

PHOTOS FOUND IN THE ARCHIVE.  
AN APPROXIMATION TO THE WORK WITH  
IMAGES BASED ON AN AMATEUR ALBUM  
ON CHILDREN'S GAMES (ARGENTINA,  
LATE 19TH CENTURY)<sup>α</sup>

*Fotos encontradas en el archivo. Aproximaciones al trabajo con imágenes a propósito de un álbum amateur sobre juegos infantiles (Argentina, fines del siglo XIX)*

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Fecha de recepción: 27/10/2018 • Fecha de aceptación: 16/12/2018

**Abstract.** This article presents a study of a series of photos on children's games that is preserved at the National General Archive in Argentina as part of the Fond of the Argentinean Photographic Society of Amateurs, active between 1889 and 1925. The album contains 77 pictures of unusual quality that present heterogeneous groups of children playing diverse games in different settings. The photos include little information about how they were produced, but a detailed research and analysis can reveal different aspects of the production of images of childhood at that time. The text presents, in its first part, some general considerations about photography as historical documents and its truth-claims; in the second part, it discusses the social biography of these images, looking at the available information in its peri-textual inscriptions to trace its conditions of production, authorship, and circulation, and introduces the analysis of some of its contents, particularly in relation to how these images, in their aesthetic choices, collaborate in the production of a new iconography of childhood.

<sup>α</sup> I want to thank Luis Priamo for his help to follow the traces of the Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados, and Martín Schuliaquer for his support on further inquiries at the National General Archive in Argentina. I am also grateful to the archivists of AGN for being generous in sharing their own research on the history of the Society's album, and to the librarians of the National Library of Spain, where some of these publications are held.

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The final section raises some reflections about the ethical demands of working with photographs, calling for an in-depth study that makes room for their singularization and contributes to redefining the politics of the archive and of memory in the history of education.

**Keywords:** Visual history of education; Amateur photography; Children games; Visual archive.

**Resumen.** *El artículo presenta un estudio de una serie de fotos sobre juegos infantiles que se encuentra en el Archivo General de la Nación de Argentina. Parte del fondo de la Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados, activa entre 1889 y 1925, el álbum se compone de 77 imágenes de inusual calidad que presentan grupos heterogéneos de niños en espacios diversos en distintos juegos. Las fotos contienen escasa información sobre cómo fueron producidas, pero la investigación y análisis detallados revela distintos aspectos sobre la producción de imágenes de infancia en esa época. El texto presenta en primer lugar algunas consideraciones generales sobre el soporte fotográfico y sus postulados epistémicos como documentos históricos. En segundo lugar, aborda la biografía social de estas fotografías, buscando indagar en la información disponible en sus inscripciones peritextuales para precisar sus condiciones de producción, autoría y circulación. A continuación, se introduce el análisis de algunos de los contenidos de estas imágenes, especialmente con relación a cómo estas imágenes, por sus opciones estéticas, colaboran en producir una nueva iconografía sobre la infancia. Finalmente, se reflexiona sobre las demandas éticas del trabajo con la fotografía, invitando a un estudio en profundidad que permita singularizarlas y que contribuya a redefinir otras políticas de archivo y de memoria en la historia de la educación.*

**Palabras clave:** *Historia visual de la educación; Fotografía amateur; Juegos infantiles; Archivo visual.*

Every true historian is still a poet of detail, and endlessly plays, as the aesthete [...], the thousand harmonies that a rare piece awakens in a field of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

How to work with images that are found in the archive? In this article, I present some historiographical reflections around a series of photographs on children's games. These images are available at the National General Archive in Argentina (AGN) and have been occasionally used to illustrate

<sup>1</sup> Michel De Certeau, *La escritura de la historia* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2006), 85. All translations from Spanish and French are mine.

works on the history of childhood in the 1900s, but they have not been studied as a series. Their finding occurred while I was doing research on the history of school uniforms; the fortuitous encounter confirms what historian Lila Caimari says: «every once in a while, a piece of the [...] archive that breaths below the book surfaces triumphant, amazing, in the main text»,<sup>2</sup> and stops being relegated to the footnote.

The photographs, 77 in total, show with great quality and detail several scenes of children's games in which diverse groups—including Afro-Argentinean boys and girls— participate in different spaces: houses, schools, parks or waste grounds. They are part of a specific fond, that of the Argentinean Photographic Society of Amateurs (Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados, SFAdA), which was donated to the AGN in 1940. From the first moment, it was clear that the series was a little gem, a treasure, both because of its photographic quality and its semantic richness. However, there was little information available on these pictures at the beginning of my inquiry. All the images have one, two or three inventory codes; one third of the pictures show a date (February to September 1902) and more than half of them have the name of a game as title. I set on a journey to know more about this series. Moreover, I was interested, following De Certeau, in listening to the thousand harmonies that these pieces could awaken in the field of knowledge of the history of education and the history of childhood. How to do that?

The metaphor of listening may sound not appropriate for working with images, which evoke vision as the privileged sense to capture their density and specificity. However, listening calls for a multi-sensorial approach that is concerned with what an image can say and the meanings it can convey not just as a text but also through its silences and its very presence, even if digitalized. In that line, Peter Szendy's work on the history of listening is stimulating. Szendy says that the modern idea of «the condescendence of the ear, which presents itself as the pure reception of that which comes», overcame several other possibilities of listening that did not neutralize the marks or punctuations made by the self or by others.<sup>3</sup> For example,

<sup>2</sup> Lila Caimari, *La vida en el archivo. Goces, tedios y desvíos en el oficio de la historia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2017), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Szendy, *En lo profundo de un oído. Una estética de la escucha* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2010), 60.

Laënnec, author of the *Treatise on Mediate Auscultation* in 1819, underscored the importance of interposing an apparatus (the stethoscope) that put distance between the body of the doctor and that of the patient. For Laënnec, if there is no mediation, there is the risk of listening just oneself. On the contrary, listening is better achieved if one punctuates the listening, posing questions «literally with the fingertips» —that is why auscultation is accompanied by short knocks.<sup>4</sup> Szendy argues that the sense of listening is suspended between tact and gaze, and needs both to get access to meaning.

Following this thread, this article intends to listen to what these images, their harmonies, their noises and silences, can contribute to the history of education. In order to do that, I will present the historiographical approach taken in my research, still ongoing, of the series of photographs, seeking to avoid the reproduction of the photographic cliché and the des-identification of photography that subsumes it in stereotypes of children and games<sup>5</sup>. The argument will start with some general considerations on the photographic medium and its epistemic and historical claims; second, it will present the social history of the series under consideration, looking in particular at the information available in its peri-textual notations,<sup>6</sup> third, it will introduce an analysis of some of its contents, looking in particular at how these images, through their aesthetic options, contribute to the production of a new iconography of childhood at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

A first line of reflection proposed in this article is on photographs as historical documents, and on the conditions upon which they became legible, authorized and trustworthy signs in modern times. In their discussion of the image as «witness» or «capture» of a historical moment, historians Lynn Hunt y Vanessa Schwartz remark that,

<sup>4</sup> Szendy, *En lo profundo de un oído*, 63. In digital times, it is very suggestive to think of this listening with the fingertips, in an interesting turn around pre-, and maybe post-, cybernetic facilities.

<sup>5</sup> See the work done by Sjaak Braster and María del Mar Pozo Andrés, «La Escuela Nueva en Imágenes: Fotografía y Propaganda en *The New Era* (1920-1939)», *Historia y Memoria de la Educación* 8 (2018): 97-145, for a discussion of the construction of visual stereotypes of childhood, and of the effects that this des-identification produces in the understanding of historical phenomena.

<sup>6</sup> I refer to the inscriptions that are in the margins of the photos: titles, inventory numbers or codes, notes, dates. On the notion of the peri-textual, see Gerard Génette, *Umbrales* (México DF: Siglo XXI, 2001).

[P]hotography did have profound effects on thinking about the relation between the image and the external world represented in it. [...] Scholars began to reinterpret the images made before photography (whether they were paintings, sculptures, prints, or tapestries) through a photographic imaginary, assuming that people had always more or less attempted to represent the real.<sup>7</sup>

This interpretation succeeded over other possibilities, which were visible in the early debates on the status of photography in the illustrated press as studied by Thierry Gervais.<sup>8</sup> Gervais, who worked on the images of the Crimea War of 1855, observed that editors had, at that time, an ambiguous and problematic relationship to war photographs. In the illustration of news pieces, they preferred drawings and paintings because they were deemed as better adjusted to reality. The editors thought that photographs captured all that was in front of their lens, which was perceived as a limitation; drawings could enhance some details and convey emotional climates that could get closer to the event itself. William Fox Talbot (1800-1877), one of the earlier photographers, said that photography was «a mechanical aid for those who lack drawing talent».<sup>9</sup>

Some years later, few would doubt of the advantages of photography in relation to manual media of representation. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the promise of photography of producing «mechanical objectivity» had ample following among researchers.<sup>10</sup> John Berger said that camera, positivism, and sociology grew up together in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and shared the belief that observable and quantifiable facts would offer human beings a complete and objective knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Berger underscored that these «truth claims» of representing life in precise and

<sup>7</sup> Lynn Hunt and Vanessa Schwartz, «Capturing the Moment: Images and Eyewitnessing in History», *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (2010): 259-271, quote in p. 259.

<sup>8</sup> Thierry Gervais, «Witness to War: The Uses of Photography in the Illustrated Press, 1855-1904», *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (2010): 370-384.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Tom Gunning, «What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs», in *Still Moving. Between Cinema and Photography*, eds. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 23-40, quote in p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> John Berger, «Appearances», in *Another way of telling*, eds. John Berger and Jean Mohr (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 81-129.

objective terms had been central in the public uses of photography, mainly in scientific research and photojournalism. Even Sigfried Krauer, a sharp analyst of films, said that «photography has an outspoken affinity for unstaged reality». <sup>12</sup> Although spectators are now well trained about the impossibility of an unstaged reality in photographs, their affinity with reality is still a widespread belief. <sup>13</sup>

In the field of historiography, however, the debate on these truth claims has not ceased to grow in recent years. <sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the consideration of photographs as material artifacts, as entities with their own biography or social biography, is receiving increased attention. Photographs are seen as playing an active role in the production of meaning as part of the non-human actants in the networks that configure the social. <sup>15</sup> This perspective claims that photographs cannot be thought outside of the material and affective trajectories that configure their lives as artifacts, and also their inscription in particular politics of the archive. Their materiality also emphasizes the importance of a multi-sensorial approach to photography. Elizabeth Edwards remarks that «photographs are the result of walking with cameras, an embodied sense of technology as the camera becomes, in effect, a prosthetic eye and the creator of prosthetic memory through the photograph. Different camera technologies, however, demanded different forms of movement». <sup>16</sup> This approach calls for imagining, in the photograph, the body that was behind the camera, the crossing of gazes, the voice that staged the scene, the weight or the magnitude of the camera in a specific scene. It also invites to ask again why some pictures survive and others don't; which

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Hunt y Schwartz, «Capturing the Moment», 259.

<sup>13</sup> As Tom Gunning says, while the digital gives freedom to people to manipulate the photo and turn it into something different, it still «remains parasitic on the initial claim of accuracy contained in some uses of photography» (Gunning, «What's the Point of an Index?», 27). That is, the transformation of a photo, its playful quality, depends on it still being recognized as a photo; there is a «truth claim» that matters in the production and circulation of digital photography.

<sup>14</sup> See António Nóvoa, «Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing: Public Images of Teachers (19th-20th Centuries)», *Paedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000): 20-52, one of the first that gave impulse to this debate.

<sup>15</sup> Inés Dussel and Karin Priem, «The visual in histories of education: A Reappraisal», *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 6 (2017), 641-649.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, «Out and About: Photography, Topography, and Historical Imagination», in *Double Exposure: Memory and Photography*, ed. Olga Shevchencko (London: Transaction Press, 2014), 185-209, quote in p. 191.

were the politics, procedures and bodies that decided to keep some records and what happened with these decisions throughout time. That is why, according to Edwards, the history of photography has to be considered as part of an «affective and effective history», that is, of the concretization and the particular strategies of histories that connect artifacts, persons, and affects in plural and changing ways.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the challenge to the notion of photography as a transparent and unmediated historical evidence is also based on a reconsideration of photography's relation to time. The emergence of photography, a medium that defines its images for the fragment of time that the film or digital sensor is exposed to light, «revealed the new human power to save specific instants of time»<sup>18</sup> and store them for future viewers. As time-based media, photography appeared as a sign that brought the past to the present, expanding its temporality by the presence of active fragments of the past. Photography, together with film, set new standards for «precision, memory, knowability»<sup>19</sup> for every record of culture. But it also started the spread of the archival impulse, the pressure to record life and store these records as separated and isolated units —a sort of liberation or unbounding of the archival desire that is all the more alive with digital media.

In these new historiographical perspectives, photography as historical document is no longer considered as a way of entry into a direct and unmediated encounter between past and present. The research of photographic documents involves an immersion into a combination of technologies, archival impulses, signs and bodies that all bring heterogeneous gazes and temporalities. French historian Arlette Farge says that photographs are «the beating of time» that remind the researcher that there was a future in the past that we are seeing; they are wounds of time, passages, brief callings, as when one can perceive fleeting details that open up some room for connecting this present to worlds already

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, «Photography: A Strong History?» in *Photo Archives and the Idea of the Nation*, eds. Constanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2015), 321-329, quote in p. 325.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World. A Pelican Introduction* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Mary-Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time. Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 24. Also, see Kathryn Yacovone, *Benjamin, Barthes, and the Singularity of Photography* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

buried and vanished.<sup>20</sup> The notion of wound resists the tyranny of the *all visible (tout-plein)*, the regime of full visibility that rejects thinking about ruptures, gaps, and absences;<sup>21</sup> it affirms, on the contrary, the need to take into account the historicity of images and of the events that are being considered, and to acknowledge the epistemic and affective dimensions of the researcher's encounter with these sources.

## THE RESEARCH ON THE AMATEUR ALBUM ON CHILDREN'S GAMES

Grounding on these considerations on the complex status of photographs as historical documents, both because of their own trajectory of production and archiving and because of the relationships that historians have with these records in different historical moments, in the work with archival images different paths can be followed.

One option is to inquire about their material history. On top of Elizabeth Edwards' approach, already mentioned, and the contributions done by Deborah Poole on the visual economy of the Andes, centered on the circuits of production, circulation and consumption of images,<sup>22</sup> another relevant precedent for my own work is Fernando Aguayo and Alejandra Padilla Pola's study of Mexican photographs from late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They point to three issues when working with photos in the archives: «look at the printed or handwritten inscriptions in the primary medium of the pictures», get «information via research in newspapers and different sources of that time, as well as from the biographical trajectory» of photographers, and pay attention «to the information contained in the

<sup>20</sup> Arlette Farge, «Le temps logé en la photographie. À partir de Barthes et Kracauer», *Intermédialités* 7 (2006): 205-213, quotes in, 206 y 213.

<sup>21</sup> Sylvie Lindeperg, *La voie des images. Quatre histoires de tournage au printemps-été 1944* (Paris: Verdier, 2013), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity. A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). From a Neo-Marxist and postcolonial perspective, Poole studied the material practices involved in these circuits, for example the ateliers or studios, the production of postcards (as studied by Antonio Viñao and his team), the painters and creators of short operettas on the Incas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She looked in particular to how a racialized notion of Andean identity was produced, and the historical, changing conditions for the production of racial difference. Poole underscores the relevance of studying how races and social classes were visually produced, following the thread of the producers of images but also the images themselves in their powers and weaknesses, their silences and inconsistencies.

image itself».<sup>23</sup> These three issues, taken together with the theorizations on the historicity of photographic techniques and the material life of the images, are helpful for expanding the analysis of the series under consideration, as will be seen below. In the next section, I will present the choices made in my research on the pictures of children's games found at the AGN in Argentina: first, the inquiry into their production, authorship and circulation, and second, the analysis of the content of the series, that refer to the construction of visual discourses on childhood in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Production and circulation of the album

As already mentioned, the photographs are part of the Fond of the Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados (SFAdA), active between 1889 and 1925, a fond that arrived at the national archives in 1940 after a donation made by Casa Witcomb, a well-established photographic atelier that closed that year and sent their collection to the AGN.<sup>24</sup> In a sense, they are *objets trouvés*, found objects of which not much is known and that appear severed from their context of production. But if *objets trouvés* are those that have been retired from the circuits of exhibition and circulation,<sup>25</sup> then these pictures do not fulfill this condition, because they have been included in different narrations of the nation and the history of education and childhood.

However, their emergence occurs in the context of politics of the archive that have made them available for public search in digital form, which allows them to be copied and transported to other spaces; at least

<sup>23</sup> Fernando Aguayo and Alejandra Padilla Pola, «Fotografía y ciudad», in *Instantáneas de la Ciudad de México. Un álbum de 1883-1884*, eds. Alicia Salmerón y Fernando Aguayo (Ciudad de México: Instituto Mora/Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa, 2013), 38-55, quotes in pp. 41 y 43.

<sup>24</sup> The collections of the SFAdA are located in different archives in Buenos Aires, but the AGN holds the greatest part of it (46 albums). There are other albums at the Museo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Museo Histórico Nacional, Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Mitre and Biblioteca Manuel Gálvez. See Verónica Tell, «Gentlemen, gauchos y modernización. Una lectura del proyecto de la Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados», *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 3 (2013):16, available at: [http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article\\_2.php&obj=110&vol=3](http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_2.php&obj=110&vol=3).

<sup>25</sup> What is characteristic of *found footage* is that images are found outside the circuit of exhibition, and are reintroduced in it through artistic appropriation. Marcos Pererneau, «Construcción de la referencia», in *Antología de Argumentos teatrales en Argentina, 2003-2013* (Buenos Aires: Libretto, 2015), 11-21, quote in p. 17.

until now, the AGN is not granting access to the albums themselves for fear that they might be damaged. I will claim that this technological change contributes to turning visual records (not only these ones) into *objets trouvés*, objects buried in the para-human oceans of data that make the official and non-official archives of the digital era. In this circulation, the separation, fragmentation, radical de-contextualization and *mash-up* of records increase the risk of producing new forms of collective amnesia.<sup>26</sup> The attempt to restore singularity to this corpus, identifying its conditions of production and tracing its early paths of circulation are ways in which historians can go against the «tempest that blows from the land of oblivion», as Walter Benjamin called it.<sup>27</sup>

How, then, to proceed in the analysis? Some pictures have inscriptions that, even if brief, are of great value to know more about when and how they were produced. It was mentioned before that 45 of these images have a title (the name of the game played by children), and 22 show a date (month and year, from February to September 1902). In this last notation, there is an inscription, «CyC», which was inferred correctly to be a reference to the illustrated journal *Caras y Caretas*, edited in Buenos Aires between 1898 and 1941.<sup>28</sup> In this journal, I found nine articles that published these photographs, including one edited on January 1903 that is not mentioned in the peri-textual inscriptions of the pictures at the AGN. In total, *Caras y Caretas* printed 24 pictures of the album. A significant finding is that the journal published three photos whose originals are not included in the AGN album («Sir Roger» —CyC 190/1902—, «Balancín-balanzas» —CyC 207/1902— and «La payana», CyC 223-1902). If there were more photos than the ones currently at the album available at the AGN, this raises questions about who made the album and when did that happen.

After research done in archives in Argentina and Spain, and following the references in Edgardo Cifardo's study on the history of

<sup>26</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, «L'image brûlée», in *Penser par les images*, ed. Zimmermann, L., Didi Huberman, G. et al. (Nantes: Editions Cécile Defaut, 2006), 11-52.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Benjamin, «Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death», in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 111-140, quote in p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> *Caras y Caretas* included photographs from its first issues. See Jorge Rivera, «Caras y Caretas: La economía literaria del mercado», *La Nación Suplemento Literario*, 15 de marzo de 1990, 1.

childhood in Buenos Aires,<sup>29</sup> I could trace an earlier appearance of these photographs in a journal, *Buenos Aires-Revista Semanal Ilustrada*, between January and August 1897, which seems to be, at least until now, the earliest publication of this series.<sup>30</sup> This makes it possible to date these photographs not in 1902, as the archive's notations claim, but at some point between 1889, year in which the SFAdEA was funded, and 1896, since the first publication is from January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1897.

In the *Buenos Aires* journal, 18 photos on children's games were printed —among them, «La payana», the same one not available at the AGN and printed in *Caras y Caretas*. It is important to underscore that in *Caras y Caretas* as well as in *Buenos Aires*, pictures were surrounded with texts that provided short narrations around the games, sometimes fictional stories that gave names to the children who appeared in the photos and other times describing the rules or procedures of the games depicted. However, in two issues of the *Buenos Aires* journal the photographs were published as independent illustrations, without any narrative text (a total of 5 pictures). Considering both journals, of the 77 photos that are included in the AGN album, 31 were published.<sup>31</sup> Considering that the 77 include pictures that repeat the same scene or game (for example, three images of a tic-tac-toe scene), it is reasonable to claim that most of these scenes came to be known by a broad public.

What else can be inferred from the peri-textual notations? The titles of the photos are descriptive of the scenes shown; they are written in ink, together with three numbers of the inventory codes (one with four digits, another with five digits that start with a D, and the third with six digits that start with the notation Inv., which is the latest one and is the one used in this article).<sup>32</sup> All inscriptions seem to be from the same

<sup>29</sup> Edgardo Ciafardo, *Los niños en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1890-1910)* (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> The journal *Buenos Aires. Revista Semanal Ilustrada* was edited between 1895 and 1899, and was directed by José María Drago and later by Gabriel Cantilo. According to the obituary of José María Gutiérrez, it was a journal derived from the established Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación*.

<sup>31</sup> The research on this corpus is to be followed on other illustrated journals in which the Society published their pictures, for example a journal from Barcelona, *La Ilustración Artística*.

<sup>32</sup> The notation that seems to be the oldest runs from the numbers 994 to 1085, but skips 21 (from 1060 to 1080). If this notation came from the original album, then this would mean that at least 21 pictures are missing from the AGN album, which is consistent with the finding of printed photos whose original is not in this album. But this cannot be confirmed yet.

moment, with identical calligraphy and ink. In some images, which have a broader frame than average, it is possible to read an inscription of the album: «Children's Games. Buenos Aires Antique». In three pictures there are numbers written in pencil in the upper right margin (15, 17, 19) that refer to the pages of the original album.<sup>33</sup>

For the analysis of the titles, it is revealing to compare the notation that appears at the AGN album and the one printed in the journals. Most of the 45 titles at the AGN repeat those of *Caras y Caretas*, but up to now it is difficult to know which one was the original. A significant change is the picture «Contando cuentos/Telling stories» (Inv. 214905), which shows a mixed group of girls and boys listening to an older girl who seems to be talking; in *Caras y Caretas* this picture was published with the title «Haciendo cuentas/Making calculations» (CyC 199, 1902). In the journal *Buenos Aires*, two images were printed with different titles: an image that shares the same title, «Contando cuentos/Telling stories» (Inv. 214940) but depicts a different scene with only boys (see figure 1), and is included in a short story called «Los raboreros/The truants», and another image titled «Lucha/Fight» (Inv. 214901), that in *Buenos Aires* is titled «Un concurso y un jurado/A contest and a jury». In both cases, the pictures are street scenes of boys and young males in activities that tended to be moralized later, as will be discussed in the third section of this article; the changing titles might have to do with this increased moralization.

<sup>33</sup> The inscriptions are being analyzed by the archivists of the Photographic Department of the AGN. The sign D indicates, in the internal coding, that their cataloguing was done before their arrival at the AGN; the prefix «Inv.» was included by the AGN personnel in the 1960s. The title of the album («Buenos Aires Antiguo - Juegos Infantiles») seems to date from that same moment. The archivists consider it likely that there are no further inscriptions in the back of the pictures, but this is yet unknown as they are glued to the album; the archivists are working on separating some without damaging the originals. Taking into account the history of the collections and cataloguing cycles, they have two hypothesis: first, that the albums were compiled at Casa Witcomb after their donation by the Amateur Society in 1925, given that they share the same aesthetics with all the albums of Casa Witcomb; and second, that the album kept the same order that it had when it arrived to the AGN in the 1940s. That means that the album might have been organized as such around 1925, although the notations seem to be from a later time. At any rate, this is a history that will continue to be written, as historians, archivists, photographers and conservationists are working together to understand more about the collections that constitute the Fond of the Society.



Figure 1. Telling stories. Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, AR\_AGN\_DDF/ Consulta\_INV:214.940.

In the cases of the photographs that were not published, as was already mentioned most of them are part of a sequence of two or three shots that depict a scene with slight variations (generally, a different position of one of the participating children). In these cases, the titles repeat the one that they received in their publication in *Caras y Caretas*.

In other cases, such as «Boxeo/Boxing», «Buen día su señoría/Good morning your highness» o «Barrilete/Kite», none of the images were published, and they seem to be descriptions of the games observed in the pictures. It is still uncertain whether the titles came with the originals or if they were added in the cataloguing done at the General Archive in the 1960s (see note 33).<sup>34</sup>

### **Authorship/s: Amateur photography and the Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados (SFAdA)**

What is known about the photographer or photographers? In *Buenos Aires-Revista Semanal Ilustrada* and in *Caras y Caretas*, most of pictures appeared attributed to Juan M. (Miguel?)<sup>35</sup> Gutiérrez, who was secretary of the SFAdA (figure 2). Juan M. Gutiérrez was member of a Patrician *porteño* (from Buenos Aires) family, but up to now it is not possible to confirm if he was the nephew<sup>36</sup> of José María Gutiérrez (1831-1903), President of the National Board of Education, second-in-line after the Minister of Education. However, as will be seen later, the pictures in the album have different styles and locations, and it is not clear if they were produced by the same author and originally belonged to the same album.

<sup>34</sup> A thread that was followed, but proved unfruitful, was to trace the names of the games to find if they were common at the time in which the pictures were produced. In case that the names were newer than the pictures, this could have given other clues about the moment in which the peri-textual inscriptions were written. The search in Google Ngram Viewer, a software that allows to see a timeline for words that appear in all printed publications that are digitally available, shows that the names of the games in the pictures (tic-tac-toe, hopscotch, *sillita de oro*, *Martín Pescador*) were common in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some books on children's games, such as P. Santos Hernández, S.J., *Juegos de los niños en las escuelas y colegios* (Madrid: Editorial Saturnino Calleja, 1876), include most of the games depicted in the photographs. That is, this thread does not help in determining more precisely if the unpublished photographs received their titles around the 1900s or if they were included by archivists in the 1960s, but at least does not exclude the possibility that they received their titles around the 1900s. These logical inferences are important when the information is scarce.

<sup>35</sup> The only source that identifies Juan M. Gutiérrez as Juan Miguel is Juan Gómez, *La Fotografía en la Argentina. Su Historia y Evolución en el Siglo XIX, 1840-1899* (Temperley: Abadía Ediciones, 1986), 138. In the pictures and notes published in different journals, his middle name appears only with an initial.

<sup>36</sup> In José Ma. Gutiérrez' obituary, two sons of the Board's President are mentioned, Ricardo and José María, and five daughters (Julia, María Elena, Lucía, Ana Rosa and Luisa) («Dr. José María Gutiérrez, Anoche», *La Nación*, Sunday 27 December 1903). It is mentioned in other news pieces that at the burial Juan Miguel Gutiérrez was present, but there is no reference to their relationship. See the special issue of *El Monitor de la Educación Común*, organ of the Board, 15 January 1904 (Año XXIV, Tomo XIX, No. 371) that compiles all the obituaries and notes sent to the family.



Figure 2. Señor Juan M. Gutiérrez. Señor Juan M. Gutiérrez. Picture included in the article «La Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina», *Buenos Aires. Revista semanal ilustrada* III, no. 129 (26 de septiembre de 1897), 6.

At any rate, the knowledge that these photographs were part of the Amateur Society and that at least some—if not all—of them were produced by one of its most important members and a relative of a high educational authority, is a significant piece in the jigsaw that is the reconstruction of the history of this series. It has to be taken into account that photography as an urban practice was growing rapidly in Argentina at that time. In 1893, the first issue of the *Revista Fotográfica Ilustrada del Río de la Plata* appeared, containing not only copious ads about photographic equipment but also several articles for those who wanted to be initiated in its practice, most of them translations from the French.<sup>37</sup> The extent of this expansion of photography

<sup>37</sup> The journal was edited by Enrique Lepage (owner of a photographic atelier and shop) and directed by Francisco Pociello, Chief of Stenographers of the Chamber of Representatives. See Gómez, *La Fotografía en la Argentina*, 127-128.

can be seen in the memories of Vicente Quesada, a well-known Argentinean historian, which were published in 1889. In a short piece called «Mi retrato/ My portrait», he made reference to «the numerous photographic establishments all around the capital city». The author was not celebrating this spread: for him, it was part of a «photographic nervous contagion» that made everyone want to get their portrait or ask for a portrait of other people for their personal albums. He qualified this impulse as «a plague»: «it is necessary to take a portrait of the little kid, poor him! And then the girl, as one cannot make distinctions among the children. As if this was not enough, they take portraits of dogs, and the landowners of their breed horses, [and] the tide goes up and this explains the growing number of photographic houses». Photography was also a «defensive official weapon», as prisoners and thieves also got their portraits, and each commissioner had their album. Quesada ended his essay saying: «This damned photography ... is making us all crazy».<sup>38</sup>

Beyond Quesada's grudge and irony, these narrations, together with others of that time,<sup>39</sup> point that amateur photography needs to be located in the growing interaction between the professionalization and commercialization of photography and the dissemination of photographic practices among the public. It is important to keep in mind that the notion of amateur photography is broad, and in many cases equivocal. Anne-Marie Garat underscores that «amateur photography is a multifaceted world of quite extraordinary diversity, ranging from family photographers to semi-professionals, from casual snappers to keen members of local camera clubs».<sup>40</sup> Amateur photography saw a quick expansion in those years, promoted, among others, by the photographic companies. Books like Albert Londé's *La Photographie Moderne* (1888) were quickly translated into Spanish, and the booklets by Eastman Kodak (1905) contributed to spreading the practice of photography in ample portions of the urban middle classes.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, these texts drew professional photographers

<sup>38</sup> Vicente Quesada, «Mi retrato», in *Memorias de un Viejo* (1889), quoted by Juan Gómez, *La Fotografía en la Argentina*, 145 and 147.

<sup>39</sup> Similar narratives were published in newspapers at that time. See Verónica Tell, *El lado visible. Fotografía y progreso en la Argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (San Martín, UNSAM EDITA, 2017), 209-218.

<sup>40</sup> Anne-Marie Garat, *Found Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> See among others Alberto Londé, *La fotografía moderna. Práctica y aplicaciones* (Madrid: Fuentes y Capdeville, 1889) (Edición facsimilar- Sevilla: Extramuros, 2007), and *The Modern Way in Picture Making. Published as an Aid to the Amateur Photographer* (Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Company, 1905). A study on amateur photography and its links to the dissemination of photographic practices

closer to the amateurs, making the circulation of photographic knowledge more fluid. Another historian of photography, Quentin Bajac, says that:

The generalization of the term ‘amateur’ since 1880 and up until the 1930s should not confuse us, as it encompasses very different realities. Since 1890, Kodak’s advertisement campaigns [*Women Who Use Kodak*, 1891] are targeted to amateurs without any technical knowledge, above all a new feminine and even infantile public, and usually these campaigns reduce photographic practice to simply clicking the shooter. At the same time, the emergence of a new genre of photographic editions—the basic manual—defines a slightly different profile: the bourgeois male, generally cultured, who takes photography as a hobby but is eager to dominate the main technical knowledge and evokes, in several dimensions, the figure of the grand amateur of the first years of the medium, forty years before. This *aficionado* profile is the one that joins the amateur associations. Even though they were still scarce in France in the 1880s, by 1907 there were more than 120 amateur societies.<sup>42</sup>

Historians of photography claim that in Europe there were two different types of institutions around photography: some associations, early established, that focused on research and the technical and scientific applications of the new media (*Société Française de Photographie*, *Royal Society of London*), and other late comers, from the 1880s and 1890s, which considered photography as art and were concerned with the aesthetic developments that it brought (*Photo Club de Paris*, *The Linked Ring*). In the Argentinean case this distinction did not operate, and the Amateur Society was the only photographic institution that aimed at non-professionals.<sup>43</sup> Its profile can be assimilated to what Elizabeth Edwards identifies in England in relation to the amateur societies and clubs whose work, organized through photographic inquiries and studies, contributed to produce the English historical and geographical imagination.<sup>44</sup>

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can be found in Paul Spencer Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete: The Legitimation of Photography as Art in America, 1880-1900* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Quentin Bajac, *La fotografía. La época moderna, 1880-1960* (Barcelona: Blume, 2015), 18-19.

<sup>43</sup> See Tell, «Gentlemen, gauchos y modernización», 15.

<sup>44</sup> Through following the thread of the clubs, their publications, trips, readings, textual productions and photographic practices, Edwards reviews the practices of production, reproduction and

The SFAdA was considered a selective club —in fact, a scholar called them the «*gentlemen* photographers»<sup>45</sup>. It was active between 1889 and 1925, and had its peak around 1910, with 600 members.<sup>46</sup> It was funded by wealthy men, who embraced amateur photography as part of a social and political renewal and participated on the archival impulse of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seeking to produce records for the future and a lasting iconography for the nation. Their pictures had an air of social documentary, recording poverty and different social types, as well as of a pictorialism aligned with other international movements in photography. Overall, they wanted to produce a renewed national imaginary that showed the Argentinean leadership in the Americas, «imitating and assimilating the main Nations of Europe in everything», as they said in their General Assembly in 1899.<sup>47</sup>

The Amateur Society combined vocational activities with commercial ones. They produced and sold thematic albums, of which 46 survived; the one on children's games is number 30 of this collection.<sup>48</sup> Most of its members were statesmen and part of the wealthy families of landowners (*estancieros*); thus, it is not casual that they thought of these records as the production of a visual memory of Argentina, of a national iconography that was technologically modern yet also attentive to its distinctiveness, which they identified with the *gaucho* and the *pampas*. The photographers of the Society did not see themselves as artists or as commercial photographers; they

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exhibition of the images, the lives of those that produced them, the ways in which they circulated, and the structures of feeling or affects that were implied in their «afterlife» of images in books, associations and national iconographies. Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian. Amateur Photography and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> See Tell, *El lado visible*, 139-156. The term is a loan from David Viñas, a literary historian, who used «*gentlemen* writers» to describe the writers of that time, coming from privileged families. See his *Literatura argentina y realidad política*, first published in 1964 and reedited by the Centro Editor de América Latina in 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Abel Alexander and Luis Priamo, «Notas sobre la fotografía porteña del siglo XIX» en *Buenos Aires, Memoria Antigua. Fotografías 1850-1900*, ed. Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA Ediciones, 2018), 9-27.

<sup>47</sup> Gómez, *La Fotografía en la Argentina*, 144.

<sup>48</sup> Marta Mirás, *Imágenes del espacio público. Buenos Aires 1900* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas, 2001). It should be noted that the term album was not necessarily «that of a precise object», that is, «an artifact that contained a limited number of images»; it was used to refer to «a certain way of commercializing groups of photographs» (Aguayo and Padilla Pola, «Fotografía y ciudad», 38). That is, the photographs were sold as groups but not necessarily as a physical album to which they were pinned or glued. This is part of the material history of the collection that needs to be further investigated.

were closer to the spirit of historians or journalists.<sup>49</sup> The more prominent members of the Society portrayed gauchos and rural scenes, in line with the production of an imaginary centered around the ruling of the stockbreeders over other activities and possibilities; but they were also enthusiastic about the samples of urban modernity (see figure 3). Tradition and material progress are two of the main organizers of their photographic series.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 3. Group of employees from the SFAdA. Picture included in the article «El primer acontecimiento artístico de 1904», *La ilustración sudamericana. Revista Ilustrada de las Repúblicas Sud-Americanas* XII, Nos. 265-266 (enero 1904): 21.

<sup>49</sup> Luis Priamo, «La Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados y sus fotografías nacionales». Paper submitted to I Encontro de História da Fotografia Latino-Americana Gilberto Ferrez, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil (1997), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander and Priamo, «Notas sobre la fotografía porteña del siglo XIX», 24. Even if it goes beyond the scope of this work, it should be noted, with Luis Priamo and other researchers, that the work done by the SFAdA was pioneer in enthroning an idyllic image of the gaucho, which would later have a defining enshrinement with Leopoldo Lugones' conferences in 1913 (Lugones was considered the national poet and devoted a series of talks to the poem by José Hernández, *Martín Fierro*, that year). This discursive construction of the gaucho as a national icon can be observed in the photographs that Francisco Ayerza and Leonardo Pereyra, prominent members of the Amateur Society, prepared for an illustrated book on Hernández' poem, which was never printed but whose images are still kept. They show a much more modern image of the gaucho, with phonographs and other mechanical media. See Priamo, «La Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados y sus fotografías nacionales»; Tell, *El lado visible*; Julieta Pestarino, «La imagen fotográfica bajo la mirada antropológica. El caso de la Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina de Aficionados», XI Jornadas de Sociología. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, 2015.

In its by-laws, it was established that if the Society was dissolved all its archives would be donated to museums or public libraries. However, due to motives that are still unclear, when the dissolution took place in 1925 its collections went to Casa Witcomb, a private photographic atelier; it was only in 1939-1940, when this atelier closed, that they entered the National Archives recently created, where to this day 4,600 negatives remain, most of them 18x24 cm glass negatives or 8x16 cm stereoscopic negatives, which would have been the ruled sizes for the members.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that the pictures of children's games belonged to the Amateur Society explains why there is no signature in them. The by-laws excluded professional photographers as members, something that must have been related to the privileged background of its members.<sup>52</sup> They committed themselves to a collective authorship, and they were not allowed to sign their photos or keep their negatives, which had to be given to the Society.<sup>53</sup> The exception are the pictures that were published in newspapers or journals; in the case of *Caras y Caretas*, it is known that the journal asked for a rubric and the name of the author, although it did not always print it.<sup>54</sup>

As has already been mentioned, the Society participated actively in the production of a visual national imaginary. Its members «used to deal with urban subjects through the production of series of photos, instead of one or two shots».<sup>55</sup> This is of particular interest to my analysis: even if it is not aligned with the goal of producing a national iconography that combined rural motifs with urban progress, the album on children's games contributed to portraying urban and social types, as the series on

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<sup>51</sup> Alexander and Priamo, «Notas sobre la fotografía porteña del siglo XIX», 24.

<sup>52</sup> Tell, *El lado visible*, 140 and 152.

<sup>53</sup> In spite of that rule, Priamo and Alexander document that at least in some cases (such as José de Iriondo, from Santa Fe) members kept some negatives in their power. Alexander and Priamo, «Notas sobre la fotografía porteña del siglo XIX», 24.

<sup>54</sup> Tell, *El lado visible*, 228.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander and Priamo, «Notas sobre la fotografía porteña del siglo XIX», 25. The Society organized national contests, which is a way to identify authorship. In the first contest in 1890, members could participate with at least two negatives and with no more than four: the idea is that the photographer should select their records taking into consideration their quality as document and its aesthetic value. But in later years, those who submitted their pictures sent large series of photographs (see Tell, *El lado visible*, 258).

street vendors or public employees. According to Tell, the members of the SFAA «used to elude arid and less attractive subjects such as marginal dwellings or tenements, a decision that corresponds [...] with the interests of dissemination of the images and the social position of the majority of the group».<sup>56</sup>

An article that reviews the activity of the Society in 1897 lists the subjects of the series of some members, with an explicit mention to the album of pictures on children's games. This article attributes the album unequivocally to Juan M. Gutiérrez:

The valuable and notable collection of negatives to whose production have contributed all members, grows day by day with new works, photographs of panoramas, pictures of traditions, historical memoirs, local types, maritime views, and a variety as curious as artistic of snapshots from all cities and regions of the Republic [...], because they have gone in all directions with their cameras and their artistic intuitions such as the Ayerzas, Montes, Nunes, Sardá and Gutiérrez. The travel snapshots of Dr. José A. Ayerza, **the collection of children's games of Mr. Gutiérrez**, the rural scenes of Dr. Francisco Ayerza, [...] all these pictures of utmost beauty, some of which have adorned the pages of this journal, constitute an artistic treasure on their own, and highlight the knowledge, aptitudes, passion and exquisite taste of these distinguished devotees to art, to whose work and perseverance owes the Amateur Society of Argentina its flourishing state, and photographic art its improvements and advancements.<sup>57</sup>

Scholars who have studied the initiatives of the SFAdA, such as Luis Priamo and Verónica Tell, remark that the Society's approach shifted from a documentary interest to pictorialism; the pictures that won awards at their contests, mostly of children or elders, shared a romantic undertone and imitated the pictorial composition prevalent at that

<sup>56</sup> Tell, *El lado visible*, 144. However, it should be noted that at that time, illustrated journals such as *Caras y Caretas* started to be published, and they included pictures of demonstrations or social violence. Their photographs constitute the most important photographic collection for the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina. Alexander and Priamo, «Notas sobre la fotografía porteña del siglo XIX», 21, 25.

<sup>57</sup> Daguerre (pseudonym), «La Sociedad Fotográfica Argentina», *Buenos Aires. Revista semanal ilustrada*, Año III, no. 129 (26 September 1897): 1-2, quote in p. 1; bold added by the author of this article.

time.<sup>58</sup> Yet, in comparison with other photographers of the Society that documented landscapes or traditional types, Juan M. Gutiérrez's choice of depicting children's games in collective scenes, most of them urban, is aligned with modern theories of childhood and human nature, and not with the goal of documenting or inventing national traditions. This will be analyzed in the next section.

### ANALYZING THE SERIES: INDEXICAL TRACES OF CHILDREN'S LIVES IN BUENOS AIRES, CA. 1890-1900

What can be seen in relation to the traits and content of the pictures themselves? It is clear that photographs open up several lines of exploration, of which I can only present some in the pages that follow. I will look at them as a series, that is, as a group of photos, and in relation to their inscription within the broader project of creating a modern national iconography developed by the Amateur Society.

As historical documents of children's lives in Buenos Aires in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these pictures are outstanding because of their photographic quality, highly unusual for educational records. They are takes that seek to reflect, with a variable degree of achievement, scenes of the daily lives of children in a casual and relaxed way, quite different from the solemn tone of school pictures but also from the pictures taken in studios and ateliers, which privilege middle shots with stand-up posing and static representations of childhood.<sup>59</sup> In this direction, this series gets closer to photojournalism in its quest to deploy collective scenes.<sup>60</sup> In the pictures, it is evident that there is a staging of the scene by the photographer, for example in the repeated takes of a game in the same scenario and with the same group of children; yet this staging does not invalidate them as sources but invites to explore into how the iconography on childhood is being produced.

<sup>58</sup> This can be seen in the photos that won the 1904 award. «El primer acontecimiento artístico de 1904», *La ilustración sudamericana*. *Revista Ilustrada de las Repúblicas Sud-Americanas*. Año XII, nos. 265-266 (January 1904): 7-8.

<sup>59</sup> See the analysis of Brazilian photos of children of these same years in Natalia Brizuela, *Fotografía e Império. Paisagens para um Brasil moderno* (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012), 125-126.

<sup>60</sup> Gisèle Freund, *La fotografía como documento social* (México DF: Gustavo Gilli Editores, 1981), 95.

This intention of showing childhood scenes with spontaneity and realism —understood as dated aesthetics and not as unmediated representations of reality— is a first remarkable trait of this series. The second quality that turns these pictures into significant historical documents is their condition of a consistent group or album, which enables a serial analysis connecting the scenes depicted, the actors, and the choice of locations. In my approach, I tried to identify some indicators present in the images, in a similar way to what Braster and Pozo Andrés did in their study of photographs in *The New Era* between 1920 and 1939.<sup>61</sup> Among these indicators, I looked at the spaces shown in the pictures, and the gender and age of the children that were portrayed.

In relation to the spaces, in the album there is a privileging of indoor spaces (49 photos) over outdoor scenes (28). These interior spaces are stable (one or maybe two *patios* or yards with their columns, doors and windows which seem to belong to a school); another common background is a set of windows, plants and glass decorations of an entrance doorway that might or might not belong to the same yard. In contrast, the outdoor spaces are varied: there are cobblestone streets, nice gardens or backyards, humble dwellings, a public park and a wasteland or construction site (as can be observed in figure 1). They show the presence of an urban space where luxury houses coexisted with vacant lots or waste grounds, symptoms of an urban grid that was being redefined.<sup>62</sup> Seen together, the images of childhood are more «urban» than «natural»; there is plenty of streets and constructions, and even though girls in particular are depicted surrounded by plants and flowers, and occasionally little boys appear with plants, these symbols of nature have a minor presence compared to the one they had in the romantic iconography of childhood.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Braster y Pozo Andrés, «La Escuela Nueva en Imágenes».

<sup>62</sup> Adrián Gorelik, «Buenos Aires, 1850-1900: una ciudad en tránsito», in *Buenos Aires, Memoria Antigua. Fotografías 1850-1900*, ed. Luis Priamo (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA Ediciones, 2018), 29-67.

<sup>63</sup> Anita Schorsch, *Images of Childhood. An Illustrated Social History* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979), 94. See also Sandra Szir, *Infancia y cultura visual. Los periódicos ilustrados para niños (1880-1910)* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila editores, 2007).

Significantly, in these pictures eight Afro-Argentinean children can be seen, a remarkable proportion if one considers the declining demographic presence of this group in the city of Buenos Aires.<sup>64</sup> 20 photos show children who are ostensibly poor, dressed in rags or barefoot; another group of 20 depict children of mixed social backgrounds, in which costly hats can be observed along with humble dresses. In relation to gender, 35 pictures portray boys exclusively, 28 only girls, and 14 gender-mixed groups.

These pictures distance themselves from the 19<sup>th</sup> century family portraits that compose scenes where adults and children shared activities like playing, talking, or reading books.<sup>65</sup> In the album, only five pictures depict adults, generally on the borders of the scene or manipulating animals, as in the one that shows children observing a scene of cockfighting. What the photos seem to portray, as much as create, is a world of children where adults are on the side. This is consistent with what Burke and Grosvenor, and Braster and Pozo Andrés<sup>66</sup> found on the photographs of the New School movement, but it should be noted that the pictures of the Amateur Society were taken at least 20 years earlier. Regarding the age of children, in 53 pictures children play in mixed-age groups, most notably in the ones taken outdoors, which suggest a public space where children with different ages and social backgrounds shared games and social activities, and where the children of privileged classes were not confined to their homes. This is consistent with other studies; for example, Edgardo Ciafardo reconstructs some childhood scenes based on articles such as the ones published in the *Buenos Aires* journal and autobiographies from well-known writers:

To gain or defend a position among their classmates, children needed to fight with their fists, or accept to be kicked at during the school breaks. If a discussion burst between two classmates, the usual follow up was to wait until the end of the school day and

<sup>64</sup> Mónica Quijada, Carmen Bernand and Arnd Schneider (eds.), *Homogeneidad y Nación con un estudio de caso: Argentina, siglos XIX y XX* (Madrid: CSIC, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Schorsch, *Images of Childhood. An Illustrated Social History*, 87.

<sup>66</sup> Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, «The Progressive Image in the History of Education: Stories of Two Schools», *Visual Studies* 22, no. 2 (2007): 159-163; Braster and Pozo Andrés, «La Escuela Nueva en Imágenes».

go somewhere off the gaze of teachers and policemen (a construction site seemed to be the ideal place) to settle their differences. For this, it was needed that all the classmates were present as witnesses and jury. The rules said that the duels «began with the classic formula of wetting the other's ear or stepping the line» and ended always «at the first blood, that is, when one of the contenders bled his nose».<sup>67</sup>

In the photos of the album of the SFAdA, the camera is placed at the same level than the children; most of the shots use a wide angle to show the scene of the game within a broader frame or context. There are no high-angle shots or close-ups; a few outdoor scenes are taken as panoramas and are of a worse quality, raising doubts about their belonging to the same series. In general, children are portrayed with different gestures, sometimes in movement and sometimes seated or quiet. The pictures create «little narratives»<sup>68</sup> that connect people and places. Also visible is what Alois Riegl called «age-value», the feeling that one is observing a record that will be passed on to future generations, a feeling that has a visual impact and appeals to emotions.<sup>69</sup> This «transpires» into the photograph, and it is not surprising that in a high portion of these scenes (24) there are children observing other kids playing (and being photographed) without being involved in the action (figure 4).

<sup>67</sup> Edgardo Ciafardo, *Los niños en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, 26. For these descriptions, Ciafardo followed the notes by Enrique Herrero published in the journal *Buenos Aires* along with the photographs of this album (See Enrique Herrero, «Juegos Infantiles», *Buenos Aires. Revista Semanal Ilustrada* III, no. 99 (28-2-1897): 14-15).

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, «Out and About: Photography, Topography, and Historical Imagination», 189.

<sup>69</sup> Edwards, «Out and About: Photography, Topography, and Historical Imagination», 185.



Figure 4. Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, AR\_AGN\_DDF/Consulta\_INV:214.936.

Objects, and the lack of, are another interesting thread to look at this series of pictures. In the play scene depicted in figure 4, it is worth observing that, even though rings were used since medieval times, there were not specially destined to children, which was also the case with marbles or wooden horses.<sup>70</sup> It is only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that rings started to be considered as toys for children, along with an increased differentiation of spaces and rules for children's games. This growing specification of play can be seen in this series of images. In terms of the games portrayed in these pictures, there are two images that include a kite; in one case there is a cockfighting observed by girls and boys, this being the only photo in which animals are present; two pictures portray a group of boys playing hopscotch in what appear to be two different schoolyards; two photos

<sup>70</sup> Schorsch, *Images of Childhood. An Illustrated Social History*, 83.

show groups of children (one of them of mixed genres) playing *Uñate*; three show groups of children play *Don Juan de las Casas*; another three depict girls playing *Martín Pescador*; two photos show boys playing tic-tac-toe. In some cases, games require an intense physical activity that does not involve objects (for example, hand-walking in a public park).

Several traces of children's material culture are visible: there is a scarce presence of toys or industrial goods for play, which generally came from Europe and were a class privilege.<sup>71</sup> Only one of the 77 photographs of the album shows a mixed-gender group with girls playing with dolls and a dollhouse, and a boy who plays with a construction set, in what appears to be the patio of a house (figure 5). Interestingly, the title of the image refers only to the dolls and not to the construction toy.



Figure 5. Playing with dolls, Sept. 1902. Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, AR\_AGN\_DDF/ Consulta \_INV:214.896.

<sup>71</sup> Ciafardo, *Los niños en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*.

Following this same thread of the material culture of childhood, it can be seen that even children with what seem to be elegant and expensive dresses play with improvised toys of wood or cardboard, or, as in the case of the seesaw, in an artifact made with planks occasionally set (figure 6). 11 photos, a small portion of the album, show marbles, cords or rings. The attire is also revealing: the boys don the usual dress of that time, particularly the sailor suit of the boy who plays in figure 6 and that is also visible in the boys depicted in figure 7.<sup>72</sup>



Figure 6. Seesaw, Sept 1902. Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, AR\_AGN\_DDF/ Consulta \_INV:214.928.

<sup>72</sup> Clare Rose, *Children's Clothes* (London: B.T. Batsford Limited, 1989).

What about schooling? Besides the locations, which in several photos seem to refer to a school space (for example, in the presence of a female adult figure or a yard that seems to connect to rooms that resemble classrooms), there are other traces of the presence of schooling in children's lives, which in the city of Buenos Aires was close to 60% of the population age group at that time.<sup>73</sup> In eight photos, school notebooks, books, and briefcases can be seen, usually set aside while children are playing (figure 7).



Figure 7. Tic-tac-Toe. Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, AR\_AGN\_DDF/ Consulta \_INV:214.932.

<sup>73</sup> According to the 1895 National Census, the percentage of children who went to schools in the city of Buenos Aires was 57,7%, clearly above the national average of 29,6% (Susana Di Pietro y Ariel Tófaló (coord.), *La situación educativa a través de los Censos Nacionales de Población* (Buenos Aires: Dirección General de Evaluación de la Calidad Educativa, 2013, 15).

It is remarkable that the presence of literacy and literate culture is minimal: besides these eight photos that show school briefcases with books, there is only one image (figure 1) that shows a collective scene with a noteworthy presence of books in an outdoor space, a rare combination at any rate. A picture showing a mixed group that was titled «Contando cuentos/Telling stories» (as said before, published in *Caras y Caretas* with a different caption, «Making calculations») does not show any book. In that direction, it could be said that this series of images distances itself from the presentation of the reading child as a childhood ideal,<sup>74</sup> and stress its emphasis on other traits of children's practices that point to collective games, the mingling of bodies, and playing with different roles.

Which iconography of childhood was this series of pictures seeking to produce? Its images seem to be more modern than other conceptions of their time.<sup>75</sup> On the one hand, it can be noted that there is still operating a distinction of the activities according to sex, and most of them portray single-sex groups. But along the numerous pictures that show physical prowess and fight among boys, other scenes are visible, as the ones of boys playing with rings in figure 4 or some others where small children are dancing, which would not be in the liking of those who were concerned with the effeminacy of boys. Few years after the publication of these photos, a distinguished pedagogue from Argentina, Rodolfo Senet, said: «nothing is sadder than watching the boys playing with rings or jumping the chords as girls [...], we called them fairies [*mariquitas*] in my childhood times».<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, the pictures depict scenes that would later become dangerous or will be prohibited for children: cockfighting, smoking (figure 1), or betting. In the texts that surround the photos published

<sup>74</sup> See Beatriz Alcubierre Moya, *Ciudadanos del futuro. Una historia de las publicaciones para niños en el siglo XIX mexicano* (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México/Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Compare the images with, for example, what is said in the Mexican journal *La edad feliz* in 1873: «The games and exercises that are allowed for children should be adequate for their age and sex. It should be sought that men from early on are strong, agile and lively, vigorously fighting any inclination towards effeminacy -however small. The girls, on the contrary, should be driven towards modesty, decorum, and tenderness» (quoted by Alcubierre Moya, *Ciudadanos del futuro*, 192).

<sup>76</sup> Rodolfo Senet, «El niño de esta época» (1906), quoted in Ciafardo, *Los niños en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, 25.

in *Caras y Caretas*, there are mentions to «violent games» that are considered positively as they allow boys to develop physical dexterity and strength.<sup>77</sup> There are other positive references to games that involve betting and money, that gather «true clouds of young boys» who, when grown up, will continue this in «their fondness for horse racing».<sup>78</sup> Girls are also portrayed playing games where they «run and shout», which is good for their physical education even if it is not «comfortable for their parents».<sup>79</sup> There is an evident distance in this iconography from the crusade against children's games carried by Puritan groups in those same years in countries like England and the United States.<sup>80</sup>

As a sum-up, it can be said that the Amateur Society album puts together an iconography of childhood that depicts children playing with easiness and spontaneity in games not yet subjected to the commercialization and commodification of play through the toy industry, but already indicative of a differentiation and specification of children's practices and spaces in which play has a defining role. In that direction, it makes visible the reconsideration of play not as a waste of time or as morally dangerous but, as historian Stephen Kline has remarked, as a formative activity, as the «work of childhood —the moral equivalent of labour» for the adults.<sup>81</sup> Also, the introduction of scenes that take place within the schools seem to confirm that play has a pedagogical value and that is not antithetical to schooling. The images translate these conceptions in the children's faces that show gestures of concentration, the bodies with their muscles ready to act, and the communion or conjunction of interests among children that do not seem to need adult guidance. These images seem to say that play is what is typical or proper to childhood and that it should be taken seriously, just as children are doing.

<sup>77</sup> Figarillo, «La payana-El rescate-Las plumas», *Caras y Caretas* V, no. 203 (23 August 1902): 62.

<sup>78</sup> Figarillo, «Hoyo y Quema- Ta-te-ti – La rayuela», *Caras y Caretas* V, no. 194 (21 June 1902): 60.

<sup>79</sup> Figarillo, «Sir Roger-Las esquinitas-Abuelita, ¿qué horas son?», *Caras y Caretas* V, no. 190 (24 May 1902): 67.

<sup>80</sup> Schorsch, *Images of Childhood. An Illustrated Social History*, 77.

<sup>81</sup> «Street children were ushered into the playground to have a taste of organized collective activity. Structured game play and organized sport were also highly recommended as ways of preparing children for a competitive society and of creating a location for class mingling and negotiation. Games for the young in which children pretended to be animals were recommended as providing models of appropriate childlike behavior to the very unchildlike street children of the working class», in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 95-109; quote in p. 100.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE GIRLS THAT LOOK AT US

There is a distinctive trait of this series that is also very interesting: these pictures of girls and boys do not depict a particularly happy or funny childhood. There are not many smiles or free movements, except in a few sequences. In the history of media, the emergence of the image of a funny childhood occurred a little later, in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>82</sup> But the absence of smiling faces speaks of a certain rigidity of the children's bodies that, very likely, is not so much related to some sort of suffering but to the burden of the presence of the camera and the photographer. Even if placed at the children's level, it is feasible to speculate, considering the social history of photography and of the photographer/s involved in this shooting, that the scene could not avoid the generational, class, and technologies inequalities that the presence of the camera and the cameramen installed.

It is in this juncture that the notion of photography as a trace of an encounter acquires more relevance. The image is not only the effect of what the photographer wanted to do: in the sullen gestures and in the fixity of bodies one might find traces of boredom or rejection of a particular choreography or staging that had to be rehearsed several times—as can be seen in the sequence of shots of the same scenes—, or the resistance or discomfort or even submission towards the orders of what can reasonably be presumed was a young and wealthy photographer. Also, these gestures could also be the effects that cameras are starting to have, turning subjects into objects invested with a certain imposture when they become interchangeable visual signs.<sup>83</sup>

Among the pictures of this series, there is one image in which the crossing of gazes between the photographer and the children is very visible (figures 8 y 9). This scene invites, more clearly than others, to imagine the moment in which the photographs were taken.

<sup>82</sup> See Sarah Wolfenstein, «Fun Morality: An Analysis of Recent American Child-Training Literature», in *Childhood in contemporary cultures*, eds. Margaret Mead and Sarah Wolfenstein (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 179-203.

<sup>83</sup> Barthes said: «The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other: In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares)» (Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida. Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 14).



Figures 8 and 9 (detail). Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, AR\_AGN\_DDF/ Consulta \_INV:214.908.

The girls' gaze makes room for connecting, even if fleetingly, to the wound of time mentioned by Arlette Farge.<sup>84</sup> How might have felt these girls in that instant? How were their lives intersected by this moment of being photographed? These are questions for which we have no answers, but they help to underscore the importance of rescuing some pieces from the archive where they are buried in order to attempt to singularize them, trying to understand the experiences, artifacts and bodies that met at the moment in which they were produced, and trying to look at them within and as part of a history of gazes, as Barthes called for. This rescue goes against the des-identification promoted by several visual archives (most notably, digital image banks), where photos are confined to be mere examples of stereotypes or predefined categories. On the contrary, historians should seek, in their work with photographic documents, to connect with what photography offers as an encounter with alterity, with past lives that we don't fully understand, but that show that the past contained different futures. In the case of this series, it is evident that there were other possibilities for children, and particularly for girls, to look back at the photographers, but also other futures for toys as (non) commodities, for different boundaries between authorized and prohibited games or between femininity and masculinity, for the use of money or violence in games, and for mingling and cohabitation in the public space.

I would like to make a second and final point about the crossing gazes. The gazes of these girls intersect not only with that of the photographer, which might or might not have been Juan M. Gutiérrez, but also with ours, the researchers, and this connects to the ethical demand that is involved in working with these images. In digital times, where images circulate in voracious and amnesic ways, I find it important that historians rise up against the gigantic processes of serialization and des-identification of photographs, insisting on the singularity of the encounter with each photo, singular because of the photographic object but also because of the moment in which it intersects with the present of the one who looks at it.

This ethical demand should make us pay attention to these gazes and to what they say about the lives of these children. Commenting on Benjamin, Agamben says:

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<sup>84</sup> Farge, «Le temps logé en la photographie. À partir de Barthes et Kracauer».

Even if the person photographed is completely forgotten today, even if his or her name has been erased forever from human memory—or, indeed, precisely because of this—that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten.<sup>85</sup>

Even if the name of these girls is almost impossible to find, in this close work with pictures one should let oneself be touched by their gazes, listen to them with another apparatus (as Szendy said, with different short knocks with the fingertips or stethoscopes), so that they say something of what could have been their human experience, theirs but also that of so many others who should not be forgotten. Benjamin said that learning was a cavalry attack against the tempest that blows from the land of oblivion, and learning means, for me, getting close to that which we study, giving oneself time to get acquainted with this or that record of the past. Far from being a play of erudition, seeking for relevant details shows the importance that historians of education find the time and the space to encounter other histories and experiences, to study past records with care and depth, in order to enable different politics of the archive and of memory in education.

### Note on the author

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<sup>85</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*. Translated by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 25.

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