

## Call for papers

### **The question of the child in Merleau-Ponty: reading and developments**

The psychological and pedagogical reflections on childhood in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty have received little recognition and appreciation in the literature, although they offer a variety of possible insights and openings. These studies are mainly collected from courses held at the Collège de France between 1949 and 1952; they place the French philosopher in dialogue with the scientific context of the time. Following the thought of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jacques Lacan, among others, Merleau-Ponty analyses childhood development through two fundamental macro-themes: the child's relationship with the world in the early stages of life and the acquisition of language.

The analysis of the first theme highlights the parallel development of the child's perception of the self and the world. The concept is intertwined with the ontological approach that the philosopher will adopt more fully in his later studies, deepening the thoughts already developed for the drafting of *The phenomenology of perception*. In fact, the lectures on the psychology and pedagogy of the child anticipate the reflections of the *Courses on nature* and on what will be called *The visible and the invisible*. These courses analyse issues such as the temporality of relations between subjects, the emergence of subjective identity, the active/passive structure of intentionality in the development of subjectivity, the role and modes of language learning, primordial indivisibility and transitivity, tracing the shape of the relational structure, corporeal and plural, in which different subjectivities are immersed.

Drawing on the work of Henri Wallon, Jean Piaget, and Paul Schilder, Merleau-Ponty revisits the theme of the mirror image of the other by analysing the establishment of interiority and exteriority in child development through the centrality of the notion of the body schema. The child's perception of the other is not given in the form of a mere mirror image, but takes shape in the relationship of affective, introjective and projective exchanges derived from the experience of self and other, expressed in a continuous ontological structuring. Central to these reflections is the interpretation of husserlian *Lebenswelt* in an ontological sense, through which Merleau-Ponty analyses the historical and communitarian dimensions of individual and intersubjective development, referring to an original intercorporeity that is not destined to be overcome with maturity, but defines the inherent plurality of human subjectivity.

This approach is particularly evident in the second macro-theme: the study of children's language acquisition. Language learning is understood as a means of inter-subject relations and is analysed in its perceptual and expressive aspects, in its connection with the body schema: through the broader filter of the acquisition of behaviours and gestures, and in the form of an "I can" in action. The notion of expression is central to this analysis. Language learning is defined not as a mere reproductive act, but as a creative act through which the subject expresses itself ontologically. It is also understood as an ever-increasing cohesion with the environment and at the same time as an ever-increasing subjective differentiation from an original plurality. This qualitative transformation aligns with Merleau-Ponty's later reflections on artistic creation. The process of language acquisition enables the child to discern and elucidate the unseen and the new, insofar as they transcend the existing reality. The coexistence of an original and primordial environment, in which everyone is both subject and object of history, makes language both an element of communication and an element of differentiation of the subject in relation to a primordial ontological dimension.

This ongoing dialogue with the human sciences leads the philosopher to evaluate the phenomenological conception of embodied subjectivity through the concrete investigations of the other disciplines. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty uses a philosophical and phenomenological approach in his psychological, pedagogical,

and anthropological research, constantly working on the foundations. By applying phenomenology to the study of the child, and thus starting from the questions opened up by the analysis of perception and its facets, the philosopher frees himself from the naive Eurocentrism present in anthropology and pedagogy, which sees the child's development as a process of progressive acquisition of a valid rationality in itself. Human ontology is thus defined as a dialectical process.

This Call for Papers invites contributions in Italian and English on a wide range of topics related to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought on the child, opening up the philosopher's work also in an interdisciplinary sense, conducted in the light of the present. Papers dealing with the following topics are particularly welcome:

- Imitation in children's behavioural development and learning.
- The relationship between child expression and language and between child expression and drawing.
- Imagery and imagination in relation to the child.
- Temporality and institution in the construction of subjective identity and relation to the other.
- Intercorporeity and intentionality in the development of subjectivity.
- Primordial indivisibility and transitivity.
- Historical and communal dimensions of individual and intersubjective development.
- Readings on Merleau-Ponty's contribution to psychoanalysis and pedagogy.
- Readings on the problem of the universal validity of rationality from Merleau-Ponty's reflections on child development.
- Readings on the problem of gender identity from Merleau-Ponty's reflections on child development.
- Readings of wartime childhood trauma from Merleau-Ponty's reflections.

The volume will be part of the *mappæmundi* series published by Ventura Edizioni, with a special contribution by Talia Welsh (University of Alberta, Canada) and edited by Stella Canonico (University of Ferrara, Italy; PUCPR, Brazil). Papers should be no longer than 40,000 characters and must be sent to [canonico.stella@gmail.com](mailto:canonico.stella@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions is **April 28, 2025**.

For the editorial standards, please visit the [mappæmundi websites](#) or the link below:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mvQdNo5QtWDPUGcxaekxLkYBUqO6DkD/view>

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