

From the Memories to a Sensorial History of the School in the Province of Paraná

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ABSTRACT – From the Memories to a Sensorial History of the School in the Province of Paraná. Based on the considerations of Silva and Vidal (2011), it was developed the hypothesis that it is possible to evidence some experiences of what the elementary school in Imperial Brazil delivered to children. This was done by means of a sensory history, based on the individual and collective contacts with school materiality evoked in memorialistic records, making explicit the meanings assigned to the school and the schooling received during that historical moment. This article aims to conduct an initial approach to this matter, identifying the sensory experiences that occurred in a school of city of Paranaguá, in the coast of the Province of Paraná along the 1870s, in the life of Nestor Vitor dos Santos, one of the students who attended it.

Keywords: Sensory History. 19th Century. School Material Culture.

RESUMO – Das Memórias a uma História Sensorial da Escola na Província do Paraná. Partindo-se das considerações de Silva e Vidal (2011), trabalha-se com a hipótese de que, por meio de uma história sensorial, baseada nos contatos individuais e coletivos com a materialidade escolar evocados em registros memorialísticos, é possível evidenciar algumas experiências que a escola primária no Brasil Imperial propiciou às crianças, dando a ver significados atribuídos à escola e à escolarização recebida nesse momento histórico. O objetivo do artigo é realizar uma abordagem inicial desta questão, identificando as experiências sensoriais ocorridas numa escola da cidade de Paranaguá, no litoral da Província do Paraná, na década de 1870, na vida de Nestor Vitor dos Santos, um dos alunos que a frequentou.

Palavras-chave: História Sensorial. Século XIX. Cultura Material Escolar.

Introduction

For a long time in the historiography of Brazilian education, the school experiences that occurred during the Empire were object of a historic discourse that disqualified them, producing about them an image of disorganization, abandonment and lethargy. As pointed out by Maria Lúcia Hilsdorf (2002), such narratives, written by Republican intellectuals (many of them protagonists of the educational reforms conducted by the new regime), disregarded previous initiatives, with the purpose of highlighting and overestimating the achievements of their present. Currently, the panorama unveiled by educational history, concerned with producing interpretations that better define the knowledge of the field about the imperial elementary school, is totally different. It has been evidenced not only the vitality of this school – despite the undeniable material and political problems, caused by a State in formation (Gouvêa, 2007) – but the complexity of the experiences that in it and through it occurred in the 19th century Brazilian society.

Researches have highlighted, for this period, the affirmation of the school form of knowledge transmission (Inácio et al., 2006); the discussion on the moralizing role given to education, in regard to the popular classes, elected as their target for action (Gouvêa; Jizenji, 2006); the legislative apparatus of which this *branch of the public service* became object in the different provinces and in the different instances of the State administration, in order to give it shape and organicity (Faria Filho, 1998); the discourses and initiatives for the implementation of compulsory elementary education, with a whole range of implications on the family and society (Vidal et al. 2013); the production of childhood as generational selection and a time of human life more suited to undergo schooling, transforming the child into student (Veiga, 2004; 2005); the presence of poor, black and mixed-race children in the schooling process (Veiga, 2008), among other aspects which were unknown or ignored until then.

On the other hand, the major increase of studies and significant knowledge that has been accumulating begin to instigate researchers to propose new approaches to the investigation of elementary school in the 19th century. One of them is carried out through the approach of the study of school material culture, “[...] the set of material artifacts in circulation and use in schools, mediated by the pedagogical relationship, which is inherently human, revealing the social dimension” (Peres; Souza, 2011, p. 56). One focus of interest has been making an inventory of the significant arsenal of educational objects that were part of the daily life of the school of first letters, such as writing utensils, schoolbooks and furniture (which enables establishing the physical contours of 19th century school spaces, analyzing the circulation of certain materials and situating them in the context of pedagogical practices and trends in which they were produced and adapted. Also, as done by Valdeniza da Barra (2008), observing the discourse on their lack the indications of an educational project in action in the Empire, making it possible to

apprehend, based on them, experiences of school subjects – students and teachers – through their contacts with and uses of material artifacts that were part of it, since, as pointed out by Rosa Fátima de Souza, the study of material culture enables “[...] positioning man at the center of the discussion on the objects, emphasizing the human relationship with the material world” (Souza, 2007, p. 169).

With regard to this second aspect in which one can invest for the study of education in the Imperial period, in a methodological article produced as part of investigations into material culture in comparative perspective, Diana Gonçalves Vidal and Vera Lúcia Gaspar da Silva emphasized the importance of investment in writing what they call a *sensory history of school and education* aimed at highlighting “[...] the individual and collective experiences of construction of subjectivities, perceptive schemas, tastes, corporealities, memories, and affections” (Silva; Vidal, 2011, p. 38). A history not only of what was done in school, but of sensibilities and affections that the contact with it and its objects produced in students and teachers in terms of experiences lived within this institution and that were taken with them for life, as an indelible mark of the moments spent in classroom. For writing this kind of history, a prime source, according to the same historians, are memorialistic productions or autobiographical writings, as they “[...] bring evidence of how contact with this materiality gradually forged an affective memory – positive or negative – of school and schooling and produced sensibilities” (Silva; Vidal, 2011, p. 32).

Founded on these considerations, the hypothesis with which I work in this article is that, through a sensory history, based on individual and collective contacts with the school materiality evoked in the memorialistic registry, it is possible to highlight some little-known experiences that the imperial elementary school provided to children. These experiences enable observing significances assigned to the school and the education received at this historic moment and that, for having been taken by students throughout their lives, allow the historian to delimitate and understand them. My objective, however, will be far more modest: to perform an initial approach to this question, tracing the sensory experiences that occurred at a school of Paranaguá, in the province of Paraná, in the 1870s, in the life of Nestor, one of the students that attended it.

In the first part of the article, I present this character and discuss his account, noting the way I intend to question him. Then I investigate the sensory experiences with the school materiality he narrated in his memorialistic writings. At the end, I make some considerations about the preliminary conclusions that this historiographical exercise can reach.

The Memoirs of Nestor Vitor

Although researches based on childhood memories having as object of study school material culture and its intersections are scarce, the

use of memorialistic and/or autobiographical literature in research in education history has been recurring in the last two decades in Brazil. With regard to the Brazilian 19th century, this also proves valid, as, for instance, in the case of the works of Ana Maria de Oliveira Galvão (2001) about schooling in the Paraíba state in the Republican period and of José Gonçalves Gondra (1999) about experiences of students in private schools in the Imperial Court. Regarding to the history of education in the 19th century Paraná, it can be said that this type of documentation is virtually unexplored¹, since the researches have been conducted resorting almost exclusively to the official documentation, produced by employees of Public Instruction and of the provincial government or, exceptionally, by resorting to the press of Paraná. Both groups of sources are valuable and fundamental for writing the history of education in the state of Paraná. However, by complementing them with other empirical data, such as the memorialistic texts, they will certainly provide new panoramas and objects to be questioned and understood. One of them is this relationship between school material culture and sensory history, for the study of the marks that the classroom objects left in the lives of adults who as children attended the schools of the region.

The memorialistic text chosen here is entitled *Meus Dois Mestres* [My Two Masters] and is a set of reminiscences of Nestor Vitor dos Santos, better known as Nestor Vitor. Born in the coastal city of Paranaguá in 1868, the oldest locale of Paraná, he lived there until 1885, when he moved to Curitiba in order to continue his studies at the Instituto Paranaense (Carollo, 1996). In 1891, he settled in Rio de Janeiro, city where he would develop a career as a writer and literary critic. Although most of his activities took place far from home, he never lost touch with the Paraná intelligentsia and his contemporaries of Paranaguá, as attested by, among other evidence, his correspondence with Emiliano Pernetá, in the 1910s (Carollo, 1975; 1976) and his account on the travel to Paraná in 1912 (Vitor, 1996). Nestor Vitor died in the then federal capital [Rio de Janeiro] in 1932. Fourteen years after his death, the Paraná Academy of Letters published in its journal the memorialistic text, unpublished and written originally in the 1920s, in which the *paranaense* writer brought together, as per the subtitle he chose “[...] elements for my biography” (Vitor, 1946, p. 72), a biography which, incidentally, he never got to finish.

The subject of the text is, basically, his school experiences lived in Paranaguá in the 1870s, having as masters the teachers José Cleto and Francisco Machado. The first taught him in elementary education, while the second seems to have taught him the first rudiments of subjects of the preparation course, which he completed in the Instituto Paranaense, in Curitiba. Considering this, it will be focused in this paper only reminiscences about the school of teacher Cleto, not only because it is richer in the kind of evidence we seek, but also because it clearly occupies most of the memorialistic record written by Nestor Vitor, showing us the imperial elementary public school environment, as organized in the province of Paraná.

Michael Pollack (1992), although not hiding his distrust on projections that can obliterate memories, highlights that the constituent elements of individual and/or collective memory are the events experienced, people with whom one had some contact, and places where one has been, and so they can also “[...] obviously, relate to real events, places, and people, empirically founded on concrete facts” (Pollack, 1992, p. 202). Meanwhile, the facts that build memories become fragmented over time in the remembrance of those who lived them, causing them to lose a little of their consistency, but not of their essence. Therefore, the assertion of Krzysztof Pomian (2000, p. 507) that “[...] all memory is, first and foremost, a faculty of conserving the vestiges of what belongs, in itself, to a bygone era” is correct, but vestiges that, according to Pierre Nora (1993), are materialized in places, such as the memorialistic text that is, above all and like any place of memory, a remainder created and produced with the intention of remembering.

The memorialistic record, for the reasons mentioned above, is a built and manufactured testimony, in which past experiences gain new emotional, affective, and ideological qualities and do not arrive *pure* to the historian’s workshop (a purity which does not exist in any historical testimony). But it can only be constructed, manufactured and dressed in Sunday clothing of ideology and emotion because it is founded on vestiges of everyday experiences that really existed and left marks in the life and in the perceptions of the child. Thus, many years later, they are still registered in the adult who recorded them in writing, making in fact that the childhood and its historical concreteness appear again, as a rhetoric, which speaks and reveals itself through the hands of an Other, the adult that narrates them (Becchi, 1994).

Based on these theoretical delimitations, I sought to question Nestor Vitor’s text of ego taking into account that I was before a testimony that constructs an image of the past based on vestiges of concrete experiences of the author, about which he produces meanings. Some produced *a posteriori* (but that should be considered for documentary criticism) and others, that interest us the most, experienced by him as a child and that, despite all deformations to which memory is subject, can be identified and questioned, provided they are related to evidence contemporary to the narrated phenomena, either by cross-examination with other sources or with historiographical interpretations about the period, actors and practices in question.

Consistently with these procedures, it can be found in *Meus Dois Mestres* remnants of school events and situations, but, in particular, of objects, their uses and the participation they had in certain experiences lived by its author in the school of teacher Cleto. Due to having been important in his childhood, they were kept and nourished by him throughout his life, thus enabling that they are known by the historian, even in the temporal distance separating from the events narrated. The image created based on them shows a school marked by rhythms and routines, but also by the action of a teacher, who he really wants to remember and make remember in his memorialistic text. Let us see how

Nestor Vitor produced this material memory (of objects and their uses) and affective memory (of the relationship between him and the teacher mediated by some of these objects).

The School-Sensory Experiences of Nestor Vitor

Nestor Vitor initiates his account by stating: “José Cleto, for his time, was, in Paranaguá, that which Abílio [was] in the Rio milieu: a revolutionary in pedagogy” (Vitor, 1946, p. 72). José Cleto, a teacher at the school of first letters attended by our writer, is not as anonymous a teacher as most 19th century teachers. Some education historians, in research addressing distinct objects such as physical punishment in schools of Paraná (Dalcin, 2005); knowledge about the education of the body, which later, would result in the discipline of school physical education (Taborda de Oliveira, 2007); and the education of slaves and naive (Silva, 2010) came upon him, his ideas and practices concerning these themes. We know, as a result, that as early as 1870 Cleto asked for permission to open a night school where slaves could receive instruction, at a time when they were vetoed the access to elementary education (Silva, 2010); he argued that physical punishment should not be adopted by teachers; before that, it was by moral punishment that the authority of the master had to be guaranteed among students (Dalcin, 2005), and proposed that the specifics of the child – such as the need for time to play – were also taken into account in the production of the rhythms of schooling (Taborda de Oliveira, 2007).

Thus, in part, in the description provided, Nestor Vitor seems to have saved in memory an image that corresponds to some aspects of the personality of his teacher and that possibly belonged to his knowledge when he attended that school. An image that, over time, was intensified, especially when, under the impact of the early 20th century, which sought to value some of these issues in the deployment of the Republican school, the memoirist may have had an opportunity to view in the master of his childhood a man who – long before the innovations that would shape the pedagogic modernity – already sought to practice the principles of the so-called *modern* pedagogy, of which Abílio César Borges, Baron of Macaúbas, was, without a doubt, an exponent in the Empire, as evidenced by Diane Valdez (2006) in her study on the famous educator. Furthermore, both the Baron and teacher Cleto were actors immersed in a much more complex national and international context, in which the pursuit of modernization of pedagogy was a recurring agenda both in discussions of intellectuals and in experiments of some educators, such as those conducted by Froebel and Pestalozzi, among others (Arce, 2014).

However, this image of teacher Cleto as a *revolutionary* of pedagogy, in the memorialistic text, was not based only on this information above. It is founded, mainly, on personal observation of the material aspects of the school, seen and experienced by Nestor as a boy and student, and that were, to him, visible elements of the innovative and

revolutionary character of the public teacher from whom he learned. For this reason, soon after, he starts to refer to the materiality of the classroom – which in his opinion would attest the *revolutionary* character of his master in terms of pedagogy – stating that there, in the school of Paranaguá, “[...] the new furniture, lacquered and comfortable, had replaced the old black benches, which by themselves made the teaching room darker [...] the whole school atmosphere was cheerful and inviting” (Vitor, 1946, p. 72).

Nestor Vitor writes in the 1920s having witnessed in Rio de Janeiro, where he lived adulthood, all that movement of pedagogical renewal, based, among other things, on concern about the adequacy of furniture to students’ needs (Vidal et al., 2010). This discourse, as we know, is old and already appears in the 19th century, among other sources, in the medical theses defended in the Court, as studied by José Gondra (2004), showing a glimpse of a restlessness that gradually and as medicine approached school more and more was imposed in several provinces, including in the state of Paraná. The scarcity of resources and even the great distances between schools, however, prevented, in the case of Paraná, that the public budget from always and properly satisfying this aspiration (Barbosa, 2012). Thus, these varnished furniture become, in the memorialistic text, evidence of a pedagogical renewal, ensured not only by the teacher, but also by the furniture that, unlike most schools of that time, would better meet the needs of the kids who received instruction in that space.

At this point, however, based on records of the instruction supervision in the public record of Paraná (Paraná, n.d), I discovered that the other schools of Paranaguá were also being equipped, throughout the 1870s, with this same type of varnished furniture and, even so, the teachers that taught there were not considered *revolutionaries* by their contemporaries as was José Cleto. This is because, in the source used, it is the personal experience of one of the school students of that time that expresses a feeling and deserves to be considered by the historian, when he says that these furniture were not only *new and varnished* – something that the codex confirmed as being what was usually adopted in the case of furniture items provided in the period – but were also *comfortable* – which could only be known by those who used them, sat on them, and spent in this position part of their experiences as a student – so that their novelty, comfort, and beauty together helped compose a *cheerful and welcoming school atmosphere*, which he felt and perceived in childhood. In short: it was not only the existence of this furniture in school that made it different, but the relationship he established with it and through it with the school, the master and the environment that they helped build, which confers uniqueness to that which – if we were to be guided only by the official documentation – could be considered irrelevant to the writing of the history of education. It is within this framework of senses and sensibilities experienced in the singular, that the table used by students occupies a place in the memoirs of Nestor Vitor (1946, p. 78).

Teacher Cleto, choosy in everything, had for it [lacquered furniture] a particular care. He always said: – If ink happens to spill on the table (they were still long tables, not individual desks), the one who spilt it must go get a cloth (we did not have sponge), hurry and clean so there is no stain left (it was sometimes followed by a somewhat hard speech on tidiness).

As the historiography of education has shown us, tables entered the school when it became a place not only of teaching of reading, but also of writing (Castro; Silva, 2011). Its presence was gradually imposed to such an extent that today it is naturalized in the classroom. Semiologist Jean Baudrillard, however, proposes to think that the study of objects should not be conducted only by research on the functions for which they were designed, but “[...] on the processes by which people come into relationship with them and on the systematic aspect of the resulting conducts and relations” (Baudrillard, 1973, p. 10). At this point, Nestor’s memory, in addition to the effective assimilation of this artifact in his school for learning of writing, shows that, from this prescribed use, could derive other practices that, although not directly related to the purpose for which the object was designed, led its users to adopt, in light of it, unusual positions.

Thus, at the school he attended, he recalls a series of orders and prescriptions prepared by the teacher, aimed at ensuring the correct use and conservation of that furniture, so costly to be obtained in the provincial context and that, therefore, deserved special attention from users. First, being careful so as to not spill ink on it; in the event this occurs, the agility to get another object, a cloth and clean up *quickly* so the piece of furniture would not be stained. In the event of such an accident, this could also be followed by a somewhat fierce lesson on tidiness, when the mistake of a student in the use of the object would trigger, then, another pedagogical lesson: the teaching of good hygiene habits, motivated by an incident in the classroom. Based on the memoirs of Nestor Vitor, it can be observed that the presence of certain objects in school not only ensured the execution of ordinary practices of 19th century schooling, but also some of the *thousand practices* – using the expression of Michel de Certeau (1998) on the creativity of consumers before that which is offered to them by culture – that when appropriated by students and teachers could result in other educational processes. Or in other possible experiments, as the rest of his account allows thinking.

There was a day he forgot to do the homework...

I was eight years old and was starting to write with ink, copying lessons in exercises that the teacher recommended we brought ready from home. But it happened that I could not do so on that day and tried to remedy by borrowing a colleague’s ink. This ink, by the way, had a purple color that turned golden, if you happened to trace the head of the *Ts* and the *Ds* thicker [...]. For my misfortune, suddenly, the ink bottle spilt. I was sad and all nervous. I wanted to go to the blackboard, but the teacher was

there, in an arithmetic lesson to another class. I did not want to interrupt. I was not afraid. I was never afraid of him. It was respect, for caring. I was distraught and solved the case in an absurd way, without taking into account the consequences at home. I got a little suit sleeve, a white jeans checkered jacket, as were the pants, and I cleaned the table with the sleeve. This done, I committed another blunder, frantic as I was. I got up of my seat, there too far and went to sit by the teacher's desk, crying convulsed. It was the instinctive appeal to help from the master (Vitor, 1946, p. 79).

At first, Nestor Vitor suggests that some writing utensils, or at least, of regular usage at school such as pen, ink, and paper (whose existence is implied in the report!) were not limited to use in classroom in a society acquiring literacy and in which, following the general trend of the 19th century, it was still common to find literate people that could read, but did not know how to write, either due to the non-concurrency of these teachings or even to insufficient attendance. This was pointed to by Antonio Viñao Frago (1993) and only guaranteed acquisition of reading ability. By virtue of the *exercises that the teacher recommended that we brought ready from home*, ended up, at the hands of students, penetrating the household space, where, in the specific case, they were expected to copy the lessons that would later be used in their schooling process. If we agree with Luciano Mendes de Faria Filho (2007) that, over the 19th century, in Brazil, it occurred what he designates the *schooling of the social*, a process through which dimensions of social life are gradually submitted to the imperatives of school and the vocabulary and significances of this are also incorporated by society, one of the ways through which this phenomenon was effected, may have occurred through this circulation of school objects and of the practices conducted with them in spaces of informal education, as was the family. Simple and commonplace gestures such as that narrated by the *Paranaense* memoirist, therefore, may have achieved considerable effects on the perceptions and relations between social and school times, relations that unfortunately can only be proposed as a hypothesis, since the record that we investigated provides no evidence that allow progress in that direction seeking a historical verification.

What we know with some certainty, as already mentioned, is that, at the time narrated, the boy Nestor forgot to do the task assigned to him by teacher José Cleto. Apparently, he also forgot to bring from home his own purple ink – that which during written operations interested him for being *a purple that turned golden, if you traced the head of Ts or Ds thicker*, which apparently, was also ingrained in his childhood memory – having to borrow it from a friend or ask to get the one used at school, something that is not clear in the text. Were it for the inability with the material (let us remember that *he was eight years old and beginning to write with ink*) or for the anxiety for feeling he had failed the master, he ended up failing again: spilled ink on the table the master had care with and required care from students!

Although Nestor Vitor knew how he should proceed in this type of incident (as he previously reported), when he himself made the mistake, he was confused and did not know how to comply with the guidelines of the teacher for that situation. Although stating that it was not out of fear that he did not call the master, we should not forget that he was doing in class a task that he was supposed to have done at home. It is amid this set of perceptions – the task not accomplished, the mess on the table, and the deep respect for José Cleto – that it becomes understandable the even bigger mischief that the boy would have gotten into. By using his clothes to clean the dirt (and not the cloth that was in the school for that end, in the absence of sponge, as he reported), the boy was going to get seriously in trouble at home. We know that, based on Gizele de Souza et al. (2010) and on the example of what occurred in other provinces, many students did not attend schools because they had no proper clothes to wear; and here, little Nestor ended up damaging an item that, if not the only one he had to receive instruction, surely was a luxury for many other people of his age. Realizing the gravity of what happened where, again, the school times could cross with the household times (bringing *consequences back home*), he conducted a physical movement that he kept in memory: getting up from his seat – breaking, in a way, with the school form adopted there – and go to the other side of the room, sitting to cry near the teacher's desk. To him, that gesture was *the instinctive appeal for help from the master*. And that help was coming.

When the arithmetic lesson ended, students that intercepted the teacher's view from the blackboard dispersed, and then he could see me. He asked others what had happened. Upon knowing, he laughed and observed while walking around me. He eventually took my jacket and sent someone to buy soap. He went to the backyard with the dirty little jacket and took with him the basin that they had in the school to wash the face. He soaped the piece of my clothing up, rinsed it, hang it to dry under the sun. When it dried up, he dressed me, hugging me, filling me with affection, and I came home with nothing that could evidence what had happened. [...] Poor as I was, no one but him, one that looked to the social status of the parents of his students, would have reason, in the case, to do this heartwarming thing he did to me (Vitor, 1946, p. 79).

For a long time, the memory produced about the imperial elementary school – such as those found by Diana Vidal and Luciano Mendes de Faria Filho (2005) in the celebrations of the 100 Years Anniversary of Elementary School, in Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, in 1927 – crystallized in the collective imagination the 19th century elementary teacher as a stern, authoritarian subject, far from the students. Above all, adopting practices that were even violent, such as the use of paddling to punish and discipline children who insisted in disobeying the order that, under their direction, should be established in the classroom. This all has some historical truth, because there is evidence confirming these attitudes for some cases. However, an excess of this, taken as *historical*

truth in the singular form and considered the single possible image of imperial education – as wanted the memory and even the Republican historiography about our educational past –, is extremely counterproductive for historical knowledge, given this relies on generalized and generalizing explanations of a reality that was, undoubtedly, much more complex, dynamic, and contradictory.

Interestingly, it is in another kind of memory – such as that of Nestor Vitor – produced, at least at the time of its writing, not in an institutional and institutionalized form (different from that led by republican reformers in the Centenary of Instruction), but as individual desires to remember, make recall, and give an account of the deep causes and reasons for a student's affection for his master, that we can find elements to deconstruct the monolithic image of the 19th century elementary teacher that, even today, is found, at times, in some historical narratives, with their seductive promises of explanatory convenience. Our dissonant version is evidenced here not in the official discourses about the teaching conditions in the province of Paraná, which, as already observed Lilian Ana Wachowicz (1984), made teachers constant target of criticism and blame, often blaming them for a failure that did not depend only on them, but on an entire political, social, and economic situation. It is revealed to our eyes through the relationship between teacher José Cleto and Nestor, mediated, once again, by some objects and artifacts that existed in the school space. It is, again, from the presence of such objects and from their uses that emerge the vestiges of the imperial school from a more specific and singular perspective: the sensations, feelings, and affections.

The teacher's gesture of washing the boy's clothes avoiding that he got in trouble back at home is the main element evoked by the words quoted from *Meus Dois Mestres*. However, the memoirist kept the details of each of the actions taken by the teacher at the time, suggesting that at that moment of concern and apprehension, that microcosm populated with artifacts, mobilized by the teacher acting in his favor, acted in depth on his child perception and sensibility, so indelibly that those significances were still with him several decades later.

We can almost follow with our eyes what the writer claims to have seen José Cleto do: the teacher circling and watching the small boy all flustered and distressed, falling in laughter right away and taking the decision to help him; taking his little jacket stained with purple ink, sending someone (a student, perhaps) to buy soap (in some of the street vendors at *Rua da Praia* street, where it seems the school was located, according to information gathered during a recent visit, made by me, to the city), taking the basin for washing the face in which surely students washed upon arrival, before starting school work; using it, then, to wash the ink from the boy's clothes; hanging the clothes to dry in the backyard of the house where the school operated and, finally, returning it clean and almost new to his concerned student.

According to Nestor Vitor, that scene described and which remembrances he decided to fix in memory, would have been the greatest

proof of love and affection he received from the teacher who – without taking into account the boy's social condition – did for him this heart-warming thing! Surely, if the teacher proceeded this way, the routine of school that day ended up being broken – the lesson was interrupted, somebody had to leave the room to buy soap, the master, with the basin in which the boys washed the face, under the arm (another material indication of hygienic concerns in the classroom) also left the room to go to the backyard where the clothes would be washed in the same container, making it object of another use and, more than that, one of the material symbols of the master's affection for the student. Considering all this, this scene integrates, according to Nestor Vitor, that which at the beginning of his memorialistic text he designated with the subtitle *elements for my biography*, that is, elements of what constituted, in his view, the history of his life and that comprised, in a way, the experience in the elementary school conducted by teacher José Cleto. Not only in moments of learning of school knowledge – which, by the way, hardly appeared in this study, as they are absent in the account – but of material, affective, and sensory experiences that this very school – despite the historical limits that delimited its place in the 19th century social scene – also provided to the actors that were part of it and of its history.

Final Remarks

Considering the proposed hypothesis and the objective pursued in this work, it is possible to make some considerations that, more than conclusions, seem to outline the prospects – with their peculiarities, limits, and possibilities – of a sensory history of school for writing the history of Brazilian education in the Imperial period.

The main peculiarity is that a sensory history of school and schooling, as essayed, implies an analysis of deeply individual and subjective phenomena, due to the nature of the very evidence that enables knowing them. Indeed, it is thanks to the singularity of a student of teacher Cleto, in the Paranaguá of the 1870s, which had contact with the school where he taught and its material dimension, that we were able to trace how this world of objects and furniture, with their uses and *abuses*, left indelible marks on the senses and sensibilities of a particular individual, Nestor Vitor, as well as on the account about it that he, as an adult, bequeathed in the form of a memorialistic production. Because of the individual dimension of the historical phenomenon we found, for instance, that such school artifacts were object of their prescribed uses – such as the varnished table that was part of the new school furniture and was intended for writing – and could also, in cases of unexpected appropriations and school situations (accidents of the type that was suffered by the memoirist), acquire new uses and be part of new educational situations, such as the hygiene practice caused by purple ink poured over the top of a table. While, because of the subjective dimension, we observe how situations experienced in the contact with this materiality and triggered by the human relationship it mediated – and here I refer to

the scene of the *school accident* with the furniture and the boy's clothes, but also to the teacher's gesture of affection and care in assisting his student in trouble – triggered affective and symbolic perceptions that attributed significance not just to the schooling received, but, mainly, to the school in which a childhood stage was spent and experienced by a particular individual.

Well, it is precisely from this peculiarity of the phenomenon, of the evidence, and of the historical narrative produced from them that it emerges what, in principle, seems to be the main limit of the school's sensory history. After all, what role could such individual and subjective experiences have in the broader historical process that occurred in the Brazilian Empire and even in the province of Paraná? From the perspective of a history that is written, due to privileged sources, almost always from the point of view of the Imperial State and its agents – supervisors, teachers, and intellectuals –, it is practically null the contribution that a history like this, so subjective, can provide. However, it is precisely the change of perspective one of the issues that, according to Luciano Mendes de Faria Filho (2008), needs to be developed a little further in studies on the history of the Brazilian 19th century school, in a movement that takes us from the forest to the trees, that is, from historic conjunctures and structures already known to other specific phenomena that they comprised and that, as well as could be shaped by them, also shaped them. Considering this, that which would be the limit of a sensory history of school can become its greatest potential, if we situate it in the broader temporality in which these individual and subjective experiences evidenced by it were lived and experienced by subjects such as Nestor Vitor, in their individuality and singularity.

In fact, when in the peculiarity of his sensibilities, Nestor Vitor evoked the existence of new furniture in his school, more convenient and comfortable, he shows private perceptions, but that are evidence of a broader educational movement that was in development in the Empire – that of the need for the school to adapt and follow the rhythms and specificities of childhood, which included, among other things, their bodily and physical conditions and a suitable furniture for their use. Thus, he not only confirms that such movement was coming and reaching his school: he lets us know that, to a child that used these pieces of furniture, they could, in a certain way and through more subjective channels, produce a feeling of newness and educational modernity that was, ultimately, the main objective of the physicians and intellectuals who proposed such modifications in the 19th century school environment.

Similarly, in suggesting – though as unintentional evidence – the reality of the circulation of objects and artifacts of school use in non-school spaces, such as his house, he shows the complex process of affirmation of the school in the 19th century that, for this purpose, had to negotiate with other social times, aiming not only at being present in the wider scene but also at imposing themselves in relation to other educational agencies, such as the Church and the Family (Faria Filho, 2008).

Although Nestor Vitor's account, I insist, only suggests that, it may be that, in fact, the dialogue between these different times was also mediated by the circulation of school materials and objects that concretely symbolized and meant the growing presence of the school in the lives of Brazilians. This may be possible for both those who attended it, as Nestor Vitor, and those who, for various reasons, excluded themselves from it or were excluded from it, but followed in their manner and, who knows, through the involuntary presence of those objects in their life, some dynamics of the broader historical process of its construction.

Finally, care and affection as expressed by the memoirist in relation to his teacher José Cleto – ultimately, the main goal of his writing of ego – propose, for a context in which in most Provinces the school was deeply associated with the master in his successes and failures, re-thinking, despite criticism and blame that authorities and even family members directed at these actors, the social significances of this profession and of this professional in the 19th century. Actually, such significances may have been much less harmonious and much more contradictory than we already know, to the point that a sensory history of school and schooling announces – as in the case of Nestor Vitor with his teacher José Cleto – possibilities, also, for this problematization. In short, concerning the writing of the history of education in the Imperial period, considering its peculiarities and limits, the sensory history of the school provides multiple possibilities of review and/or critique of certain historical explanations already built or to be built. One of them is that provided by Nestor Vitor and his subjective and individual experiences in the province of Paraná.

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Note

- 1 The exception is the work of Névio de Campos (2011) on the creation of the family *habitus* of Victor Ferreira do Amaral e Silva, conducted through childhood memories that bring evidence of educational experiences, although, for the most part, they took place outside of Paraná.

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