

## IV. РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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**WELSH TALIA. “THE CHILD AS NATURAL PHENOMENOLOGIST: PRIMAL AND PRIMARY EXPERIENCE IN MERLEAU-PONTY’S PSYCHOLOGY”**  
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS: NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013, 194 P.  
ISBN: 978-0-8101-2880-4

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Этот обзор посвящен одной из интригующих тем в психологической литературе XX века — первичному феноменологическому миру ребенка. Автор, американский философ Талия Уэлш, обращается к мысли Мерло-Понти, бес сомнений, сложной и продуктивной, основанной на Абстрактном: феноменологической и постмодернистской традициях. Ключевая черта этой мысли состоит в разработке экологической, экзистенциальной структуры опыта ребенка: в его *бытии-в-мире* и *бытии-с-другими*. Кроме того, Мерло-Понти преодолевает гуссерлевский запрет в отношении естественных наук, обращаясь к психологическим, психоаналитическим и эмпирическим данным. Уэлш поясняет один из противоречивых тезисов Французского философа о синкретической социальности способа-быть ребенка. Согласно Мерло-Понти, вначале нет ни отдельного сознания себя, ни сознания других в силу более фундаментального априори всякого действующего интерсубъективного существа, анонимного и асубъективного, но социального. Уэлш демонстрирует актуальность идей Мерло-Понти, обращаясь к современным исследованиям опыта других у ребенка в междисциплинарной сфере (Шон Галлахер, А. Мельтцхофф, Б. Ставарска, и другие). Важнейшая задача этой книги — обновить наш взгляд на природу субъективности. В ситуации первичного опыта мира и других, до всякой теоретической установки, провоцирующей нас генерализовывать и универсализировать наше опытное содержание, мы уже понимаем его и их в феноменологической, экзистенциальной установке путем действия в нашем первичном окружении и существуя по направлению, с другими. Несколько психологических примеров подтверждают эту идею. Уэлш отмечает связь идей Мерло-Понти

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с идеями Маркса и Фрейда, разоблачающих идею абсолютной истины в пользу герменевтического понимания фактичности.

*Ключевые слова:* синкретическая социальность, интерсубъективность, самость, первичный опыт, гештальт, психология, междисциплинарный.

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This review is devoted to one of intriguing topics in psychological literature of 20<sup>th</sup> century — primary phenomenological world of a child. The author, American philosopher Talia Welsh, addresses to Merleau-Ponty's thought, which is indubitable a challenging and fruitful in this sphere, grounded on Abstract: phenomenological and postmodern traditions. The essential feature of his thought consist in elaboration of ecological, existential structure of child's experience: in his *being-in-the-world* and his *being-with-others*. Besides, Merleau-Ponty surmounts husserlian taboo in the respect of natural sciences, appealing to a number of psychological, psychoanalytical, empirical data. Welsh elucidates one of the controversial thesis of French philosopher about syncretic sociability of child's way of being. According to Merleau-Ponty, at first there is no discrete sense of the self and sense of others, due to more fundamental apriori of any interactive, intersubjective being, which is anonymous and asubjective, but social life. Welsh demonstrates actuality of Merleau-Ponty's ideas, addressing to contemporary research of child's experience of the others in interdisciplinary sphere (Sh. Gallagher, A. Meltzoff, B. Stawarska etc.) The significant idea of this book is to refresh our look on the nature of subjectivity. In situation of primary experience of the world and others, before any theoretical stance, which provokes us to generalize and to universalize our experiential content, we already understand it, them in phenomenological, existential stance, by acting in our primary environment and existing toward to, with others. Several psychological examples confirm this idea. Welsh makes a point of connection Merleau-Ponty's ideas with ones of Marx and Freud, who unmask the idea of absolute truth in a favor of hermeneutical understanding of factual life.

*Key words:* syncretic sociability, intersubjectivity, self, primary experience, gestalt, psychology, interdisciplinary.

This book is an informative, valuable and thought-provoking contribution to the Merleau-Ponty's interdisciplinary work on child psychology. Scholarly and comprehensive, it acknowledges the difficulty of accessing the world of the child but encourages us to interact with the challenges of this field and to resist objectifying the childhood experience.

As Talia Welsh points out in the *Preface*, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological and psychological achievements are difficult to summarize given that he stands at the intersection of two traditions: phenomenology and postmodernism. One can portray Merleau-Ponty as the inheritor of Edmund Husserl's legacy. If we focus on his magnum opus, the "Phenomenology of Perception" (1945), we can distinguish an unique and fruitful research into the nature of unreflective perceptual experience, precisely in the manner of its appearing. Another branch of interpretation views Merleau-Ponty as the

forefather of postmodernism, elucidating his posthumous and unfinished masterpiece “The Visible and the Invisible” (published in 1964), at the center. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh, his disintegration of the limits between mind and body, as well as between embodied agents and world-horizon, clearly places him beyond the specifics of classical Husserlian phenomenology.

In the first chapter, *Early Work in Child Psychology*, we find that the child’s behaviour indicates a structured, meaningful experience as our primary and primal connection to the world and others. Although Merleau-Ponty makes significant modifications upon this initial rough outline of the child’s existence, his subsequent research remains largely sympathetic to the initial forays into the philosophy (Hegel, Bergson) and psychology of early life (Wolfgang Köhler, Max Wertheimer, Adhémar Gelb, Kurt Goldstein).

Chapter 2, *Phenomenology, Gestalt Theory, and Psychonanlysis*, discusses the relationship between philosophy and psychology in the Sorbonne Lectures. Welsh insists that Merleau-Ponty argues for the relevance of phenomenological insights to experimental praxis and also the relevance of psychological and anthropological studies for a phenomenology of lived experience. In doing so, the french philosopher does not see in principle why phenomenology and psychology could not be parallel in all respects even if much of psychology is dominated by an unreflective scientism.

In the chapter 3, *Syncretic Sociability and the Birth of the Self*, the author calls attention to Merleau-Ponty’s thesis that our earliest life is social and responsive, but not subjective. Instead of viewing this as an evidence of a proto-self and other-awareness, Merleau-Ponty elucidates the concept of a syncretic, transitive experience. Our early life is defined by a continuum with life rather than by an innate sense of selfhood and otherness. Syncretic sociability is seen as a phase where the infant, due to an inability to organize her perceptual and tactile world, confuses herself with others. She has no subjectivity and hence no intersubjectivity. It’s important to emphasize here that, according to Merleau-Ponty, this anonymous, asubjective life is social in that it is directed toward others. In other words, human intersubjectivity does not rely upon discrete subjectivities.

Chapter 4, *Contemporary Research in Psychology and Phenomenology*, asks if it is necessary to criticise Merleau-Ponty’s conclusions about our early experience given contemporary research in neonatal imitation (Andrew Meltzoff, M. K. Moore), theory of mind (Alison Gopnik, Susan Jones, Olga Maratos), interaction theory (Shaun Gallagher) and dialogical phenomenology (Beata Stawarska). In light of what is at stake in contemporary debates in early infant experience, Welsh asserts that Merleau-Ponty would have certainly had to revise his statements about the life of the infant. He would have likely taken up a similiary path to Stawarska and Gallagher in searching for a truly interdisciplinary approach to intersubjectivity.

Chapter 5, *Exploration and Learning*, underscores two examples of the child’s perception and understanding of the world: drawing and explanations of magic tricks. Following these examples, we can see that children are naturally engaged with experience and will provide childlike explanations for surprising phenomena if they are allowed to express themselves

freely. Merleau-Ponty contradicts Jean Piaget's suggestion that children are natural metaphysicians by portraying children more as natural phenomenologists. Children explore the life-world rather than analyze the world. The child's reality has a solidity that while not static, can appear to be rigid to adults who are indoctrinated in certain philosophical and scientific generalizations.

Chapter 6, *Culture, Development, and Gender*, focuses on how Merleau-Ponty incorporates the influence of sociocultural norms and the path of physical development in his theory. Strongly influenced by existentialist, Marxist, and Freudian theory, Merleau-Ponty agrees not only that we are culturally determined to privilege certain values over others, but also that our very methods of grasping the truth are influenced by our factual situation.

Finally, for reasons of space, it is not possible here to emphasize a critical examination of Welsh's main phenomenological theses about Merleau-Ponty's project. Nevertheless, suffice it to say that this present volume deserves to be welcomed and studied carefully by students and scholars in embodiment theory, Gestalt psychology, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and by anyone interested in the philosophical relevance of early childhood for the constitution of an individual's subjectivity.

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