terms of collective heritage, functional to education to the cultural heritage and active citizenship¹¹.

While

the historiographic choice of increasingly focusing research on life inside the school and the school culture that this produced has opened the doors to the need to return to where real school is manifested: in the local community, the times and spaces of the cities, rural areas and mountains, the municipalities which, in this way, have acquired new dignity as a subject of study of a renewed local history¹².

Nonantola has lent and continues to lend itself to this type of investigation. Of all the educators I investigated, the oral memory of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati has been lost, as he died in 1965 at the venerable age of eighty-eight, and his students are also no longer with us, but still today visitors to Nonantola asking about Don Arrigo Beccari will be able to talk about him as many people, although elderly, were students at his school and knew him, and the myriad of initiatives he ran, firstly in the tiny parish of Rubbiara and later in Nonantola. The same can be said for the teacher Ida Nascimbeni, who taught for many years in Nonantola until the early Seventies¹³.

In the case of this teacher, the collective memory still has to be systematically collected, while there are many interviews and written testimonials about Don Arrigo Beccari. As concerns Monsignor Pelati, everything stops with the official documents held at the library of the Metropolitan Seminary in Modena and the Diocesan Historical Archive.

career developed completely in the seminary in Nonantola, where he joined as a prefect in 1916, going on to become Vice-Rector, Rector and Vicar Capitular. He died in Modena in San Bartolomeo's Church on 31 May 1965.

¹¹ M. D'Ascenzo, *A caccia di storia nella scuola di ieri. Per una memoria educativa collettiva tra ricerca e didattica nella scuola primaria*, in Ascenzi, Covato, Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, cit., p. 364.

¹² M. D'Ascenzo, *Linee di ricerca della storiografia scolastica in Italia: la storia locale*, cit.

¹³ Despite the insistent requests sent to the secretariat of the “Fratelli Cervi” Comprehensive Institute in Nonantola, I have still not been able to view the service records of the teacher Ida Nascimbeni.

At this point, we have to focus our attention even more on school memory,

within which instruments, practices and materials have been subject to unique attention and studies (memoirs, public naming, stone plaques, displayed writings, decorations and medals, obituaries and funeral speeches, etc.), able to highlight which memory of schools and teaching has been built on in official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions on the basis of a precise “politics of memory”, or a “public use of the past”, aiming to acquire consensus and strengthen the sense of belonging to a given community¹⁴.

In the case of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, the official collective memory comes from two stone plaques, a tomb and an epigraph. A slab affixed to the wall of the former seminary in Nonantola remembers Don Arrigo Beccari and Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati who offered shelter in those rooms to many of the children from Villa Emma; a stone placed in the crypt of the abbey marks the remains of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati; a monumental tomb in the nearby cemetery houses the remains of Don Arrigo Beccari; an epigraph in the primary school named after her remembers Ida Nascimbeni. In 2005, a state maternal school was inaugurated in Nonantola named after “Don Arrigo Beccari” but there are no epigraphs remembering him in the school itself. The school names therefore belong

to the school memory of a community, sharing mental associations referring to shapes, geometries of space, colours, smells and personal experiences, as well as common mental representations that become sedimented over time¹⁵.

Naming a school after a specific person

therefore recalls a collective memory, they are authentic “tanks of collective memory” sedimented over time and which help to identify a community; school names hold and reveal a form of civil belonging and a set of common values, triggering strong educational values for the whole community¹⁶.

In terms of studying school history through school practices, it is clear that

the study of school names is filled with considerable heuristic potential, the spy of collective memory, public memory and local, national and international school memories, an authentically new source of historical and educational research¹⁷.

¹⁴ R. Sani, *La ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia/Research on education history heritage in Italy*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio. Atti del I Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Palma de Mallorca, 20-23 Novembre 2018)*, Macerata, eum, 2020.

¹⁵ M. D’Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as resource in history of education*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, pp. 633-657.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

1. *The protagonists: Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, Don Arrigo Beccari and the teacher Ida Nascimbeni*

Continuing in chronological order, I shall examine the figure of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, born in San Felice sul Panaro (Modena) on 28 September 1885. His ecclesiastical career developed completely in the seminary in Nonantola, where he joined as a prefect in 1916, going on to become Vice-Rector, Rector and Vicar Capitular.

Modena, 30 December 1926

Most reverend Don Ottaviano Pelati,

Having decided to elect a rector for the Venerable Seminary in Nonantola, which with science and virtue educates the young clergy that form the dearest part of our flock, preparing them to become saintly priests; on the other hand, knowing through doubtless testimonials your affection for us, your virtue, science and experience in the management of seminaries, our Ordinary Authority appoints you, Monsignor Don Ottaviano Pelati

Rector of the Seminary of Nonantola, wishing hereby that you shall have the faculties, honours and prerogatives which by right and by custom are assigned to those holding this office. It is our desire that you shall diligently train the students of this Venerable Seminary, directing their studies and other exercises and assessing their vocation¹⁸.

Mons. Ottaviano Pelati always taught mathematics, both as a prefect and as rector, and came into contact with the group of children from Villa Emma, guiding them in a tour of the Abbey in Nonantola and its treasures¹⁹. He was a priest with open ideas, and indeed according to some witnesses, Don Zeno Saltini was invited to speak of his pastoral experience at the seminary in Nonantola²⁰. Monsignor Pelati allowed a large number of children from Villa Emma to enter the seminary, including girls, holding responsibility for such choice before the bishop of Modena, who was also the abbot at the Abbey of Nonantola. It should also be recalled that Monsignor Pelati was able to delay the children's departure from the seminary for as long as possible, against the continuous insistence of the then-Bishop of Modena, Monsignor Cesare Boccoleri. This educational action was based on continuous dialogue with his students, both those who continued their religious studies and those who abandoned them. The door of his rector's office was always open for talks with the children, whom he actively listened to.

One written testimonial of the seminary students dates back to 22 March 1928, Monsignor Pelati's name day, entitled "To our dear Rector". Firstly, the children gave spiritual gifts, listening well to the Masses, the spiritual Holy Communion, doing their duties well with a total of 106,921 good deeds offered to the Divine Heart of Jesus. There is also a request for Monsignor Pelati to celebrate a Holy Mass in their honour and finally

¹⁸ Letter of appointment of Monsignor Pelati sent by the Bishop of the dioceses of Modena and Nonantola Giuseppe Antonio Ferdinando Bussolari (1926) preserved in Archive of the Seminary of Nonantola at the Diocesan Library Ferrini&Muratori in Modena, «Rectors» file.

¹⁹ K. Voigt, *Villa Emma. Ragazzi ebrei in fuga 1940-1945*, Milano, La Nuova Italia, 2002, p. 165.

²⁰ E. Ferri, *La vita libera*, Modena, Mucchi Editore, 1997, p. 57.

the gift of an altar bell and ampoules containing water and wine for the celebration. At the end of the letter, the children signed themselves as his “children”²¹.

To better understand Monsignor Pelati, we must recall the events at Villa Emma, a noble villa just outside Nonantola. Here, in July 1942 around forty children from the Delasem²² were hosted with their educators, and another thirty arrived from Split in the spring of 1943. The first group consisted of German Jewish orphans, and the second Croatian Jews. On 8 September 1943, the day of the fall of Mussolini, the children were still in Nonantola and in a few hours they were rescued. The largest group were hosted in the seminary, while the older children were housed by farmers and other people in the town. They stayed there until October of the same year when, thanks to the relations with a relief organisation working in Modena and the province, as well as other organisations in and beyond the region, they were taken across the Swiss border and officially welcomed by the Swiss State. As already underlined, Monsignor Pelati took the responsibility for housing the children in the seminary, including the girls who were placed in the apartments of the nuns who managed the seminary kitchen²³. This decision in fact saved these children, who would otherwise have easily been discovered.

In the oral testimonials given by Don Arrigo Beccari, Don Ivo Silingardi and Don Ennio Tardini, this priest is remembered as a father who understood, helped and supported his priests, who were also involved in the Resistance²⁴.

The second figure, of huge pedagogic importance, certainly more identifiable and traceable than Monsignor Pelati, is Don Arrigo Beccari, whose name was in fact Ario. Don Arrigo was a fundamental figure for Nonantola from 1940 to 1980. He worked actively in the Civil Resistance, hiding and rescuing officers from the British Army who escaped from the concentration camp in Crocetta, Modena, and from the trains deporting them

²¹ Letter of greeting of the seminarians to the Much Loved Rector (22 March 1928) preserved in Archive of the Seminary of Nonantola at the Diocesan Library Ferrini&Muratori in Modena, «Rectors» file.

²² «Delegation for the Assistance of Emigrants, a Jewish association founded in Genoa in December 1939. With headquarters in the Ligurian city, it was chaired by the lawyer Lelio Vittorio Valobra. It worked in various Italian cities where there were Jews. Its purpose was to facilitate the emigration of foreign Jews who were still in Italy, providing them with all the assistance they needed while in Italy. It was officially recognised by the Italian State. Delasem's main activity was to assist the many refugees coming from foreign cities invaded by the Nazis, Jews interned in the Italian camps, towns and cities. After the fall of the Italian State, on 8 September 1943, and after the Police Order no. 5 was issued by the Italian Social Republic which persecuted the Jews, despite the fact that many of its managers had moved to Switzerland, Delasem contributed significantly with men and money to rescue as many people as possible. From 1943 to 1945, the assistance works also relied heavily on the help of all kinds of Catholic orders. When Lelio Vittorio Valobra left for Switzerland, the points of reference became the Jew Massimo Teglio from Genoa and the Curia of Genoa, with the cardinal bishop Pietro Boetto and then his secretary Don Francesco Repetto» in S. Panzetta, *Nonantola dei bambini, Nonantola dei ragazzi. Storie di pedagogia d'avanguardia, di solidarietà, di servizi educativi e di servizi culturali a Nonantola 1937-1985*, cit., p. 28.

²³ For a description of these events, refer to K. Voigt, *Villa Emma. Ragazzi ebrei in fuga 1940-1945*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2002; I. Vaccari, *Il tempo di decidere*, Modena, CIRSEC, 1968; E. Ferri, *La vita libera. Biografia di don Arrigo Beccari (1933-1970)*, Modena, Mucchi Editore, 1997; G. Moreali, *Sprazzi di luce*, Modena, Poligrafico Artioli, 1978; O. Piccinini, K. Voigt, *I ragazzi di Villa Emma a Nonantola*, s.l., Comune di Nonantola, n.d.; E. Ferri, *Il sorriso dei ribelli*, Firenze, Giuntina, 2013; S. Borus, *Diario di Sonjia. Fuga e alijah di un'adolescente berlinese, 1941-1946*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018.

²⁴ Many of these testimonials are found in the private archive of Enrico Ferri.

to Germany. His efforts to rescue the Jewish children at Villa Emma was considerable, as he and Dr. Giuseppe Moreali²⁵ initiated contacts with the group and he was the one who presented Monsignor Pelati to the children, who were then invited to visit the Abbey's treasures and were given refuge in the adjacent seminary. The work to rescue escaping Jews continued even after the children left, relating to some draft evaders hiding in the Modena Apennines among the partisan formations of the Resistance, particularly the Brigata Italia led by "Claudio", the *nom de guerre* of Ermanno Gorrieri²⁶. This activity consisted particularly of providing false documents, and ended with his arrest along with the other collaborator priests including Don Ennio Tardini and Don Ivo Silingardi. Don Arrigo remained in prison in San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna and later in Sant'Eufemia in Modena from autumn 1944 until April 1945, when he was freed by the partisans who entered the city.

After the war, Don Arrigo founded a professional training school named "Enrichetta Zanni Raiberti", which went on to become a unified middle school. In those years, in the small hamlet of Rubbiara, where he was rector from 1940, opera performances were put on, and a theatre, nursery school and glass and ceramic workshops were set up. He spent the last years of his priesthood as parish priest of Nonantola. Some testimonials of the professional training experience in Rubbiara were collected in a recent publication²⁷. Don Arrigo Beccari was awarded the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic on 2 June 1961, and the Righteous Among the Nations medal on 18 February 1964 by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. Finally, on 23 October 1989, he was appointed Prelate of Honour of His Holiness.

The third educational figure leaving a profound mark on the inhabitants of Nonantola is Ida Nascimbeni, known as Dina, born on 6 January 1909, the same year as Don Arrigo Beccari. Of frail constitution with walking difficulties, she came from a humble family; rather than working in the fields, she became a primary school teacher. Firstly, she taught in Trentino-Alto Adige, then in Montese in the Modena Apennines, and finally in Nonantola, where she spent around forty years, before retiring in the early Sixties. On 10 January 1984, Ida Nascimbeni was awarded the first-class Diploma of Merit for primary and maternal education and for her particularly zealous and effective service to primary school and preschool education.

²⁵ He was one of the two general practitioners of Nonantola, born in 1895 and winner of the competition for the second general practitioner in Nonantola in 1925. He was a man of anti-Fascist sentiments, reported on several occasions to the police headquarters by the Carabinieri and the investigation department of the Voluntary Militia for National Security. He was a friend of Don Arrigo Beccari, and a sincere friend of the children's guide Josef Indig and other escorts. After the young Jews had escaped, he continued to collaborate with Don Beccari and the other men to help escaping Jews, draft dodgers and care for injured partisans. He was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations medal by the State of Israel in 1964. He died in Nonantola in 1980.

²⁶ Born in Modena on 26 November 1920, he was a partisan commander, taking part in the Resistance with the *nom de guerre* "Claudio" leading the Brigata Italia. He wrote a fundamental work on the Resistance entitled *La Repubblica di Montefiorino. Per una storia della Resistenza in Emilia-Romagna*, published by Il Mulino in 1966. Another of Gorrieri's fundamental books was *La Giungla Retributiva* published in 1972. He was an MP, elected to the Democrazia Cristiana party from 1958 to 1963. He died in Modena on 29 December 2004.

²⁷ S. Panzetta, *Nonantola dei bambini, Nonantola dei ragazzi. Storie di pedagogia d'avanguardia, di solidarietà, di servizi educativi e di servizi culturali a Nonantola 1937-1985*, cit., pp. 52-56.

In terms of educational practices, it should certainly be recalled that Ida Nascimbeni soon learned the importance of educational intervention that went beyond the customary hours of teaching, and indeed, from the testimonials collected from interviews with her former students, I learned that she ran after-school clubs in the afternoon, firstly in her own home and later in the newly founded municipal library. The after-school activities were run for her own students a couple of days a week, and were open to students from other classes on the other days. Her teaching focused on interclass work, leading to exchanges of skills and students with at least one other colleague, equally renowned and esteemed in Nonantola, Cesarina Zaniboni. Her working style with the children was based on dialogue, colloquial relations with her students, learning rules not by coercion but by understanding, the continuous use of encouragement and support rather than threats and repression. In a time when “caning” was far from forbidden, Ida Nascimbeni never used such methods. Another important aspect of her working style in the primary school was the introduction and the class library, which was used systematically²⁸.

After this albeit brief presentation of the protagonists, I shall now illustrate the forms of public memory concerning them that we can find in the Nonantola area through the study of stone plaques and epigraphs. The main objective

pursued by epigraphic communication is to honour merit and immortalise memory; however, on closer inspection, in a more or less clear manner, the task of the inscriptions also seems to be to enhance the collective formations of which the commemorated individual was or is reputed to be a member, be they work places, professional groups or territorial entities at local or national level²⁹.

2. *The forms of public memory*

Monsignor Pelati's remains lie in the crypt of the abbey in Nonantola. Monsignor Pelati died in 1965 and was exhumed and buried in 1967. The stone, inaugurated on 23 April during a religious ceremony, was commissioned by Monsignor Carlo Berselli and made by the stonemason from Modena Alfredo Borsari, in red Verona marble. It is inscribed with the Latin words

OSSA HEIC QUIESCUNT/ DD. OCTAVIANI PELATI/ PROTONOTARII APOSTOLICI/
SACERDOTIS PIENTISSIMI/ CAPITULI CATHEDRALIS PRIORIS/ QUI PER L'ANNOS/
SEMINARIUM MAGISTER RECTOR/ PATERNO FOVIT AMORE/ ABBATIALEM
POPULUM/ VICARIUS GENERALIS/ PASTORALI STUDIO PROSECUTUS/ TEMPLUM
HOC ARCHIVUM THESAURUM/ STUDIOSSIME SERVAVIT AUXTIQUE.
1885-1965³⁰.

²⁸ Interviews recorded with Giovanni Piccinini, Ivano Reggiani and Roberto Vaccari, former students of Ida Nascimbeni.

²⁹ V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, cit., p. 232.

³⁰ Here lie the bones of Don Ottaviano Pelati, protonotary apostolic, most devout priest, prior of the Cathedral chapter, who for fifty years as a teacher and rector led the seminary with paternal care; as vicar

The burial of a Monsignor in an abbey cathedral is usually reserved only for bishops, but in this case it aimed to underline Monsignor Pelati's close ties with the church in Nonantola and all the local people. The spatial reference in the engraving in fact adds greater importance to the place of burial. The epigraph underlines Monsignor Pelati's specific character as teacher and rector of the seminary, which he led with "paternal care". The commemorative Holy Mass was held by the Archbishop of Modena Monsignor Giuseppe Amici, who stated that

we fulfil a commitment, bringing the remains of Mons. Pelati to the crypt of the Abnbey, near the tomb of the first abbot S. Anselmo. Although Mons. Pelati did not hold this title and without any other titles, he was in any case considered an abbot by his population, among whom he lavished the treasures of his goodness and his spiritual paternity. In particular, during the sad and tragic years of the war, when his spirit was offered to all, without concern for their ideas or professions of faith. Monsignor Amici also appropriately recalled Monsignor Pelati's work for the seminary, of which he was rector for many years, and the affection and esteem he always enjoyed among the priests who left and whom he loved and followed even in the ministry, being concerned with their fate when need most required of him. The solemn funeral bears witness to the goodness and fecundity of his work, continued Mons. Amici, with hundreds of people united in his dear memory, moved and tormented behind his coffin. His whole life was a testimonial of goodness and truth that nobody can forget. The archbishop then read Mons. Pelati's spiritual testament. Among the many phrases (some of which remind us of the testament of Pope John), one in particular struck us: "I lived in the Seminary and for the Seminary". The solemn funeral was held after the Holy Mass. Now he rests in the central nave of the crypt in the Abbey, right opposite the tomb containing the remains of St. Anselm³¹.

Don Arrigo Beccari died on 27 December 2005 – not unexpected, as the priest had been bedbound for some time – and the cemetery of Nonantola was chosen, when perhaps it was reasonable to expect him to be buried in the hamlet of Rubbiara, his parish of many years. The tomb was on the ground, and there was no special stone other than one bearing his name, date of birth and death. The priest's new tomb was inaugurated in 2008, made by the Modena-born architect Emilio Montessori and the Nonantola-born sculptor Paolo Sighinolfi. The texts on the stone were written by Don Emanuele Mucci³² and cover the most important moments of Don Arrigo's priesthood – the events of Villa Emma, the professional training school and his work as parish priest helping the poor. A psalm is engraved on the rear of the stone, along with some of Don Arrigo's customary sayings, explaining his own way of understanding his ministry³³. His signature is engraved beneath these words. On 14 September 2008, the date of the inauguration of the funeral monument, in the nearby church of Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo in

general, he accompanied the abbey's people and with great care preserved and raised this temple, the archive and his treasures (1885 – 1965).

³¹ *Vicino alla tomba di S. Anselmo la salma di Mons. Ottaviano Pelati*, «Settimanale della Diocesi di Modena Nostro Tempo», n. 17, 29 April 1967, p. 2.

³² Don Arrigo's assistant in the parish of Nonantola and currently the parish priest of Bagazzano, a village near Nonantola.

³³ «Good is always good. It is not true that nobody helps you, there is always someone who can give you a hand. When we can we must do good. God has forgiven me, that is his job».

Nonantola a short commemorative service was held with the participation of some local scholars and the Mayor of Nonantola³⁴.

Mons. Ottaviano Pelati and Don Arrigo Beccari are also remembered on a marble plaque affixed to the outside wall of the former seminary in Nonantola, recalling the children rescued from Villa Emma and housed in the seminary itself³⁵.

The ceremony unveiling the plaque on 3 December 2011, opened with greeting from the Archbishop-Abbot of Modena-Nonantola Antonio Lanfranchi and the Mayor of Nonantola Pier Paolo Borsari, followed by speeches by Marco Tarquinio, director of the newspaper *L'Avvenire*, and Paolo Turrini, teacher at the "Beato Contardo Ferrini" Higher Institute of Religious Science in Modena. Before the blessing by the vicar general of the Diocese of Modena, Monsignor Giacomo Morandi, Don Emanuele Mucci, the parish priest of Bagazzano in Nonantola, remembered the works of Beccari and Moreali and the support they received from the population of Nonantola³⁶. The text of this plaque belies what was stated by Valentino Minuto in the previously mentioned article, that

"the epigraphic genre", even in its "specificity", can be compared to the aphoristic genre on the basis of "brevity", as well as "pregnancy of meaning".

The inscriptions cannot be too long, otherwise passers-by will not be enticed to read them; concision therefore determines communicative success³⁷.

No funeral stone was dedicated to Ida Nascimbeni as her body lies in the anonymous family ossuary which does not even give her name. The collective memory of this teacher lies in an epigraph affixed to the entrance of the "Ida Nascimbeni" primary school in Nonantola. The text, accompanied by a photograph of the teacher, states

³⁴ *Il giusto testimone*, «Settimanale della Diocesi di Modena Nostro Tempo», n. 31, 13 September 2008, p. 3.

³⁵ The stone plaque reads «IN THE NAME OF THE LORD ENTER/ AWARE THAT THE WORST WAS JET TO TOME/ ON THE NIGHT OF THE NATIVITY OF MARY/ 8 SEPTEMBER 1943.

ARRIGO BECCARI AND GIUSEPPE MOREALI/ PRIEST AND GENERAL PRACTITIONER / DELIVERED TO / MONS. OTTAVIANO PELATI/ RECTOR OF THE ABBEY SEMINARY / VICAR GENERAL OF THE DIOCESE/ THE JEWS FROM VILLA EMMA/ TRUSTING IN THE SILENCE OF THE ROSARIES OF THE STUDENTS AND OF THE SUPERIORS/ WITH THE PROVIDENTIAL LOVE OF SOME FAMILIES IN THE TOWN/ THEY PROTECTED THEIR HIDING PLACE AND HELPED THEM ESCAPE TO SWITZERLAND/ THANKS TO THEM NONANTOLA BECAME / A PLACE OF WELCOMING/ FOR ALL KINDS OF OUTCASTS IN SEARCH OF SALVATION/ ON 15 SEPTEMBER 1944 IN MEMORY OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS/ FOREWARNED TO GET TO SAFETY/ DON ARRIGO DON ENNIO TARDINI DON IVO SILINGARDI/ WAITED FOR THE SUFFERING TO STOP AND THE DEATH SENTENCE OF THE GESTAPO/ CERTAIN OF PREVENTING THE REPRISAL/ THREE YOUNG CLOISTERED NUNS/ ADORATRICES HANDMAIDS FROM BOLOGNA/ OFFERED THEIR LIVES IN ATONEMENT FOR THEIR SALVATION/ WITNESSES OF JESUS RESURRECTED FOR THE POPULATION/ RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS / "THESE ARE THE TWO OLIVE TREES, AND THE TWO CANDLESTICKS / STANDING BEFORE THE GOD OF THE EARTH" (REVELATION 11.4)/ IN 2011 FOR GRATITUDE/ NONANTOLA LAYS ALL TO REST.

³⁶ See <https://www.pietredellamemoria.it/pietre/lapide-a-ricordo-del-salvataggio-dei-ragazzi-ebrei-di-villa-emma-in-nonantola-mo/> (last access: 07.12.2022).

³⁷ V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, cit., p. 232.

“IDA NASCIMBENI” PRIMARY SCHOOL

“MAESTRA NASCIMBENI” WAS A TEACHER AT SCHOOL AND IN LIFE,
 AN EXAMPLE OF SENSITIVITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE,
 HER UNSELFISH COMMITMENT TO THOSE IN NEED,
 HER CONSTANT AND SILENT SOCIAL COMMITMENT,
 HER SIMPLE LIFE.
 IDA NASCIMBENI, NONANTOLA

06 JANUARY 1909 – 10 JUNE 2007

The epigraph was laid for the inauguration of the school on 9 May 2009 in the presence of the town authorities and Ida Nascimbeni’s former students who, during the ceremony, told anecdotes of their teacher.

Conclusions

The research conducted allowed me to investigate the extremely complex and heterogeneous characters who worked actively not only during the Resistance but also afterwards. The events concerning the children from Villa Emma were part of a wider and more complex plan of assistance that people from different social backgrounds and political orientations gave to British soldiers and officers escaping from the concentration camp in Fossoli and the camp in Crocetta, Modena, immediately after 25 July 1943. Two members of the organisation were shot because of their activities³⁸. Another fundamental member of this assistance network, Don Elio Monari, was arrested during a shoot-out between partisans and Nazi forces in the Modena Apennines, taken to Florence and later shot. Don Beccari was arrested in September 1944 and imprisoned by the German security police in San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna. The children from Villa Emma, who were the first to be saved by this organisation, all found refuge and safety in Switzerland with their escorts, except Salomone Papo, a young man admitted to the sanatorium in Gaiato suffering from tuberculosis. The Italian police forces arrested him and sent him to the concentration camp in Fossoli di Carpi, from where he was deported to Auschwitz.

The narrated events left a significant, lasting trace in the history of the town in which I was born and live, Nonantola, and indeed periodically the memory comes increasingly more precisely to the fore. While in 1964 the Righteous among the Nations award went almost unnoticed, with only a brief ceremony in a council meeting³⁹, in 1978 a film

³⁸ These were Arturo Anderlini and Alfonso Paltrinieri, of whom, in his book *Il sorriso dei ribelli*, Enrico Ferri speaks at length.

³⁹ From the Liberation and for as long as it existed, Nonantola was governed by the Italian Communist Party, which had a crushing majority; therefore, the episode, among those of the Civil Resistance, was not enhanced as more room was given to episodes of the Armed Resistance.

on the events of the Children of Villa Emma⁴⁰ obtained national resonance. In 1997 the publication of Enrico Ferri's book "La vita libera" clarified some decisive aspects of the events, with precise references to the religious and cultural biography of Don Arrigo Beccari. In the early Nineties, the municipal administration appointed professor Klaus Voigt to bring the events to light, with precise historical references which ended up in a book published in 2002⁴¹. In 2004 the Fondazione Villa Emma was set up, and still exists today. Its origins lie in the episode of the Jewish children in Nonantola in 1942 and 1943, and it keeps their memory alive with meetings, conferences and public events.

As concerns Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, we should say that, in all the years since his death, he has been the subject of the studies mentioned here, but no research has been conducted on him specifically to investigate his training and educational and teaching practices. Therefore, the epigraph on the floor in the crypt of the Abbey in Nonantola in no way guarantees the immortality of his memory⁴².

Finally, in the case of the teacher Ida Nascimbeni, I continue to perform research in the archives, through oral sources and in the teaching materials, as well as through her former students and the archives of the schools where she taught.

⁴⁰ The film was made by the Nonantola-based priest Don Gianni Gilli, the parts played by the children of class 3D of the middle school and class 4A of the primary school in Nonantola.

⁴¹ K. Voigt, *Villa Emma. Ragazzi ebrei in fuga 1940-1945*, cit.; E. Ferri, *La vita libera*, cit.

⁴² V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, cit., p. 247.

Public School Memory between Centralist Policies and Local Instances. Giulitta Ferraris Well-Deserving of Education and the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” Boarding School in the Early 20th Century

Annarita Pilla
University of Molise (Italy)

1. *Processes of schooling and the development of merits between centre and periphery in the first post-unification decades*

As is well known, the liberal ruling groups of post-unification Italy entrusted the primary schools with the dual task of combating widespread illiteracy and nationalising the masses by disseminating norms of national civilised behaviour and proposing to unify the peninsula from a linguistic point of view, so as to bring the different parts of the country closer together in terms of communication¹. In order to address the limitations, already evident from the first post-unification months, of the Casati law, it was necessary to wait until the start of the government experience of the historical left to see a more precise definition of the regulations for compulsory schooling passed by Minister Coppino in 1877, and the opening of evening and festive schools to offer more literacy opportunities also to the adult Italian population². Alongside the major school policy interventions since the decade following Italian unification, in order to support the establishment of the national school system and combat the high rate of illiteracy, unprecedented forms of recognition were established for persons or entities that had a significant role in popular education. The Ministry of Education gave rise to

¹ Cf. G. Vigo, *Gli italiani alla conquista dell'alfabeto*, in S. Soldani, G. Turi (edd.), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, Vol. I, pp. 37-66; G. Chiosso, *Alfabeti d'Italia. La lotta contro l'ignoranza nell'Italia unita*, Torino, Sei, 2011; E. De Fort, *Scuola e analfabetismo nell'Italia del Novecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998.

² On the school policies of the first post-unification decades, see E. De Fort, *La scuola elementare dall'Unità alla caduta del fascismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996; M.C. Morandini, *Scuola e Nazione. Maestri e istruzione popolare nella costruzione dello Stato unitario (1848-1861)*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2003; G. Talamo, *La scuola. Dalla legge Casati alla Inchiesta del 1864*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1960; Id., *Istruzione obbligatoria ed estensione del suffragio*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (edd.), *Scuola e Società nell'Italia unita. Dalla legge Casati al centro sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, pp. 47-73.

the institution of honours, through the awarding of diplomas, medals or life cheques. The practice of honours conferred on primary teachers is configured «as a form of policy to promote the memory of the school and the teaching staff, [...] in relation to both the development of basic schooling processes and the promotion of the process of professionalisation of the teaching staff»³. This special award institution, conveyed through strategies to promote public remembrance, has evolved significantly over time, associated with that of the teacher model. A teacher with a «predominantly lay character [...] capable of taking upon herself the task of a mission strongly marked by the traits of a civil religion ready for sacrifice»⁴. It was Minister Natoli in 1865 who instituted the first form of merit addressed to teachers. Specifically, Circular No. 159 issued by the Head of Public Instruction established the awarding of two prizes worth 100 lire each to be assigned in each municipality to a teacher and a schoolmistress⁵; in this way, the ministry intended to meet the need expressed by many to support the growth of the social and cultural prestige of the elementary teacher and to make the career of the teacher less difficult by encouraging them with prizes. In reality, prizes were not awarded on the basis of particular teaching skills or cultural competence, but the criteria for obtaining prizes were differentiated between teachers and schoolmistresses. Soon the practice of merit awards began to take root, so much so that the Minister of Education in May 1871, with a new measure, was forced to set limits to avoid an overly generous attitude in awarding them, this preventing «a distortion of the meaning of the awards with the consequent loss of their value and prestige»⁶. More attention was paid, as requirements for the awarding of honours, to years of teaching, possession of a licence and constancy in teaching especially in problematic environment that could set an example for other teachers. Attention was also paid to the number of pupils, the type of school, and the time devoted to teaching activities. The award categories also included private teachers and the religious body, such as priests. For about twenty years, the rules for awarding merit did not change significantly, except that the award forms were extended to other categories of teachers in the 1880s.

With the birth of the unitary state also in Molise, various municipalities, including the capital, found themselves «in the condition of having to provide for the reorganisation of education in order to apply the measures that extended the prescriptions of the Casati law for the development of schools and, subsequently, the provisions of the measures to support compulsory schooling»⁷. In a context characterised by a condition of profound backwardness, the first interventions for the reorganisation and development of both

³ A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...». *Public memory and awards of honour of public education in Italy from the Unification to the end of the 19th Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, p. 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Circular n. 159 of the Ministry of Public Education «Encouragement prizes to primary school teachers who stand out for diligence and culture»*, in *Collezione Celerifera delle leggi, decreti, istruzioni e circolari pubblicate nell'anno 1865 ed altre anteriori*, Torino, Tipografia Editrice di Enrico Dalmazzo, 1865, p. 310.

⁶ A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...», cit., p. 190.

⁷ A. Barausse, *Le istituzioni scolastiche dall'Unità al fascismo (1861-1933)*, in R. Lalli, N. Lombardi, G. Palmieri (edd.), *Campobasso capoluogo del Molise*, Campobasso, Palladino Editore, 2008, Vol. II, p. 67.

elementary and high school education were promoted immediately after the birth of the national state. A series of measures were enacted concerning primary schools, normal and teacher training schools, secondary education and the reorganisation of the administrative structure of public education⁸.

In Molise there was a need to structure the school administration at the local level by trying to support the development of the school network with that of the administrative network. The municipal administrations did not yet have the bodies deputed, at provincial level, to the administrative management of schools, in particular the Provincial School Council. It was the extraordinary delegate of Public Education, Domenico Carbone, who urged its establishment, which took place in October 1861. In the first two unitary years, the school administrative structure was weak, characterised by strong fragmentation and discontinuity⁹.

Initially the administrative structure was weak and fragmentary, it was only in 1863 that it was possible to see a complete constitution of the Provincial School Board, so that «the continuous flow of information from the periphery to the ministry began through the annual reports of the high school headmasters, the reports of the inspectors, provveditori and prefects»¹⁰. During the pre-unification period of the 19th century, three distinct educational paths were established in Molise:

the public one, made up of secondary schools financed by the municipalities and the Collegio Sannitico, founded in 1816 in the provincial capital, Campobasso, and elevated to a Lyceum in 1857, which allowed it to become a provincial university with the introduction of Law and Medicine chairs; the private channel, particularly flourishing as in the whole of Southern Italy; and, finally, the ecclesiastical channel, which found its existence in bishop's seminaries¹¹.

Interesting in this period is the almost total absence, with the exception of schools for the training of schoolmistresses, of initiatives to support the development of schooling, especially secondary schooling for women; as was the case in other contexts within the Italian peninsula, a substitute role was played during the 19th century by the flourishing of religious institutes, especially female ones: boarding schools, conservatories and charitable organisations. Most of these institutes had as their objective «the care of poor and disinherited youth, the rehabilitation of children in danger and most at risk from a moral point of view, the care of the disabled, orphans and abandoned children, and,

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69. On normal schools see the study by V. Miceli, *Formare maestre e maestri nell'Italia meridionale. L'istruzione normale e magistrale in Molise dall'Unità a fine secolo (1861-1900)*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2013; with regard to gymnasium education and in particular on the "Mario Pagano" National High School and Boarding School in Campobasso see M. D'Alessio, *Tra mura cittadine e educazione nazionale*, in Lalli, Lombardi, Palmieri (edd.), *Campobasso, capoluogo del Molise*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 107-135; on technical schools see V. Viola, «Il segreto della ricchezza degli altri paesi è la scienza, è l'istruzione tecnica». *Percorsi di formazione tecnica e professionale nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Lecce-Rovato (BS), Pensa MultiMedia, 2016.

⁹ F. Palladino, *Istruzione secondaria e formazione delle classi dirigenti in Molise nelle relazioni dei presidi, dei provveditori, dei prefetti e degli ispettori scolastici (1862-1877)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVII, n. 2, 2022, p. 548.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 551.

above all, the education and civil and religious education of children of both sexes and of different social classes»¹². The presence of the Church, through the work of these religious institutes, was also «particularly incisive in other sectors of the post-unification educational and scholastic reality»¹³. After the birth of the Unitary State, beyond the strong political contrasts between the Church and the State in matters of schooling and education, «private education was destined to find its own space and its own vital dimension also by virtue of a spirit of adaptation [...] to the new rules and regulations of the liberal State»¹⁴. It should be emphasised that the Church, through their «welfare, educational and scholastic organisations, have ended up exercising a role that is not only supplementary and subsidiary to the public function, as in the case of primary and secondary schools and teaching, but substantially substitutive and supplementary to a structural lack of State presence»¹⁵.

2. *The birth of the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” boarding school and the work of the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antida Thouret*

It is against this backdrop that the decisive role of the congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antida Thouret for popular girls' education is to be found. Jeanne-Antide Thouret entered the novitiate of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, training at the school of St. Vincent de Paul, in 1787. Then, in 1799, she opened a school in Besançon, with some companions, thus founding «the Sisters of Charity, who on 15 October 1800 consecrated themselves to God in the service of the poor»¹⁶ and played an active role in French and later Italian society. The Sisters of Charity arrived in Naples in November 1810, disrupting traditional Neapolitan religious life with their style of community life and service, initially limited to the care and assistance of the poor. When the Sisters of Charity arrived in Naples at the beginning of the 19th century, their work was limited to caring for the poor and women in the Santa Casa degl'Incurabili, each with their own function, but they «did not spare themselves in their efforts to combine the functions of hospital assistants with the maternal attentions of educators, also taking care of the education of the girls in the hospital»¹⁷. After the death of the foundress, the future Superior General arrived in Naples: Sister Geneviève Boucon «whose strong educational vocation led her to combine the caring work of health care with the solicitous attention

¹² R. Sani, *Stato, Chiesa e scuola dal 1861 al 1870*, in R. Sani, *Sub specie educationis. Studi e ricerche su istruzione, istituzioni scolastiche e processi culturali e formativi nell'Italia contemporanea*, Macerata, eum, 2011, p. 325.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁶ P. Arosio, R. Sani, *Sulle orme di Vincenzo de' Paoli. Jeanne-Antide Thouret e le Suore della Carità dalla Francia rivoluzionaria alla Napoli della Restaurazione*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2001, p. VIII.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

to the education of young hospitalised girls»¹⁸. Gradually the nuns were called upon to run the most prestigious educators in Naples including the *Educatario Reale Principessa Maria Clotilde ai Miracoli*. Schools were opened divided into two classes: an elementary one, more numerous, for the poorest and most derelict [...] the other secondary for poor girls of civilised condition and for those of the first class who were worthy of attending»¹⁹. The curricula were different: in the first class, in addition to catechism and civic life, the sisters taught the women 's arts useful for future family women, learning to spin, sew, clean and tidy. As rewards, to alleviate their miserable condition, they were given some food, clothes and money from the work they did. For the girls in the second class, on the other hand, «they also applied themselves to more extensive knowledge of the Italian language, and to learning the French language, the rules of arithmetic, to making embroidery and lace, and to sewing fine linen»²⁰. The separation of the two groups, rather than a difference in social classes, essentially referred to criteria of merit, both classes were free for girls of civilised status and for those in need. The nuns imparted «a more complete and in-depth education than that offered in other Neapolitan educational institutions [...] not neglected were professional teachings indispensable for an honest insertion [...] in productive activities and social life»²¹. These innovations gave great success to the educational work of the Sisters of Charity, in fact, the schools experienced a strong increase; soon the Sisters of Charity in addition to hospices, popular schools also devoted themselves to the service of orphans and exposed children. In response to the increased need for literacy among the Italian population, Sister Thouret «considered it opportune to enhance the work of the Sisters at the charity schools [...] including orphanages and conservatories»²². It is in this context that the work of the Sisters of Charity was placed at the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” boarding school.

The history of the Institute dates back to 1836 when a nobleman from Termoli, Cav. Policarpo Manes, who had moved to Naples, left a large sum of money in his will for the construction of an orphanage. The widespread presence in the area of boys and girls without parents or with relatives who could not take care of them, and especially of girls in destitute conditions destined to beg, represented a dramatic reality for the city of Termoli in the years between the 18th and 19th centuries; the city was characterised by severe poverty, deaths from plague and cholera, and poor hygiene standards. In this context, there was no shortage. The proposal to open an orphanage matured in this highly problematic context. The will was drawn up on 1 February 1836 by Notary Amendola in which we read verbatim:

I Polycarp Manes, knowing the end of my life is near [...], after having invoked God's mercy in the tremendous passage [...], I am determined to make my will known and precise in this my public Testament [...]. I want [...] that the funds of my property located in Termoli, in the Province of the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

County of Molise, have the following destination: half of the building pertaining to me [...] to be reduced to a house of education and specifically to an orphanage, in which all the poorest orphans of the city will be gathered, to learn women's work, for which purpose there will be a teacher and a servant for the internal and external offices of the House with the corresponding provision. The age of admission will be between six and seven, and there will be children up to the age of eighteen. In all the time between their entrance and their exit, they will be instructed in those arts that may be most profitable to them. When they leave, they will be given a dowry of twenty-five ducats; when they do not marry, they will be paid back to the House [...]. There will be an administrator under the direction of the Bishop of the City. I want the administrator to be the Primicerio D. Giovanni Colonna *vita sua durante*. Applications for admission will be made to the Administrator, which, after being stamped by the Bishop, will be submitted to the heir-owner for approval [...]. At the end of each year, the administrator will render an exact account of his management to the bishop [...]²³.

The orphanage was not immediately opened, as the noble benefactor would have wished, because a series of disagreements arose with Policarpo Manes' relatives, in particular with Giuseppe Petti, the husband of the latter's niece, who lived in the other half of Palazzo Manes.

The latter, wishing to enjoy the entire palatial house, rented it from his wife's uncle, Cavaliere D. Policarpo Manes, [...] the other half [...] and in order not to lose the comfort of the whole palace, as soon as Mr Giuseppe Petti learnt that in Cavalier Policarpo Manes' will of 1 February 1836, the other half of the palace owned by him had been destined for use as an orphanage, [...] he applied to the Minister of Justice of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, offering to buy the other half of the palace²⁴.

This application was not accepted because it was submitted after the approval granted by Ferdinand II, Sovereign of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, by Royal Decree of 10 August 1839²⁵. Mr. Petti then began a battle by defining himself as the heir of Policarpo Manes and «legitimate possessor of the other half of Palazzo Manes in Termoli, in addition to that owned by his wife»²⁶. He qualified himself as an «heir in order to hide under this name his arrogance used against the administrator Colonna, so as not to pay him the rent he owed on half of the house he had built as an orphanage»²⁷. This situation lasted until 1852 when Monsignor Vincenzo Bisceglia was elected Bishop of Termoli, who personally took over the administration of the Orphanage and after a series of disagreements succeeded in inaugurating, on 26 July 1881, the Manes-Bisceglia girls' orphanage under the title of «Jesus and Mary» «thus giving Termoli and the Province a centre of education and training for the girls of the people»²⁸. At its meeting of 10 June 1881, the Provincial School Council of Molise, «having seen the construction of the

²³ *Testamento Cav. Policarpo Manes. Atti costitutivi*, in Archivio storico della Diocesi di Termoli-Larino, based in Larino (from now on: ASDTL), fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

²⁴ A. Vetta, *Orfanotrofio di Termoli contro Antonio Petti*, Larino, Tipografia di V. Ficaglia, 1897, p. 7.

²⁵ See *Atti costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

²⁶ A. Vetta, *Orfanotrofio di Termoli contro Antonio Petti*, cit., p. 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

²⁸ M. Paradiso, *Termoli cenni storici*, Termoli, Ediduomo, 2003, p. 171.

home for destitute girls, considered fully suitable for imparting a moral education to those from wealthy families, [...] authorised the start-up on condition that it be erected as a moral body»²⁹. The institute, therefore, intended to ensure the education of not only destitute girls but, above all, girls of civilised status. The management was entrusted to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Jeanne Antida Thouret, with the first Mother Superior Sister Marietta Guidi. The initiative reflects the expansion of the educational commitment of religious congregations, including women's congregations, in the second half of the 19th century, as Sani's studies have shown³⁰. Following a special regulation, drawn up on 3 November 1899 and signed by Bishop Angelo Balzano, on 11 March 1900 the King of Italy, Umberto I, ordered the issuing of an Organic Statute for the Institute, consisting of eleven articles. The Statute states that «the administration of the Girls' Orphanage Jesus and Mary is entrusted entirely to the Bishop *pro tempore* of the city of Termoli»³¹, who is assisted by other figures, furthermore, «the girls admitted will be divided into classes according to their age and instructed in the principles of morals and literature and all women's works»³². A regulation of the Orphanage from 1900, retrieved from the Diocesan Historical Archives, reads:

The location of our Institute is very beautiful [...], rising up close to the St Peter's coast [...]. The enchanting view of the sea and the place remote from the noise, make it a delightful dwelling and at the same time suitable for conciliating the necessary recollection to attend to study and work with profit. The Institute's main aim [...] is to educate in a Christian manner girls of civilised condition and to instruct them in literature and women's work, in order to make them fit to run a family one day³³.

The rules of admissions follow, among which are those of possessing «proof of birth and baptism; medical certificate of good health and vaccination; commendation from the parish priest»³⁴. The girls admitted had to be between 6 and 12 years old, the monthly fee was 35 lire, excluding music and French language lessons that cost an additional 7 lire, plus a list of other expenses due annually. Education followed the government syllabus, once the elementary course had been completed «the pupils move on to the finishing school»³⁵. The girls were educated with exercises in applied arts for the ornamentation of the home, with drawing and painting, sewing and cutting, stocking and embroidery. The study of the piano and singing was taken care of; «all of them indiscriminately attend catechism and religious school, as well as lessons in good manners, so that they go out into

²⁹ *Dispaccio del Consiglio Provinciale Scolastico del Molise 1881. Atti costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofo Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

³⁰ On the role of 19th century religious congregations in education, see also, P. Arosio, R. Sani, *Sulle orme di Vincenzo de' Paoli. Jeanne. Antide Thouret e le Suore della Carità dalla Francia rivoluzionaria alla Napoli della Restaurazione*, cit.

³¹ *Statuto Organico 1900. Atti costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofo Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Regolamento del Collegio-Convitto "Gesù e Maria" 1900. Atti Costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofo Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

society formed in mind and heart, lovers of Religion, family and Country»³⁶. According to the regulations, girls were educated to strict discipline in order to internalise behaviour appropriate to the social status to which they were to belong:

the pupils were allowed to go out twice a week for a walk and to go out for a day on Christmas, Easter and the Patron Saint's Day; [...] a month's holiday is given every year [...] it is therefore forbidden for pupils to be absent from the school for more than one month without a serious and justified reason. [...] The pupils are not allowed to receive visits except from family members; [...] the pupils are not allowed to send or receive letters without the approval of the Headmistress, nor are they allowed to keep money or valuables, nor to keep books other than those approved by the Headmistress. The Headmistress undertakes the obligation to keep the pupils' families informed about their conduct, reporting on the progress of their education and instruction and on their state of health³⁷.

3. *Sister Giulitta Ferraris well-deserving of public education*

Among the nuns who took care of the "Gesù e Maria" Institute, the second director deserves special attention: Sister Giulitta Ferraris, Mother Superior and Director of the Orphanage and Boarding School from 1883 to 1913. The study of Sister Giulitta Ferraris' obituary, kept in the General Archives of the Sisters of Charity in Rome, was useful for reconstructing her profile. As pointed out by the studies of Sani and Ascenzi with the examination of the obituaries we intend to retrace

the evolution of the model of teacher and school official in the various historical phases and in the light of the different ideological, political and cultural contexts, also delving into the significance attributed to popular education and the fight against illiteracy, as well as the role of education and the school itself in the construction of national identity and the promotion of the values of citizenship in the various seasons of the now centuries-old Italian unification story³⁸.

Isabella Ferraris, in religion Sister Giulitta, a native of Castelnuovo Bormida, in the province of Alessandria, in 1841, where she embraced religious life while still an adolescent. In the current state of research we are not in a position to reconstruct the reasons that led the young woman to choose vows. Reading the obituary, however, shows us the representation of a model of a religious woman not marked by a strong spirit of conflict between her religious and civil identity. Significant, in this regard, is the reminder of the Italian patriots who fell during the Second War of Independence and the civil needs of a country, Italy, ravaged by cholera.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, "Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere". *Memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistrali nel primo secolo dell'unità (1861-1961)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, pp. 8-9.

Sister Giulitta «[...] had portrayed from her land, a robust and energetic temperament, firmness of will, fortitude of character that she kept constant until the last breath of her life. [...] At only 16 years of age, strong, generous, with a high ideal of goodness in front of her eyes, she left her family and the world to enter our novitiate in Vercelli. Barely a few months after her entry into religion, a war cry echoed through Italy [...] and Sr Giulitta asked and obtained permission to go with the other Sisters to bring comfort to the wretched fallen on the battlefield, [...] she multiplied in her care for her needy brothers and sisters, even when, after the war, cholera ravaged Italy [...] to bring charity to them. Having finished the Novitiate, being endowed with excellent qualities of mind and heart, she was proposed for teaching and deployed as an expert educator, first in Piedmont and Genoa, then in southern Italy, where she was destined by holy obedience to teach in several houses around Naples. Towards the end of 1882, her work being needed in the orphanage at Termoli, she was sent there for a short time. But the Lord, who had entrusted another good mission to his Bride in that very place, made her stay there for about thirty years»³⁹.

When she arrived at the Termoli Orphanage, had to manage a situation of strong internal conflict. The religious «found the orphans in revolt against their mother superior who did not want them to leave: “some wanted to run away, some wanted to jump out of the window” [...] and complained that the orphans had little time for school»⁴⁰. For these reasons and to meet the Institute’s needs, probably considered it necessary to strengthen, alongside the predominantly welfare intervention, the educational and in 1884 she opened a girls’ boarding school next to it for the elementary education of both internal and external girls. In his obituary, we read that «he made countless sacrifices so that the orphan girls would not lack for anything, so that the premises, at first cramped, would be enlarged to the point of being able to open [...] a boarding school, an external school for young girls [...] a wise and beneficial work»⁴¹. Sister Giulitta’s work succeeded in keeping the Orphanage and the boarding school alive, which became a destination for many girls from the Province. Demand was so high, as we read in the archive documents found, that the premises had to be enlarged. The report of the School Inspector of the Larino District, retrieved from the Central State Archive, shows us the model of teacher and headmistress that the official considered useful to represent and communicate to the Ministry. In particular, he emphasised how the nun was: «a valiant teacher, a distinguished educator, a woman who loved and loves, with her work and good life, supported by great strength of will, she immediately saw the way forward to find the means to meet the needs of the Pious Work and keep it alive»⁴². She was, therefore, that model of a missionary teacher dedicated to teaching and a leader attentive to educational institutions deserving to be reported to the minister for an award as a well-deserving elementary school teacher. The institution of honours had meanwhile undergone an interesting evolution. At the

³⁹ *Cenni necrologici intorno alle carissime sorelle [di carità ospitaliera], trapassate nell'anno 1912*, Roma, Tipografia Pontificia nell'Istituto Pio IX, 1913, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁰ M.A. De Padoue Duffet, *Storie delle Suore della Carità di Santa Giovanna Antida Thouret 1826-1915*, Roma, Casa generalizia delle Suore della Carità, 2006, p. 145.

⁴¹ *Cenni necrologici intorno alle carissime sorelle [di carità ospitaliera], trapassate nell'anno 1912*, cit., p. 77.

⁴² *Relazione dell'Ispettore Scolastico della Circostrizione di Larino 21 agosto 1908*, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, based in Rome, fond «Direzione Generale Istruzione Primaria e Popolare 1897-1910», folder 277bis, dossier «1910 Campobasso».

beginning of the 20th century, the increasing professionalisation of teachers led to new measures, so that there was an evolution in the way of thinking about the awarding of honours, which were extended to various school professional categories. In 1902 a provision was extended to head teachers and headmistresses who had been in service for at least 35 years to receive merit badges. Alongside this in the same year, a special medal was instituted for the VIII lustrums of teaching, i.e. for 40 years of uninterrupted service in boys' and girls' primary schools, emphasising «the value of the loyalty expressed by teachers»⁴³. Some measures taken required the need to reduce expenditure, which in the school year 1903-04 led Parliament to cut the funds for the purchase of medals and this provoked a broader debate on the most effective strategies to really improve the economic condition of teachers. Some of the measures taken required «the need to reduce expenditure, which in the school year 1903-04 led Parliament to cut the funds to purchase medals and this provoked a wider debate on the most effective strategies to really improve the economic condition of teachers»⁴⁴. The fund to purchase medals was necessary to support the development of evening and festive schools. In 1904, with Royal Decree n. 633, Minister Orlando again instituted the medal for meritorious persons in popular education with the intention of replacing and rationalising the pre-existing system of awards for elementary education, despite the fact that cuts were made in other areas of expenditure by the Ministry of Education. The minister wanted to reform the honours system, extending the awarding of medals to the well-deserving of popular education, to other school professional categories such as primary schools' headmasters and kindergarten and nursery school teachers. The decree consolidated the policy aimed at strengthening the public dimension of remembrance and provided, in particular, for the awarding of three types of well-deserving diplomas classified as class I, II and III, respectively associated with gold, silver and bronze medals and the awarding of life allowances. Those considered suitable for the award had to meet certain requirements, consisting of a good curriculum and significant scholastic and cultural commitment⁴⁵. The provisions were later systematised with a new regulation presented by Minister Rava in 1908. Class I, II and III diplomas were awarded to headmasters, headmistresses, teachers of public elementary schools, teachers of kindergartens and kindergartens belonging to municipalities and other moral entities, as well as to people distinguished for uncommon and free services or for considerable donations for the benefit of primary education and child education. The well-deserving were able to be awarded the gold medal. The medals bore the effigy of the King on one side and an oak wreath with the legend "To the well-deserving of popular education" on the other and could be worn on the left side of the chest, hung on a silk ribbon in the national colours. The awarding of the diploma with medal followed very precise requirements that echoed what had already been established by Royal Decree No. 633 of 1904⁴⁶. At the beginning of the

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ M.C. Morandini, *Medals and diplomas of merit for teachers: the Premio Bottero award in Turin (1891-1918)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, p. 210.

⁴⁵ *Regio Decreto n. 633*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 293, 17 December 1904, pp. 5981-5983.

⁴⁶ *Regio Decreto n. 150*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. III, 11 May 1908, pp. 2499-2500. On the orientations

20th century there was a revival of «the reference to the patriotic theme, to the national function of education, a tendency that reflected the design of the liberal political class at the beginning of the Giolittian decade to relaunch education on a national basis in order to tackle the fight against illiteracy with greater vitality»⁴⁷. The awarding of such honours in this period was accompanied by a new and different climate compared to previous decades, the work of the teacher was understood and appreciated, and his moral and economic conditions were improved. What is striking, however, is the valorisation of the nun's educational work while, at the same time, the anti-clerical accents were marked in the context of the polemics against Giolitti's policies, which were considered to be too accommodating to Catholic interests, especially by the republican and socialist politicians of the democratic bloc⁴⁸. On the basis of these premises, Minister Credaro awarded the nun the 3rd class diploma of merit with bronze medal on 27 January 1910. She died in Termoli, where she is still buried, on 12 August 1913, mourned by all the citizens of Termoli and beyond, her obituary reads: «Beautiful soul rest in peace! For the institute you loved so much [...] where your memory reigns supreme»⁴⁹. The awarding of the honour to the religious woman is in line with the orientations taken by the liberal ruling elite from the second half of the 19th century, careful to recognise the role of the teaching and management staff of religious origin even within the framework of the affirmation on the political ideological level of the defence of the secular and state character of scholastic and educational institutions. Especially where the initiatives of the clergy and religious made up for the shortcomings of the State in the educational sector. Orphanages, boarding schools or institutes for the disabled, such as the blind or deaf-mutes, belong to this sphere of action: of making up for the direct absence of the State. The history of the Termolian Institute, which lasted a long time, having been closed only during the first decade of the year two thousand, contributed to the growth of schooling processes in the Molise region. For these reasons, the history of the Institute and the figures who succeeded one another within it is being studied and researched in order to increase those elements that are useful in the panorama of public school memory.

that generated the measures of the early 20th century, see Alberto Barausse's contribution in this same volume.

⁴⁷ Barausse, «*Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...*», cit.

⁴⁸ On the anticlerical polemics linked, in particular, to the request for the abolition of religious instruction presented by the socialist deputy Bissolati see L. Pazzaglia, *La scuola fra stato e società negli anni dell'età giolittiana*, in Pazzaglia, Sani (edd.), *Scuola e Società nell'Italia unita. Dalla legge Casati al centro sinistra*, cit., pp. 171-211.

⁴⁹ *Cenni necrologici intorno alle carissime sorelle [di carità ospitaliera], trapassate nell'anno 1912*, cit., p. 78.

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