Call for Papers

Se soustraire à l’empire des grands. Children, youth and agency (1500-1830)

International Conference
University of Lausanne
Department of History
5 – 6 November 2020

In keeping with growing trends in research on historical actors over recent decades, agency has become central to the study of individuals deprived of visibility. However, in the same way that women were deprived of such historical visibility, children (despite representing a significant segment of the population) remain marginalised. Examining childhood experience and agency modalities between the sixteenth and first third of the nineteenth century, this interdisciplinary conference will raise the child's historical visibility; while contributing to the ongoing renewal of history.

Indeed, the few diaries written by children or young people during this period are generally interpreted as instruments of control by adults; paper panopticons to use the words of Rudolf Dekker and Arianne Baggerman. Nevertheless, some autobiographical accounts show that the educators were not always in complete control. We read in the memoirs of the Duke of Chartres, for instance, that Mme de Genlis could never get the absolute empire over him she claimed for herself. Systematically studying childhood accounts can show whether (and to what extent) diaries have been used by young writers as a means of taking control of their own lives or to affirm their independence. In general terms, we will reflect on the child as an actor within the confines of family and society, as well as within his own life: as an individual with his own will and spaces in which he has expressed himself. In addition, we will examine the dichotomy between the principle of freedom and the intrusive education advocated by pedagogues and philosophers such as Félicité de Genlis and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Autobiographical writings also reveal how children and young people perceived this period of their lives: how they reflected upon their status; whether they had room for manoeuvre (rebellion or indiscipline, even); and the extent of their participation in things that would shape their future (education, choice of profession, marriage etc.) Nevertheless, it is still important to consider sources external to the child (judicial, administrative, pedagogical etc.) in order to apprehend their agency – as well as the limits imposed upon it and incentives offered to them by adults.

The main themes of this conference will be models and representations of the agency of children (male or female) and the limits it was imposed upon it. We will also consider its

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social manifestations and reflect on the child's spaces of self-determination and the way in which young people perceived them.

**Submission Instructions:**

Proposals must be written in French, German or English and include a draft title and abstract (2000 characters approx). They should also include a short biography outlining the author's area of study, institutional affiliation, details of any publications, and email address.

Proposals should be sent to Sylvie Moret Petrini (University of Lausanne) by **30th April 2020** ([sylvie.moret-petrini@unil.ch](mailto:sylvie.moret-petrini@unil.ch)).

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