

# ***Women's History of Education and the Archival, Digital, Narrative, Auto/biographical, Affective and Spatial Turns<sup>1</sup>***

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## **1. Introduction**

The regular and numerous historiographical reviews and reflections that have been published on Women's and Gender History attests to the steady growth, worrying impasses, celebratory assertions, fruitful self-doubts, interactive dialogues, irreconcilable tensions and, above all, the creativity, vitality, and rich diversity in terms of sources, methods and themes that has characterised the field. History of Women's Education has regularly produced its own historiographical accounts, which have offered a zoomed-in and nuanced depiction of the manifold ways in which education, understood as informal education, self-education, and institutionalised schooling, has shaped both agentic and normative gendered identities, networks, practices, and processes of becoming across geographies and timespans.

A handful of these reviews are underpinned by a loose cartography of some of the conceptual turns that have characterized the Humanities and Social Sciences in the past decades: the affective, archival, auto/biographical, computational, cultural, digital, emotional, global, linguistic, material, narrative, nonhuman/posthuman, postmodern, reflexive, relational, sensory, spatial, textual, transnational, and visual turns. It is notably the case of Kathryn Gleadle's 2013 *Women's History Review*

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special issue «The imagined communities of women’s history: current debates and emerging themes, a rhizomatic approach» and Sue Anderson-Faithful and Joyce Goodman’s 2020 *Women’s History Review* special issue «Turns and twists in histories of women’s education». Both special issues at times explicitly comment on and implicitly dialogue with the affective turn, the archival turn, the auto/biographical turn, the global turn, the transnational turn, the material turn, the sensory turn, the posthuman turn, and the visual turn. Ultimately, both illustrate the «“fresh nodes of departure” that run alongside “more prolonged conduits of inquiry”» (Gleadle, 2013, p. 363) in the field of Women’s and Gender History in general and History of Women’s Education in particular. These take the form of apparently paradoxical «turns and twists» that reveal «ambiguities, complexities, tensions (and resistances)» (Anderson-Faithful, 2020, p. 369).

With the aim of continuing the Women’s and Gender History tradition of regularly reflecting on the methodological, theoretical and thematic venues of the field as well as dialoguing with Gleadle and Anderson-Faithful and Goodman, this special issue opts for zooming-in the question of how the field has both been informed by and contributed to leading theoretical turns. Contributors provide an illustration of the rich and myriad ways in which historians of women’s and gender education are currently playing out in these turn-related debates. In order to theoretically contextualize these articles, this introduction briefly defines the turns these authors engage with – the archival, digital, narrative, auto/biographical, affective, and spatial turns – and reflect upon their contribution to these conceptual terms.

## **2. The archival, digital, narrative, auto/biographical, affective, and spatial turns**

As we discuss in our contribution to this special issue, we agree with Joyce Goodman in that theory is a space from which we, feminist scholars, «cannot afford to flee» (Goodman, 2003, p. 158). As commented throughout this section, feminist research’s contribution to the development and enrichment of the theoretical turns is often central and largely acknowledged. In this light, the authors in this special issue «provide plenty of evidence, or even ammunition» (Spencer, 2010, p. 112), to keep on fuelling feminist research’s central and dynamic contribution to «theory». This section provides a contextualization of the turns discussed by them.

### *2.1. The archival turn*

The archival turn reflects a now ingrained preoccupation with archival practices, both in terms of curating documentation and retrieving information. It stands for a focus shift from archives mined as sources of scientific data to an understanding of archives as subject of inquiry. The archival turn is underpinned by a theorization of «archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval but knowledge production» (Stoler, 2002, p. 90). On that account, archive-related scientific research implies «critically reflecting on the making of documents and how we choose to use them» (Stoler, 2002, p. 90). This critical reflection takes the form of «a more sustained engagement

with archives as cultural artifacts of fact production, of taxonomies in the making» (Stoler, 2002, p. 91).

Numerous scholars have epistemologically problematised the archive and have hence contributed to the development of the archival turn. Thus, for instance, in his book *Archaeology of Knowledge (L'archéologie du savoir, 1969, translated into English in 1972)*, Michel Foucault's theorization of «the archive» does not refer to a physical institution that manages documents but as a network of «énoncés» – statements – that are interwoven in a web of historically fluctuating «institutional codes, everyday practices, and relations of power» (Berndtsson, Fischer, Mattsson & Öhrberg, 2021, p. 21). On that account, the archive for Foucault is a system for ordering, distributing and redistributing discourses that conditions both the production and reception of statements (Berndtsson, Fischer, Mattsson & Öhrberg, 2021, p. 22).

For her part, in her book *The Allure of the Archives (Le gout de l'archive, 1989, translated into English in 2013)*, Arlette Farge reflects upon the encounter of historians with the archive, with humour and in a poetic prose – from the rituals and hidden codes that permeate the uses of consultation rooms to the actual content of historical documents. The encounter with the materiality of manuscripts is, for Farge, emblematic of a positivist attitude among historians:

A word pronounced, an object found, a trace left become figures of reality, as if the proof of the past was finally there, definitive, and near, as if, by unfolding the archive, we had obtained the privilege of «touching reality» (Farge, 1989, p. 18, my translation).

Instead, displacing a romanticised understanding of manuscripts, archival work, and history-writing, Farge warns us that:

The important thing here is no longer to know whether the facts recounted took place exactly in this way, but to understand how the narration emerged at the crossroads of a power force that urges its articulation, a desire to convince and a practice of words we can seek to comprehend whether or not it borrows from prevailing cultural models (Farge, 1989, p. 39).

Jacques Derrida's theoretical project, put forward in his *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression (Mal d'archive: une impression, 1995)*, also associates archive to power. For him, power is *at the onset* of archives. The etymological origin of the word reflects the power that stems from them: like the *archaeon* – the place where archons (rulers) in the ancient Athenian city-state were seated –, the archive accommodates the location of power over gathering documentation. This power-related archive is, like in Foucault's theoretical project, subject to the inextricable passing of time, with its changeability, destruction, and oblivion. What Derrida calls *mal d'archive* (archive fever) is precisely the yearning to attain an exhaustive, unalterable, and whole archive.

In her book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Carolyn Steedman borrows from Derrida the idea of archive fever, or, as she clarifies, «Archive Fever Proper», that is, literally, the fever that «might actually be contracted in the dust of an archive» (Steedman, 2011, p. 9). Her borrowing permits her to walk the reader, informedly, confidently and humorously, through the ways in which dust in archives – the «origins

fever» (i.e., the wish to be in direct contact with the past via tangible manuscripts, Steedman, 2011, p. 9) – can potentially, metaphorically and literally, kill historians, from breathing in chemicals living on the cloth coverings of old files to the discomforts of traveling to archives with a low budget. *Within this* «Archive Fever Proper», echoing Farge’s take on historians’ encounter with the materiality of manuscripts, Steedman demystifies the way in which the archive has traditionally been understood as «a foundational and paradigmatic activity of historians» (Steedman, 2011, p. x) – a «rite de passage» (Steedman, 2011, p. 9) that offers the possibility to retrieve objective historical knowledge out of (literally tangible) material. Echoing Farge’s reflections upon the excitement, rituals, monotony, and loneliness that prevails in consultation rooms, Steedman deconstructs the idea that archives are repositories of sources scholars recover to produce historical truth. Instead, she invites historians to move away from «negative historiography» – i.e., the urge to concentrate and control all historical evidence in a single archive – to embrace historiography as a form of representation in which silences are part and parcel of the intrinsic openness of history-writing, subject to new interpretations built up on newfound manuscripts and/or new approaches to old evidence.

## 2.2. *The digital turn*

The archival turn has been altered and enriched by the digital turn. The latter tackles the myriad ways in which digital technology conditions our perception and understanding of the world and its processes of knowledge-production. Intrinsically interdisciplinary, the digital turn in history has opened up innumerable possibilities around the computational exploitation of (big) data. Broadly understood as «an approach to examining and representing the past that works with the new communication technologies of the computer, the Internet network, and software systems» (Cohen et al, 2008, p. 454), Digital History puts into play computational technologies of data mining and visualization brought, among other factors, by the increasingly availability of sources in digitized format. This mass digitization has in turn spurred new methodological options of data gathering, analyzing, and presenting.

As Nicholson reminds us, «Historians have responded to the emergence of online archives with cautious enthusiasm. Much debate has surrounded the pitfalls and drawbacks of digital research» (Nicholson, 2013, p. 61). A case in point is the reaction that distant reading has sparked among historians. Close reading stands for the thorough and in-depth hermeneutical analysis of a demarcated number of primary sources that historians have traditionally conducted in their scientific pursuits. Distant reading (Moretti, 2013) consists of tracing recurrent patterns and apparently invisible interconnections among big data sets. Exploitation of digital corpora within the framework of distant reading usually takes the form of software-aided computational processing: data mining, statistical analysis, textual analysis, topic modelling, data visualization, network analysis, among others. Distant reading has been accused of vitiating the study of manuscript sources. For software-aided historical research is not always accompanied by a problematisation of the way in which algorithms that make computational processing work influence the outcomes of historical questions.

In order to neutralise these allegations, digital historians have pled for a form of digital hermeneutics that consists of providing a transparent and accountable reflection on how software-aided processes of data collection, analysis, and visualisation condition research outputs. As Romein et al explain:

The choice of a particular computer language, database system or tool already steers the results in a particular direction. By applying digital hermeneutics, the historian can be transparent about this process, instead of leaving the computer's assumptions and limitations unarticulated. In practice, only historians with an interest in the epistemology of digital objects and processes will engage with this rigorous form of hermeneutics. For the majority, engaging with digital history will remain a hybrid mix of analogue and digital practices (Romein et al, 2020, p. 309-310).

Along the same lines, other historians hold a brief for a strategic combination of distant and close reading. It is the case, for example, of digital historian Gerben Zaagsma, who argues:

While some welcome a supposedly more scientific approach that big data might bring and a new paradigm of knowledge production in the humanities, others fear for the hermeneutic character of the humanities, and a reduction of humanities research to data crunching or to a view that proclaims the search for underlying patterns and structures in human history and culture to be its essence. The either/or attitude often brought to this debate however, is misleading and the distinction cannot be neatly mapped along lines of quantitative/qualitative or positivist/narrative analysis either; once again the debate should be about how to productively integrate different approaches and methods and recognise how they add up and reinforce each other (Zaagsma, 2013, p. 24).

### *2.3. The narrative turn*

Narrative approaches to scientific data are a set of interdisciplinary qualitative research methodologies that arose in the past decades within different fields, including Literary Studies, Linguistics, Psychology, History, and Sociology. They can be said to have sprung up in the context of a philosophical challenge to positivism (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Positivist research situates observers outside the social phenomena they study. It places them separated from the historically and geographically embedded cultural, social, economic, and political fabric of which both the object of their research and themselves are a part. Instead, narrative inquiry seeks to problematise the entanglement between observer and observant in the co-construction of social phenomena and scientific knowledge. And it does so via an understanding of human identity and action as a form of storied plots. For, in the theoretical projects of scholars such as psychologists Donald Polkinghorne, Jerome Bruner, Dan McAdams, and philosopher Paul Ricoeur, human life is a narrativized

and plotted process of experiential meaning-making (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Ricoeur, 1983-1985).

According to Matti Hyvärinen, the life as narrative approach developed distinctly «within three separate disciplinary fields: in literature theory and linguistics; in historiography, and finally in social sciences» (Hyvärinen, 2010, p. 69-70). As he explains, in Literary Studies, an interest in narrative grew out of a reaction against structuralist narratology, characterized by its study of the overarching traits, patterns, relationships and functions of narratives. In History, Hyvärinen argues, «narrative theory of history» did not focus so much on «methods of analyzing narratives» but on «the consequences of crafting narratives in particular ways» (Hyvärinen, 2010, p. 73). In his view, it «remained fixed upon the problems of representing the past in narrative forms, in narrative as cognitive form» (Hyvärinen, 2010, p. 74). Finally, «The narrative turn in the social sciences implicated qualitative, often humanistically oriented research – in stark contrast to the scientific, descriptive tenor of structuralist narratology» (Hyvärinen, 2010, p. 75).

In Corinne Squire, Molly Andrews and Maria Tamboukou's account, the historical antecedents of narrative analysis are «located in two parallel academic moves»: humanist – i.e., holistic, person-centred – approaches in western Sociology and Psychology, which developed against positivist empiricism –, and Russian structuralist, French poststructuralist, postmodern, psychoanalytic and deconstructionist approaches to narratives (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2013, p. 3). On both accounts, the narrative turn refers, on the one hand, to a specific sort of data – i.e., individuals' oral or written storied lives – both the informant's and the academic's narrative; and, on the other hand, to a process of scientific scrutiny with an interest in individuals' experience of the world and their human agency as well as a concern for discourse and power dynamics. This is so because the narrative turn emerged within a cross-epistemological postmodern philosophical background that called for self-reflexive modes of scientific inquiry. This self-reflexivity encompassed both the informants' and the researchers' personal and collective subjectivity and history, and accounted for their dialogical, collaborative, and reciprocal production of narrative construction and re-construction of scientific knowledge. As Ivor Goodson and Scherto R. Gill synthesize:

Narrative seems to rely on the storied nature embedded in human experience and the inherent meaning that participants extrapolate by selecting events and creating an overarching plot. In this situation, the researcher would pursue vigorously the structure in the discourse of the story and, from the way the teller or the participant employs the events and the temporality of the plot, the researcher further collaborates with her participants and delineates meaning and understanding of events as narrated (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 22).

## 2.4. *The auto/biographical turn*

Narrative modes of scientific investigation understand storied lives as opportunities to gain access to marginalised voices and provide insights into their political responses to discrimination. In feminist historical scholarship, this narrative approach has taken the form of a methodological engagement with autobiographical sources with a view to reaching and making visible female historical subjects – traditionally written out of or distortedly depicted in official sources. For, as Michelle Perrot pinpoints, «The difficulty of women's history is primarily due to the erasure of their traces, both public and private» (Perrot, 2020, p. 43; my translation).

In France, a pioneer work around autobiographical sources is Françoise Mayeur's *L'enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles sous la Troisième République* (1977) and *L'éducation des filles en France au XIXe siècle* (1979). Mayeur puts into play personal narratives, intertwined with official documentation, with a view to throwing light on girls and women's access to education (Mayeur, 1977; Mayeur, 1979). In Spain, in 1990 the Spanish History of Education Society organized its 6<sup>th</sup> biannual conference on women's education from 1868 to 1975. Among the over 70 contributions to the publication that ensued, pioneer women historians such as Carme Agulló Díaz, Pilar Ballarín Domingo, Maria del Carmen Benso Calvo, Consuelo Flecha García, and Carmen Sanchidrián Blanco, like Mayeur, explored a combination of official and personal manuscripts to recover female historical subjects from oblivion (Benso Calvo & Gonzalez Perez, 2009).

In Britain, focusing on biographies and autobiographies, in her book *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (1992) Liz Stanley offered an epistemological reflection upon the processes of writing and reading these two particular forms of personal narratives. Her theoretical project involved a critical perusal of modern biography that, by coining the term auto/biography, manifests the interrelation between biography and autobiography (Stanley, 1992). Indeed, in her book, Stanley eschews what are, in her view, the pivotal tenets of the «realist fallacy» that underpins modern biography, namely, (1) the belief that «we can somehow recover the past, understand it as it was experienced and understood by the people who actually lived it» (Stanley, 1992, p. 7); (2) biographers' self-proclaimed unquestionable expertise, who «see *their* version – the only one fully represented in what they write – as privileged, a view that is more truthful because it comes at the subject and their life with more, and thus somehow less partial, evidence than the subject's contemporaries or the subject themselves did» (Stanley, 1992, p. 7); and (3) «the realism and referentiality of modern biography» (Stanley, 1992, p. 15), which take the form of both «a correspondence theory of the relationship between the written product of biographical research and the lives it investigates – [i.e.] that the text is precisely referential of the person» – and the «coherent, essentially unchanging and unitary self which can be referentially captured by its methods» (Stanley, 1992, p. 8). Writing from «a feminist and cultural political approach», Stanley urges scholars instead to address questions such as «“the past from *whose* viewpoint?», “why *this* viewpoint and no other?”, and “what would be the effect of working from a *contrary* viewpoint”» (Stanley, 1992, p. 7). For, as the author avers: «“who says” is someone who has produced one more interpretation from among a range of possibilities, and who has produced it from one particular angle rather than any other» (Stanley, 1992, p. 7). On that account, the biographer, claims Stanley, is simultaneously biographer

and autobiographer. For his/her «self» is inevitably inscribed in the process of writing up the biographee.

Stanley's theoretical project echoes the Biography Studies approach developed at the heart of the Spanish Association for Historical Research on Women (Asociación Española de Investigación Histórica de las Mujeres – AEIHM). In 2013, AEIHM organized its biannual conference, focusing on the biographical turn: «Y ahora qué? Nuevos usos del género biográfico» [What's next? New uses of the biographical genre]. The theme was framed within a biographical turn perspective – defined by Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma as «the emergence of biographical research as an accepted critical scholarly method of investigation since 1980» (Renders, de Haan & Harmsma, 2017, p. 3). In the foreword, Henar Gallego Franco reminds us that biographies have been part and parcel of historiography since its inceptions, often taking men and the (fe/male) elites as their target (Gallego Franco, 2016). In order to offer a less biased and more democratic historical scholarship, she suggests that biographies – biographical history, in Sabina Loriga's terminology (Loriga, 2010) – stands for a fundamental ally in the promotion and recuperation of historical subjects and voices that have been traditionally written out. In her view, Biography Studies additionally permit exploring the relationship between individual and collective experience, between dominant structures and the way individual subjects negotiate their capacity to act freely (Gallego Franco, 2016, p. 12).

An alternative understanding of biographical scholarship is represented in the edited collection *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (Renders, de Haan & Harmsma, 2017). Moving away from Stanley's notion of auto/biography, the authors call for a more third-person renewed theoretically approach to biographical scholarship. As they state in their previous publication – *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* – Renders and de Haan accuse Life Writing of hijacking Biography Studies (Renders & de Haan, 2014). In his contribution to this edited collection, Renders states that the

ideological academic position [that characterises Life Writing] stands in direct opposition to the scholarly imperative to analyse the world (including the past) as objectively as possible with the aim to understand it better and without assigning to the researcher the responsibility to correct injustice (Renders, 2014, p. 172).

In this sense, Life Writing scholar Craig Howes offers a clarifying explanation of the un/commonalities between biography and life writing. The author explicates, for instance, that, presumably Life Writing-hijacked Biography Studies rally around «an organization devoted to the third person, with little interest in autobiography, let alone cultural critique, historicism, identity politics and so forth» (Howes, 2017, p. 173). Unlike Biography Studies, the questions Life Writing scholars tend to address are:

What are we doing when we're reading and writing biographies? Are they sustaining certain notions of who's important, and who's not? Are they comfort



food? Is the publishing market in fact dictating a very small stream of potential subjects for someone who wants to be «full-time»? (Howes, 2017, p. 173).

## 2.5. *The affective turn*

In critical theory, affect theory explores the potential of capacities to act and be acted upon. Its point of departure is the belief that what we have traditionally understood as individually unique – e.g., impulses, attitudes, emotions, and feelings – are in fact social, historical, and therefore shared constructions. The affective turn implies then an interest in examining (bodily) experience as a dynamic response to environmental conditions – a response that is the result of a complex interrelation between the human body, (non)human entities, discourses, cultural and social forces, and subjectively experienced but spatially and temporally located feelings and emotions.

By way of example, Sara Ahmed's seminal works *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) illustrate the extent to which emotions are not singular subjective psychological states but socially conditioned cultural practices. Her work offers indeed an account of how bodies and emotions are produced and circulated and are ethically and politically relevant as a result of what she calls «affective economies». The author contends that bodies (objects, subjects, places) materialise, take shape and become meaningful as a result of the power-laden and culturally-bound orientations bodies take and the spatial arrangements they occupy. Orientations and spatial arrangements are determined by the bodies' backgrounds, which dictate what is faced (objects, subjects, places) and what is concomitantly relegated to the «ordinary, familiar or usual» (Ahmed, 2004, p. 179). These oriented and background-determined bodies are shaped because of the affective encounters they are involved in due to their capacity to affect and be affected. The affective responses that emerge out of these interactions are conditioned by «past histories of contact, unavailable in the present» (Ahmed, 2004, p. 7), which determine the affective values attributed to bodies. Turned into objects of emotions, bodies are ascribed qualities—what Ahmed refers to as their «stickiness» –, aligning them with normativity through straightening devices. These devices produce comfort in some bodies (allowing them to extend into space) and discomfort in others (forcing them to recoil). Straightening devices inflict moments of disorientation on oblique subjects, disturbing the dwellings they inhabit. These «queer moments» are usually experienced as violence but can also be turned into inventive opportunities for change in support for inclusivity, as Ahmed purports in her affirmation of queer phenomenology.

## 2.6. *The spatial turn*

Place and space as analytical categories encapsulate the spatial turn's shift from the terms being understood as static containers to their conceptualisation as fluctuating culturally bound social productions. The (perceived) ontology of place and space affects individuals' cultural, political, and social experience and acts as a tool for the production and preservation of discrimination. A seminal work is *The Production of Space* (*La production de l'espace*, 1974), by Henri Lefebvre, whose tripartite distinction has been most influential: perceived space (which (re)produces physical and material space), conceived space (a projection of an abstract truth about space by dominant/elite groups) and lived space (which flows from the lived (marginal) experiences of people).

Another influential early work is Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (1962, translated into English in 1989). In his book, Habermas examines, from a historical perspective and in a British urban context, the emergence of the public sphere in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The public sphere is for Habermas a space where members of the middle class could contribute to public opinion and political practice, giving expression to their needs and interests.

Lefebvre and Habermas's conceptualisations of space as a means through which potentially social change can be envisaged and promoted also runs through Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (*L'invention du quotidien*, 1980, translated into English in 1984). Moving away from the idea of a monolithic power that enforces itself on passive citizens, de Certeau offers a twofold conceptualisation of dominance and agency as located in space – understood, as we have seen so far, as constructed, complex, and contested. Space is here (re)produced in everyday life practices – popular, poetic, illegible, banal, quotidian, creative, silent, invisible. He does so by distinguishing between the *strategies* of power and the *tactics* of resistance.

Moving to the field of feminist geography, Gillian Rose's groundbreaking book *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993) teases out the inherent masculinism of geography as a discipline. Her point of departure is the belief that geography has been dominated by men. In the process of legitimising geographical knowledge, they have ineluctably projected their masculinist interests and biases onto it, by means of «objective» rational reasoning, and in the name of universal knowledge. Rose's is a seminal work that epitomizes the task of envisaging a new feminist geography, to which other scholars have equally significantly contributed.

Hence, for example, in her book *Space, place and gender* (1994), Doreen Massey highlights that space is not a neutral site but is imbued with (gendered) cultural, social, and political discourses that operate within complex power dynamics. Containing multitude relational identities, space is experienced differently depending on one's identity and hence conveys (gendered) social discrimination and inequality. Massey's theorisation of space goes hand in hand with a fourfold definition of place. Places have multiple identities, full of internal conflicts; they are not static entities but processes that operate in time; they are not enclosed with clear boundaries but boundless, linked in myriad and porous ways with other entities; and their uniqueness is defined by the social relations they establish and are made of. On that account,

spaces/places are continually reproduced and reinterpreted throughout time and hence act as sites of contestation, where different groups of individuals lay claim on.

As we now move on to discuss, contributors to this special issue have engaged with and contributed to (a combination of) these theoretical turns.

### 3. History of Women's Education engagements with leading turns

Writing within the narrative and auto/biographical turns, Maria Tamboukou focuses on examining how letters permit understanding women's intellectual involvement in the making of scientific knowledge in the wider cultural formations of European modernity. Coining the term «epistolary sensibility», she deploys an epistemological approach to archival research that provides her with a methodological framework to study women mathematicians' personal correspondence. Her contribution to the archival turn takes the form of a twofold reflection – on curating policies and on retrieving information. Thus, she points out *gendered* archival practices of knowledge *production*. In doing so, her take exemplifies Foucault's understanding of the archive as a network of «énoncés» – statements – that are intertwined in a web of historically fluctuating (here gendered) culturally-bound institutional codes, everyday practices, and relations of power. By the same token, her approach stands for a vivid illustration of the workings of Derrida's etymological explanation of the word «archive» – i.e., as accommodating the location of (here gendered) power over gathering documentation. On that account, her perspective inevitably echoes Farge's comments on the materiality of documentation, which, as noted, refutes the idea that the tangibility of manuscripts bridges the distance between past and present. This is so because, in her study of female mathematicians' personal correspondence, Tamboukou identifies the extent to which curating practices around their epistolary legacy act as (here gendered) culturally bound conditioning mediators. Tamboukou's contribution to the archival turn also takes the form of a reflection upon the way historians retrieve information from manuscripts. Writing within epistolary studies, she does so by mapping out a comprehensive methodological cartography of ways in which authors have distinctly problematised letters as sources of historical evidence, unpacking the layers of mediation between letter-writers and historians.

Maria Teresa Santos Cunha equally combines the archival and auto/biographical turns to explore the way in which autobiographical material permits understanding how a female teacher-in-training in the 1960s negotiated gendered normativity throughout her professional life. To do so, Santos Cunha resorts to consulting a *personal* archive made of ego-documents. Her theoretical contribution takes the form of addressing the question of the extent to which curating practices, including accessibility, act as mediators in the process of producing historical knowledge. To do so, she unpacks the way in which personal diaries and reading notebooks are conditioned by their storage and accessibility. As she teases out, they are so because personal archives are often constituted by families that, in the process, especially when donated to institutions, scan, manipulate, and inevitably contaminate the manuscripts.

The digital turn is put into play by Meritxell Simon-Martin and Roser Grau. The authors put into use Hecumen – a search aid catered for Historians of Education

developed within the framework of the state-funded project «Connecting History of Education: International networks, publications and global dissemination». Focusing on the theoretical turns addressed in this special issue, the authors offer an introductory qualitative historiographical survey that reflects the multiple, complex, conflicting, and intersecting strands that characterize the field of History of Women's Education. Having broken down the digital «black box» that makes Hecumen possible elsewhere, their article seeks to encourage fellow academics to put into play this database to explore further sophisticated understandings on past and current trends in History of (Women's) Education and hence venture into sharp-edged new scholarship in dialogue with theoretical turns.

Writing from the area of Biographical Studies, Loïc Szerdahelyi teases out the methodological shifts that have characterised biographical approaches to the history of Physical Education (PE) teachers in France. In doing so, his article contributes to the auto/biographical turn in the form of a historiographical revision of biographical scholarship that somehow illustrates the aforementioned tension between Renders, de Haan and Harmsma's understanding of Biography Studies and the sort of auto/biographical turn feminist scholars such as Stanley have theoretically contributed to. Indeed, in dialogue with international scholarship, Szerdahelyi's historiographical revision outlines first women's and gender history and sports in France and second scholarship on the social history of PE teachers within Biographical Studies. In the process, the author unpacks methodological shifts in the profiles of the biographees (e.g., from elite sportsmen to (elite) sportswomen to a focus on the workings of gender), in terms of discipline influences (e.g., social history, micro-history, history of statistics), and in matters of choice of primary sources (career records, personal files, professional correspondence, oral interviews).

Victoria Robles and Carme Agulló examine the way in which autobiographical documents, which articulate subjective and discursive understandings of personal experience, can nuance official discourses, and hence put into question historiographical metanarratives. The authors study primorriverist female primary school teachers, teacher trainers, headmistresses and school inspectors that were called to account and penalized during the right-wing Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930). They seek to tease out their professional agency as subjects that, hitherto historiographically considered as non-active in the development of the nation, simultaneously contested, and forged strategic alliances with the regime. They do so by juxtaposing different types of primary sources: legislative documentation, public press, teacher records, including appeals submitted by the sanctioned female educators, and correspondence. Their theoretical perspective is located at the crossroads of the epistemological tension explained above. For they situate their historical argumentation between their disposition to problematise their autobiographical sources and willingness to retain a certain third-person «objective» perspective in their scientific endeavours.

The affective turn is examined by Ana Laura Abramowski in her study of the figure of the male primary school teacher in Argentina at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Against the background of a «feminisation» of the profession, the author explores the affective and emotional profile sought by the state in their official publications. An examination of educational press articles, reports produced by management staff in

normal schools, and textbooks used in teacher training attests to the «feminine» traits of tenderness, softness, affection, and patience *expected* among male primary school teachers by the authorities. Moving away from the sort of ego-documents studied by other contributors in this special issue, Abramowski's theoretical contribution to the affective turn revolves around the notion of the social and cultural construction of gendered emotions. As the author illustrates, these are always relational, located in spatial-temporal coordinates, and crossed by rules and hierarchies that de/authorise in/appropriate articulations of the «I».

The spatial turn is approached by Sue Anderson-Faithful and Catherine Holloway. The authors explore the potential of space as an analytical tool by examining three historical case studies in the United Kingdom: a girls' day technical school in Kent, the Anglican Mothers' Union, and the Anglican Church congress. This threefold study permits them to contribute to the spatial turn around the general question of the significance of locality – understood as place and space, physical and symbolic – in processes of power/knowledge production, identity formation and negotiation of agency. As Anderson-Faithful and Holloway's three examples illustrate, the normative understanding of «women's place» appears here as a fluctuating culturally bound social production that, transformed into quotidian gestures and grand practices, act as a dynamic process where female identity is forged, and agency negotiated.

Finally, Carlos Sanz, Sara Ramos and Teresa Rabazas assess the impact History of Women's Education has had on Education Studies programmes in Spanish public universities. To do so they first provide a critical bibliographic review of Herstory of Education in Spain around the axis of the biographical turn. The authors conclude there is a chasm between the dynamic and prolific scholarship in History of Women's Education produced in Spain and its transmission in the context of teacher education programmes. They suggest that this is due to the fact that «the often rigid university structures» do not facilitate its incorporation. The authors hold a brief for a mandatory *transversal* implementation of gender into History of Education syllabuses, in line with state and supranational legislation.

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