

“ART, POLITICS, AND IMAGINATION”

48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MERLEAU-PONTY CIRCLE

Oct 24th - Oct 26th 2024 | Villanova University, Philadelphia PA, United States
| In-person with virtual streaming

“Visual culture, music, art, and fiction shape the popular imagination in profound ways, outpacing changes in policy and law”

- Angela Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now!*

Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne—through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state.

- Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

As early as in *Phenomenology of Perception*, art (painting, literature, and music) plays a central role in Merleau-Ponty’s accounts of style, expression, truth, and being. As the epigraph above highlights, in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty recognizes art as a parallel endeavor to philosophical thinking; both strive to take notice of the nascent sense of a world that is “always ‘already there,’” prior to reflection (lxx). In his final essay, “Eye and Mind,” painting and the plastic arts acquire ontological priority for revealing the intertwining of sensing and sensed, perceiver and perceived. Art, then, not only epitomizes the paradoxical struggle of creative expression. Art and phenomenology share the painstaking task of interrogating the mystery of the world and of reason, an act that requires, first, an infinite investigation of their own methods and guiding assumptions and, second, learning to see the world anew with each reprisal. Although Merleau-Ponty does not make explicit the political power of art thus conceived, as the embodying of a different philosophy that engages in infinite interrogation, art has the potential of denaturalizing what otherwise may appear and be felt as necessary ontological structures - including racial capitalism and heteronormative coloniality. It is this power of imaginative variation, i.e., of imagining how things could be otherwise, that Husserl attributed to art, and that Black feminist thinkers like Angela Davis today appeal to for abolitionists projects. This year’s meeting of the IMPC brings together these rich and varied strands of inquiry to think with, against, and beyond Merleau-Ponty’s own contributions on artistic expression, politics, and being, seeking to make explicit the political dimensions of art. Can we find resources in Merleau-Ponty’s thought about the power of art as we collectively work to imagine different futures beyond the neo-liberal, carceral state?

This year's meeting of IMPC will take place in Philadelphia, United States, on the unceded ancestral land of the Lenape people, who lived in this area for more than 6,000 years prior to European colonization. The conference is being co-directed by Martina Ferrari (Villanova University) and Whitney Howell (La Salle University). Mariana Ortega and Jorella Andrews will give keynote addresses. Rajiv Kaushik, Qresent Mali Mason, and Helen Fielding will be plenary speakers. The conference will be held at the Inn at Villanova. On-site accommodation is available.

Full paper submissions of no more than 3,500 words should be prepared for anonymous review and sent EMAIL with the subject heading "IMPC submission" by May 31, 2024. As is custom, submissions on any aspect of Merleau-Ponty's work, in addition to the conference theme, are also welcome.

The conference features the M. C. Dillon prize and lecture for the best graduate student paper submission. To be considered for this prize, please indicate so on the cover letter of your submission. This year's conference will feature a second prize, the **Ron Morstyn Memorial Prize**. This prize was established, through a generous donation from Gaye Morstyn, to honour Ron's dedication to phenomenology and its potential for bettering our understanding of the human condition. It is awarded annually, to a graduate student, junior scholar, or independent scholar, for the best interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary paper engaging Merleau-Ponty's work at the Circle. (To be eligible as a junior scholar, your PhD must have been earned within the last five calendar years.) The prize is presented as both an honor and a monetary award of \$1000 USD. If you are eligible for the prize and wish to be considered for it, indicate this in your cover letter when submitting your paper for consideration for the conference. Graduate students with interdisciplinary papers may ask to have their paper considered for both the Morstyn and Dillon prizes. If you wish to be considered for either or both prizes, please indicate it in your submission.

Finally, this conference will be held primarily as an in-person event. A live stream of the event will be made accessible to the general public. If you wish to be considered for virtual participation because attending physically presents insurmountable accessibility issues (of whatever sort, including economic ones), please indicate so in your submissions. We will do our best to accommodate such requests. You are also welcome to include any anticipated accessibility needs, which will greatly assist in planning.