

Otterbein University

Digital Commons @ Otterbein

English Faculty Scholarship

English

6-2006

Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience

Jeremy H. Smith
Otterbein University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/eng_fac



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Esthetics Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Smith, Jeremy H., "Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience" (2006). *English Faculty Scholarship*. 2.

https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/eng_fac/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Digital Commons @ Otterbein. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Otterbein. For more information, please contact digitalcommons07@otterbein.edu.

Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience and Husserlian Intentionality

by Jeremy H. Smith

Introduction

In *Voir l'invisible* Michel Henry developed a phenomenological aesthetics that emerges through the confrontation of Husserl and Kandinsky. Henry, clearly working within the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology, accepts Husserl's analysis of experience as far as it goes, but finds in Husserl's view an arbitrary limitation. In Henry's view, while Husserl in many ways comes tantalizingly close to grasping the nature of autoaffection, Husserl nevertheless falls short, and slips back into an orientation whose method and results give primacy to intentionality and neglect autoaffection. For Henry, autoaffection is the fundamental pre-reflective experience that an 'I' has of itself. While from the beginning Henry employs the word 'autoaffection' to describe this experience, in *I Am the Truth* he describes autoaffection variously : 'It is a singular Self [*Soi*] that embraces [*s'étreint*] itself, affects [*s'affecte*] itself, experiences itself [*s'éprouve*] and enjoys itself [*jouit de soi*]'¹ But for Henry autoaffection, the embrace of myself by myself, is not to be understood as the self-embrace of a 'pure I' in abstraction from the rest of experience. For Henry, autoaffection is also the essence of all experience whatsoever. What it means for autoaffection to be the essence of *all* experience comes out particularly clearly by considering the realm of aesthetic experience. The crucial idea of Kandinsky that Henry incorporates into his own philosophy is the distinction between what Kandinsky calls the 'inside' vs. the 'outside' of all experience. Autoaffection as pre-reflective self-experience is the prime example what Kandinsky means by experience 'from the inside.' To experience oneself or another as an object, either in reflection or in

an attitude of instrumentality, is to experience from the outside. For Kandinsky and Henry, not only an 'I,' but external objects as well have this double potentiality in their appearing. To experience shapes and colors from the inside is to experience their life. Our everyday habitual awareness of objects, in experiencing objects in a merely instrumental fashion, has fallen into a forgetfulness of the inner life of shapes and colors. Aesthetic experience returns us to that life, not through reflection or any kind of objectification or analysis, but through an intensification or inward growth of autoaffection itself. But Henry insists that not only shapes and colors, but objects themselves, have the same double potentiality for appearing. The world itself has an inside and an outside—and aesthetic experience is the experience of bringing the inside back to life.

The Nature of Autoaffection

Henry takes the radical position that self-awareness is primordially non-objective. Henry's whole philosophy grows out of this insight. Henry finds the beginnings of such a position in Husserl, but criticizes Husserl for, in effect, not being true to those beginnings (e.g., see Henry 1990: p. 75). Dan Zahavi has textually demonstrated that Husserl himself did clearly acknowledge the reality of autoaffection, and to an extent for which Henry does not give Husserl credit. Husserl's recognition of autoaffection arises through his discussion of the question of how I know that I am the same 'I' enduring through time, through my varying actions, and the variations in my experienced world. Husserl holds that the 'pure I,' in reflecting upon itself, extends a ray of attention back to itself, but necessarily to its just past self. How does the 'pure I' know that the reflecting 'I' is the same 'I' as the one reflected on? Through a second, higher order reflection. The 'I' reflects upon its just past reflecting, and confirms objectively that the 'I' that was

just reflecting is the same 'I' that was reflected upon. (see *Ideen II* [1952], pp. 101-102, sec. 23) But the question remains, how does the 'I' performing this second order reflection know that it is the same 'I' performing the first reflection? Husserl's method of confirming absolute givenness only through a ray of attention directed toward the object given (see *Ideen I* [1976], secs. 66-69) should lead to the conclusion that this functioning 'I' is not absolutely given. But Husserl apparently rejected the conclusion that the functioning 'I' is not given or is somehow unconscious. He does, at times, acknowledge that the 'I' is self aware in a way that is prior to reflection. For example, in *Erste Philosophie II*, Husserl states that 'the being of 'I' is always being-for-self, and is always being and being-for-self through self-appearing, through absolute appearing in which that which appears is necessary. And the primal mode of appearing, which is *prior to* [my emphasis] self-grasping [i.e. reflection], is therefore a special form of appearing.'² 'I' appears to itself originally prior to all reflection, in absolute self-proximity: its being itself is self-appearing, its being is self-illuminating or self-luminous. Were it not for this self-luminousness, reflection could not arise. But, for Husserl, is this self-luminousness absolute self-givenness? For Husserl, absolute self-givenness, for example of essences, only arises through the grasping (*Erfassung, Wesenserfassung*) of an object toward which a ray of consciousness is directed (*gerichtet auf...*) (*Ideen I* [1976] sec 37, pp. 75-77/75-78; sec. 67 pp. 141-43/153-55). Husserl says of the 'pure I' that 'as an absolute given, that is, as that which can be brought to givenness in a regard that fixes [an object] in reflection, a regard that is possible a priori, there is nothing at all mysterious or mystical about it,'³ explicitly equating the givenness of 'I' to its presence to reflection, or at least to its ability to be made present to reflection. Even though Husserl does acknowledge the reality of prereflective self-awareness more overtly than

Henry admits, Henry's main criticism of Husserl remains valid. Husserl still seems to locate primordial *givenness* 'in a regard that fixes [an object] in reflection' rather than in non-objective self awareness. As Henry puts it, for Husserl, 'it is beneath this gaze, in this pure regard [*vu pure--reinen Blick*], that the cogitatio becomes an absolute given.'⁴ Henry focuses his critical development of Husserl's ideas on just this complex of issues. Henry sees Husserl's essential error as the identification of self-givenness with objective awareness. For Henry, the '*Selbsterscheinen*' (self-appearing) that Husserl once found himself calling '*der Urmodus des Erscheinens*'--the primal mode of appearing--really is the primal mode of appearing, upon which all other kinds of appearing depend. Husserl's identification of objective awareness with self-givenness makes primary what is really secondary. 'In absolute subjectivity's self-experiencing of itself, original ipseity is born, the self itself, grasped in its internal possibility, to which every 'self,' however external it may be, secretly leads back.'⁵ The term Henry regularly uses for 'self-experiencing oneself' is 'autoaffection.'

Non-objective self-appearing is not a bare intuition of self-identity, nor is it, as Husserl perhaps suggests, feeble and obscure. Even an intentional act, such as seeing, is seeing precisely through its autoaffection as seeing, while having its object, the thing seen. And much of what we call 'feeling' does not fall under 'intentionality' at all. Joy and sorrow are fundamentally joy-in-being, and sorrow-in-being. To the extent that my joy is a matter of intentionality, say for example, the joy I feel over the birth of my child, the root of my joy is not really an object, because my joy in her being is a joy in her joy-in-being, since her being, her autoaffection, is joy. Music, Henry holds, expresses fundamentally this kind of joy and sorrow, or feeling in being that is prior to all intentionality and all world.⁶ And, Henry holds, the unity of one living joy-in-being with

another is prior to any ‘mediation’ by the objective world.

Autoaffection and Hyle in *Voir l’invisible*

One of Henry’s most remarkable and problematic claims—and one of central importance for aesthetics—is that all affection is autoaffection, including affection by what Husserl calls sensuous hyle—for example, colors, the blue of the sky. In *Phénoménologie matérielle* Henry notes that Husserl, in *Ideen I* (1976, sec. 85) passes over sensuous hyle rather quickly, and that the overwhelming emphasis of Husserl’s analysis is on the syntheses of constitution (Henry, 1990, pp. 13 ff.) This is because the sensuous hyle are self-felt self-present feelings that are prior to all objectification—and Henry’s critique of Husserl is that Husserl slights his own nascent insights into the centrality of the non-objective. For Henry, the hyletic dimension is the dimension of all experience as lived-through rather than as object projected, placed at the distance of an ‘outside.’ The hyletic dimension is not merely the dimension of potentiality for objectification, but is rather the dimension of absolute reality. The shapes and colors of things around us do not merely serve the purpose of representing or characterizing objects, but rather are experienced as autoaffection. The autoaffection of ‘I’ identifies itself with those shapes and colors in an absolute closeness of identification, so that primordially we do not have an experience *of* shapes and colors, but rather experience them in the absolute intimacy of our own autoaffection.

Henry’s specific contribution to the field of aesthetics is in his study of Kandinsky, *Voir l’invisible*. In this volume, Kandinsky’s art together with his theory of aesthetics emerge as central inspirations for Henry’s entire philosophy. Henry incorporates Kandinsky’s central insight into a fundamental duality in all appearing. According to Kandinsky ‘Every phenomenon can be experienced in two ways. These

two ways of experiencing are not arbitrarily connected or associated with the phenomenon. They flow from the nature of the phenomenon, from its two properties: exteriority and interiority.’⁷ These two ways of appearing correspond to the two modes of manifestation Henry identifies: the manifestation as an object projected into an ‘outside,’ and the self-manifestation of autoaffection. Objects in the world are capable of becoming objects of attention upon which we exert an effort of attention, and they appear as outside of each other and as outside of their observer. On the other hand ‘I’ manifests itself to itself prior to all objectification. So for Henry and Kandinsky ‘interiority’ and ‘exteriority,’ or ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ are words for the distinction between self-manifestation or autoaffection on the one hand, and manifestation as object on the other. The distinction ‘inside vs. outside’ in this sense is a clear and definite one which plays an absolutely central role in Henry’s philosophy.

Both Kandinsky and Henry take the surprising step of extending the realm of the ‘inside’ beyond the sheer self-experience of a pure ‘I,’ first to the experience of sensuous hyle, and then further to absolutely all experience. They first of all note that our experience of a color or a shape involves a certain feeling tone. This feeling tone, they insist, is not some object above and beyond the sensed shape or color that arises in our minds as an effect of a stimulus. The feeling tone is not an external association. The feeling tone is rather the very autoaffection of the lived-through experience of that shape or color. The way a blue color feels is essential to the very being of that blue. That blue is absolutely inconceivable without the specific way it feels. The unity between color and feeling is if anything even more intimate and inseparable than the unity of a spatial object and the continuum of spatial profiles through which it is given. And that feeling is not a feeling merely because somehow all sensation is, as such, feeling. Rather, that

feeling is one that reaches into, or better, is absorbed into and is really identical to the depths of our own self-experience as autoaffection. Kandinsky attempts to communicate a sense of the intimate adherence of the feeling of color to the color we see, for example, the feeling of the color blue to the blue we see: 'Blue is the typical heavenly color. The ultimate feeling it creates is one of rest. When it sinks almost to black, it echoes a grief that is hardly human. When it rises toward white, a movement little suited to it, its appeal to men grows weaker and more distant. In music a light blue is like a flute, a darker blue a cello; and still darker a thunderous double bass; and the darkest blue of all—an organ.' (Kandinsky 1977, p. 38) It is important to bear in mind when reading such descriptions that Kandinsky is not attempting to formulate a set of rules or principles to impose upon the human experience of seeing the world, and of viewing or creating artworks. Rather he is simply reporting the results of a lifetime of careful observation of, and experimentation with, the inner potentialities of colors and forms.⁸ The experience of the 'inside' of those forms is an experience of autoaffection.

Aesthetic experience of the world is precisely the kind of experience in which we are sensitive to the kinds of feelings within its appearances that Kandinsky describes. And it must be noted that neither Henry nor Kandinsky, in presenting an aesthetics, mean to limit the realm of aesthetics to the realm of art. Our experience of nature is aesthetic experience just as truly. Henry, in *Voir l'invisible*, is developing a theory not just of art but of all possible sensuous experience.

Autoaffection and the Object in *Voir l'invisible*

In *Voir l'invisible* Henry traces Kandinsky's theory of the internal, invisible, affective experience and reality of shapes and colors. Kandinsky's art removes shapes and colors from their role in the service of representing objects in the world, and liberates

their own internal affective power, opening up a realm that is prior to all world. But Henry calls attention Kandinsky's acknowledgment that his own particular artistic approach is not the only one capable of opening up the realm of internal, invisible, affective experience that is prior to world. Kandinsky praises Henri Rousseau's style as one possessing equal power to his own. He names Rousseau's style 'Grand Realism,' and explicitly states that 'the object' is a third element in Rousseau's compositions whose importance is equal to that of shape and color. According to Henry, in Rousseau's art the object is 'divested of its cultural as well as practical substance' leaving 'its pure form as object perceived for its own sake' (VI, p. 163) 'The object rendered in its bare essence [*rendu à sa nudité*] allows its own pure sonority to be heard—in the same way as does a form or a color, which are "abstract," resembling nothing.' (VI, p. 163) But the role that the object plays in Rousseau's composition is intimately related to the role that the object plays in reality.

Kandinsky was very much concerned with the relationship between art and nature, as Henry points out in the final chapter of *Voir l'invisible*, 'Art and the Cosmos': 'In the course of this [Kandinsky's] analysis of the cosmos there is a brief notation that suddenly situates art—or rather the artist—in relation to invisible nature: "It is he, the artist, who, in place of nature, orders and puts into action the three factors." So art and nature occupy the same place where shapes, colors, *and objects* [my emphasis] give themselves to be sensed in the suffering and blissful night that we are....Art orders, places into a new order, not that which was somehow already there outside of us, but that which has its advent only in the flux of our life, as the *feeling of nature*, as *the radical interiority of all possible exteriority* [Henry's emphasis]' (VI, p. 240, translating the French text of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*). Our usual mode of perceiving objects concentrates its

attention on the exteriority of objects as such, overlooking, turning its back on, their essential interiority. Overlooking interiority means focusing attention on objects as means to practical ends or as yielding objective information in response to analytical effort. Or it might simply mean attending to objects with the minimum effort needed to satisfy our basic everyday material needs through habitual activity. Our habitual or deliberately objectifying consciousness misses the essence of nature itself. Kandinsky's abstract compositions deliver us to the place identical to that of the essence of nature : 'Kandinsky's abstract style, far from excluding nature, brings it back to its internal essence. *This original nature, which is subjective, dynamic, impressional and pathetic, this veritable nature whose essence is life, is none other than the cosmos* [Henry's emphasis].' (VI, p. 236) Shape, color, *and the object* are just as much elements of nature as they are of art: "Nature," says another text [of Kandinsky] "—in other words everything that surrounds the human being and is constantly changing—transforms constantly, by means of the keys [*au moyen de touches*] (i.e. objects) the strings of the piano (i.e. the soul) into vibrations." The precise context of this constant action of nature upon the soul (the cosmos is this action as such, is nature in its subjectivity) is that of the color of the object, of its form, *and of the object itself* [my emphasis].⁹ The aesthetic experience of shapes, colors, and objects, for Henry, is the experience of transcendence as immanence.

Henry and Husserl: A Mutual Critique

Henry's theory of perception in *Voir l'invisible* has two starting points. On the one hand, perception involves three elements: shape, color, and the object. On the other hand, perception is double: perception as interiority, and perception as exteriority. Perception is involved with all three elements both from the inside and from the outside.

And the relationship of interiority to exteriority is that of the founding to the founded. Interiority is the essence of exteriority. It is possible for perception to forget its interiority, and to perceive objects in their sheer objectivity, merely as destinations for our deliberate cognitive and practical actions. Perception which objectifies, in forgetting the very essence of the object, which is interior, de-realizes the object. Our power to engage in deliberate activity tempts us to forget the passive, autoaffective essence of all our experience. So, according to Henry, we fall victim to a ‘transcendental illusion’ insofar as we experience objects merely as that over which we have perceptual, cognitive, and practical power. But does Henry hold that the world of exteriority is unreal or a mere illusion? Henry’s writings do not yield a clear and consistent answer to this question. He does hold that *if* the world were in fact as it appears to us to be insofar as we have fallen for the transcendental illusion, the world could not have even begun to exist at all: ‘If everything appeared to us in this way—if there existed no other truth than the truth of the world, there would be no reality at all anywhere, but only, on all sides, death’ (CMV, p. 30/20). However, Henry also says that the transcendental illusion ‘is in fact not totally illusory’ (CMV, p.178/141). The ‘I’ really is in possession of perceptual, cognitive, and practical powers—it only forgets that these powers are themselves a gift (the giving of the gift being experienceable, according to Henry, only within autoaffection itself.) But while Henry acknowledges that our cognitive power, which grasps objects, is itself not an illusion, he nevertheless makes contradictory statements about the reality of the world and of externality—at times coming close to denying that reality. On the one hand, Henry does affirm that life grants reality to the world itself: ‘Radically foreign to the world, life nevertheless constitutes the real content of the world’ (CMV, p. 323/258). On the other hand, Henry sometimes speaks not as if the world

would be unreal without life, but rather that the world as such is unreal: 'This phenomenality, that of the world, as we have seen, makes unreal a priori everything that it makes visible, making it visible only in the act by which, posing it outside itself, it empties it of reality' (CMV, p. 184/146). 'Everything which appears in the world is subject to a process of principled derealization which... a priori puts everything that appears in that way into a state of original unreality (CMV, p. 30/20). Henry's statements are contradictory because he on the one hand claims that it is only life that gives reality to the world, but on the other hand claims that that by virtue of which there is a world makes unreal that which it objectifies. The world, which somehow has reality because its essence is life, yet is made unreal by that which makes it a world. If the world, as such, is then unreal, how can its essence be life? For the purposes of the present critical consideration of Henry's thought, it is fair to conclude that Henry has failed to deal adequately with the whole question of the relationship between 'life' and 'world,' between autoaffection and objectivity.¹⁰ I will argue that attention to this issue must lead to a revision of some of Henry's central positions.

In the remainder of this paper, my central aim will be to critically examine Henry's claims about the nature of hyle and of intentionality. Henry claims that hyle are lived-through experiences, and that such lived-through experience is the essence of aesthetic experience. Henry also makes the claim that intentionality makes unreal all that it objectifies. I will argue that Henry's claim about intentionality is both untenable in itself and also inconsistent with his explication of the experience of visual beauty. But Husserl's analysis of the role of hyle in intentionality nevertheless suggests a way of understanding how intentionality is related to what Henry describes as the lived experience of hyle. My proposed explanation of the relationship between hyle and

intentionality involves a revision of the views of both Husserl and Henry. The sense that I will give to the distinction that Henry and Kandinsky make between 'inside' and 'outside' is: the experience of something from the 'inside' is the lived-through experience of that thing, while the experience of something from the 'outside' is the experience of that thing as an object. My proposal is that there is a sense that we do experience not only ourselves, but spatial objects, from the 'inside,' and that such experience is subtly but inseparably interwoven with our experience of objects as objects, from the 'outside.' Zahavi contests Henry's assertion of the absolute priority of self-affection or life over against hetero-affection or world: 'It is untenable to introduce a founding-founded relation between self-affection and hetero-affection, since they are inseparable and interdependent' (*Self Awareness*, pp. 123-24). My aim is to explore aesthetic experience as a field within which such interdependence becomes evident.

Henry, following Kandinsky, claims that the essence not only of shape and color, but of the object itself, is life. Life is what is lived through, and in perceiving an object, we live through the object itself as well as through its shape and color. For Henry, life is the essence of the object, but the intentionality through which objects even arise is a process of derealization. I will argue that Henry's view needs to be amended since the objectivity of objects in fact is essential to and inseparable from those objects as lived-through experiences. This is evident, I think, already through Henry's and Kandinsky's analyses themselves.

Husserl's analyses provide a subtle guide to the interrelationship of 'inner' and 'outer' in aesthetic experience. The question is to understand the interrelationship among : the pure 'I' in its lived-through self experience; its non-intentional experiences such as moods; its lived-through experiencing its own intentional acts or noeses; the

object as experienced or noema; the 'I's experiencing the shapes and colors of the object; and the transcendent object itself. I will claim along with Henry that we do in fact live through not only the shape and colors of an object, but also the object itself. In other words, the object as experienced or noema is itself lived through. However, shape and color are themselves inseparable from intentionality and the objectivation it introduces. A circle in a painting by Kandinsky, or even a vision disturbance I privately experience in my own visual field, are still objects, and shape and color are impossible except as the shapes and colors of objects. (It is true that the relationship of color to objects is not quite like that of shape. But while a phantom like the sky is not a distinct object, the sky is nevertheless a spread-out expanse above and beyond us that is saturated with intentionality in that it is divisible into areas.) Intentionality is a lived-through experience that lifts my very living out beyond itself in an utterly unique way. My life is deepened through its living through the perceptual meanings which visible objects are. But that deepened life in fact depends upon the very objectivity of those objects, even though those meanings cannot themselves be reduced to objects.

Husserl's Analysis Of Perception in *Ideas I* and *Experience and Judgment*

Husserl, unlike Henry, does explicate in detail how intentionality works in our perception of visible objects, especially in *Experience and Judgment* and *Ideas I*. Husserl's research is built on a careful consideration of the nature of appearance. Our truthful awareness does not begin with assertions about things. Perception, for example, visual spatial perception, is a more fundamental level of truthfulness. Spatial objects are given through perspectives. As I examine a spatial object from an ever changing viewpoint, a multiplicity of profiles emerges. As I observe an object from one side, the possibility of further profiles is implicit at each point, including perspectives on the other

side of the object. My perception of the object consists in the synthesis of profiles that arise in time, each founded upon the earlier ones and leading to the following ones. Spatial perception also involves the conscious grasping of an object as an object, as a 'this' or substrate which has an internal and external horizon, and which is synthesized through a unique synthesis as an identical substrate with multiple explicates (such as being brown, being square, etc.). Through this synthesis, my consciousness is directed toward the object. Husserl names my perceiving of the object through these perspectives 'noesis.' The 'noema' is the single identical object, constituted through these perspectives, *as perceived*. Husserl distinguishes the noema--the object as experienced--from the transcendent object itself. For example, the tree itself performs photosynthesis and can burn up in a fire, but that our experience of the tree, either as noesis or noema, should burn up or perform photosynthesis is in an absolute sense unthinkable, at least as unthinkable as a round square. Husserl says that neither noema nor transcendent object are 'really inherent components [*reale Komponente*]' of experiences (*Ideen I*, 1976, p. 203/214). Drummond has argued convincingly that Husserl's position is that the relationship between consciousness and the object cannot be identified with that between the noesis and noema, but rather lies in a sense within the noema itself: 'the intended objectivity itself is the innermost moment *in* the full noema.' (p. 138)

Husserl's discussion of 'life-world,' especially as it appears in *Experience and Judgment*, specifically concerns the way that propositions are founded upon perceptions (see esp. secs. 24, 50, 63, 81, 87, and 89): In the beginning, we observe that we can turn our attention toward individual objects without particularly noticing their details. Through that attention, the internal horizon of the characteristics of the object and the

external horizon of its relation to other objects appear. For example, I can turn my attention toward a house without particularly attending to any of its details. Then I can begin to explicate the internal horizon of object, attending perhaps to its color, the shape of its roof, how big the windows are, etc. Prior to the act of predication, as I perceptually explicate, keeping in grasp the house as an object of attention, the explicates and the object held in grasp are brought together in a synthesis of coincidence. This 'completely unique' synthesis passively arises between the object and the explicate as I actively explore the internal horizon of the object. Husserl emphasizes that this 'explicative coincidence' is unlike all other syntheses of identity, such as the identity synthesis between two colors. We may repeatedly run through this synthesis in order to 'impress upon ourselves' the object's determinations.¹¹ But this repeated running through falls short of judgment, a term Husserl uses to indicate the active repetition of this passive synthesis of coincidence in such a way as to fix our knowledge of the object. According to Husserl, it is only through the active synthesis of predication itself that higher level objectivities of the understanding, such as states of affairs and eide, are originally preconstituted in passivity (*Experience and Judgment*, sec. 63). Husserl insists that meaning is not confined to ideal objects, propositions, or the meanings of utterances, and that in fact those levels of meaning are founded upon the prior level of perceptual meaning. I am arguing that this fundamental outlook, which lies at the heart of Husserl's philosophy, is crucial for the understanding of aesthetic experience. Henry would certainly agree that aesthetic experience lies within the realm of experience prior to the emergence of judgments and objectivities of the understanding. But Henry holds that not only propositional awareness, but intentionality itself, lie outside of the realm of authentic aesthetic experience. Henry insists that aesthetic experience is to be found in

the realm of the hyletic—although his acknowledgment, with Kandinsky, that the object itself has a role to play is not easily reconciled with this position.

The Role of Hyle in Husserl's Understanding of Perception

What role does what Husserl calls 'hyle' play in the constitution of objects? As Zahavi has pointed out, what Husserl has to say about hyle is not consistent, and his understanding of hyle is not entirely clear (1999, pp.120-21, esp. note 59). In *Ideas I* Husserl clearly uses the term 'hyle' to mean something like what is otherwise called 'sense data.' Husserl also clearly retains the Greek sense of 'hyle' as 'material needing to be shaped.' In *Ideas I*, Husserl describes how the 'animating' act of intentionality somehow works upon the data, and the result of that working is the perception of the object (*Ideen I*, 1976, pp. 192/203). Husserl also claims that both the animating noesis and animated hyle are 'real components' of consciousness, whereas the noema and transcendent object are not. Zahavi concludes the textual survey he makes of this issue by noting that Husserl's later position on hyle abandons the claim in *Ideas I* that hyle are real components of consciousness: 'Since Husserl characterizes hyle as a kind of alterity, it is obvious that he no longer takes it to be identical with or a part of consciousness' (see Zahavi, 1999, p. 120, esp. note 55). But Zahavi holds that Husserl did not hold that 'every differentiation between a hyletic affection and an object manifestation should be abandoned' (Zahavi, 1999, p. 120).

In Husserl's work the term hyle then apparently has two somewhat different significations. In *Ideas I* the signification would be something like 'sensations as real parts of consciousness.' The other signification, which Zahavi (and Lee) have uncovered in Husserl's later work, would be something like 'the primordial manifestation of the world, prior to the emergence of explicit objects, belonging intrinsically to

subjectivity.’ Husserl also at one point makes a very interesting suggestion about the relationship between hyle and intentionality. He asserts that his term ‘intentionality’ is not merely equivalent to ‘noesis,’ but that intentionality ‘is also like a universal medium, that finally carries within itself all experiences, even those which are not characterized as intentional.’¹² This remark is particularly significant, because it implies both that the experience of hyle is not intentional, and also that intentionality itself includes moments which are not themselves intentional. In the light of the confrontation of Husserl and Henry, I will argue that the non-intentional dimension of intentionality is the dimension of all experience as lived-through; that what Husserl calls hyle in *Ideas I* is our lived-through experience of the visible qualities of objects; and finally that we live through not merely those visible qualities, but through the very objectivity of objects themselves.

Lee as well as Zahavi call attention to texts of Husserl through which his later interpretation of hyle is evident. In *Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis* and in other later texts, Husserl approaches the question of how it is that we first begin to grasp an object. In *Analysen*, sec. 32, he asserts that that what he calls an ‘*Abgehobenheit*,’ ‘that which stands out’--apparently some kind of qualitative contrast--first exerts a ‘stimulus [*Reiz*],’ on the I, to which the I responds with an intentional act. In Husserl’s later work, he begins to consider the response to such a stimulus as the expression of what he calls an instinct—the instinct for objectivation. In his study of Husserl’s theory of instincts, Lee finds a distinction between objectivating and non-objectivating instincts. Lee uncovers this distinction in Husserl’s treatment of the role of affection in the genesis of an intentional act. Prior to, and in fact temporally before, the actual direction of attention toward an object and the grasping of the object as a substrate, the object already affects the ‘I’ as an ‘*Abgehobenheit*’—‘something’ which stands out, but is not yet constituted as

a definite object. This affection of the 'I' by an '*Abgehobenheit*' corresponds to the arousal of an instinct of the 'I'—the instinct of objectivation. The reality that Husserl is here dealing with is that the 'I' does in fact have a connection to that which will become an object before the object actually arises through the 'I's' activity. Without such a prior connection which excites a movement in the 'I,' the active constitution of the object could not begin. For Lee, following Husserl, the 'objectivating instinct' ('*Instinkt der Objektivierung*' see, e.g. Lee, p. 108) is the term for this tendency or drive in the 'I' to move toward the object that affects it as an '*Abgehobenheit*.' But Lee points out that Husserl has uncovered an instinct at an even deeper level, which Lee refers to as the 'non-objectivating instinct' ('*nicht-objektivierende Instinkt*' see, e.g. Lee, p. 121). Lee employs an example to illustrate such an instinct: Suppose I am sitting at a desk intensively studying, and a cold draft starts slowly developing in the room. After about fifteen minutes, I actually notice that my feet have been getting cold (and that I have in fact been moving my feet in response). The interesting thing about such an experience is that my feet were cold (and indeed were moving) before I noticed it, and also that when I explicitly notice the coldness of my feet, I also notice that my feet had been getting cold (and had been moving) for some time. During, say, the first five minutes, the coldness of my feet, Lee would claim, was not yet an '*Abgehobenheit*'—because no tendency whatsoever had yet been aroused to direct my attention toward the coldness of my feet. Lee claims that, even in the absence of such a tendency, the coldness of my feet was yet already a kind of affection—and Lee does not hesitate to call such an affection 'unconscious' or 'preconscious.' Against Lee's interpretation of this experience as somehow unconscious, I would like to object that in such an experience, when explicit attention is aroused, what we experience precisely is not just that our feet are now cold,

but rather that our feet *had been getting* cold for some time but we hadn't noticed it. The coldness of our feet must have been a conscious experience of some sort from the beginning, or else we could not now have the consciousness that our feet *had been getting* cold.¹³

Lee calls attention to Husserl manuscript text decisive for this issue:

The primordial affection of the undisclosed non-objectivating instinct is to be radically distinguished, genetically, from the primordial affection of the objectivating instinct. The difference between the two brings Husserl, at one point in a manuscript, to express himself in this way: 'Primordial affection and intensification [*Steigerung*] through movement of 'I.' Primordial affection: being attracted by that which stands out [*Uraffektion: das von 'Abgehobenem' Angezogensein*]. Being attracted, that says a great deal, since it refers to a 'more or less,' to a being-there-with-it [*Dabeisein*] more closely or less closely. But such a 'more or less,' in order to be constituted, already assumes primordial affection, which is an original being-there-with-it [*Dabeisein*], being-directed-toward-it [*Daraufgerichtetsein*].' (A VI 26, p. 29) The primordial affection of the undisclosed non-objectivating instinct, as the primordial relation between the 'I-center' and primordial hyle, is, as Husserl in one place puts it, 'a being-there-with-it-feelingly of the "I," and to be sure not at first as a being-there-with-it through going-over-to-it and arriving-at-it [*ein fühlendes Dabeisein des Ich und zwar nicht erst als ein Dabeisein durch Hinkommen und Anlangen*]' (C 16 V, 18, Lee, p. 121)

Husserl here defines the sense in which affection is prior to objectivation—prior to all objectivating acts, there is an original "being there with it [*Dabeisein*]" or "being directed

toward it [*Daraufgerichtetsein*].” (Although if the expression *Daraufgerichtetsein* rather than *Dabeisein* better represents Husserl's view, it is worth asking in what sense there can be a “being directed toward” in the absence of explicit attention.) Zahavi also draws attention to later texts in which Husserl sees the hyletic datum as ‘the primordial manifestation of worldly transcendence’ (Zahavi, 1999, p. 120 refers to Hua: 14-379; 1-130; 15-287; 23-266): ‘Husserl speaks of the hyle as of an *interior* nonegological dimension which surrounds and affects the ego. It is an *immanent* type of alterity which manifests itself directly in subjectivity, which belongs intrinsically to subjectivity and which subjectivity cannot do without. [Zahavi here refers to Hua 15-128, 375; 13-406, 459; 14: 51-52, 337; 4-356]....It is a passivity which is passively pregiven without any active participation or contribution by the ego. [Zahavi here refers to Hua 13-427; 11-386]’¹⁴

The Hyletic Field, Affection, and Intentionality

But hyle as the determinable ‘primordial manifestation of worldly transcendence’ cannot be separated from hyle as a field of sensation--for example, the visual field. And the visual field is not merely determinable, rather, it always already a fully given continuous expanse of shape and color. We try to express the unique sense of its continuity by saying that the world is somehow spread out before us, without gaps. The nature of something like a ‘hyletic visual field’ is extremely problematic. But certain reflections may suggest the justification for such a notion. It is incontestable that we are directly presented with objects, and that there are clear distinctions to be made among: the direct presentation of the sides of objects that are facing you; the sides of the directly present objects that are not facing you but are co-present; and other objects that are not directly present but may be co-perceived as being behind you. A remarkable fact about

the side of the object that is facing you is that while it is in a sense always completely and fully present, nevertheless, at the same time, it takes effort to notice all of the details available to be seen on that very side, effort that can be effective even if you don't move closer or change your perspective. So what in a sense is already absolutely present is in another sense absent. However, as I perceptually explicate the very side that is continually facing me, and come to notice the surface of the object in greater detail, I recognize the details which I now more clearly discern as having been already present to me before my effort at clearer discernment. The 'absence' of these details is utterly unlike the absence of the sides not facing me. 'The hyletic visual field' is that which is immediately involved when I confront a surface facing me, and not involved immediately in the case of the co-presence of the other sides or of objects behind me. Another relevant consideration is that the hyletic visual field includes objects which are not in any sense in objective space. People (including me) sometimes experience vision disturbances such the flashing pattern of lights termed the scintillating scotoma which can accompany a migraine. Such a pattern is an object--it occupies an expanse and it has a definite shape and color. The expanse in which it is located can be none other than the visual hyletic field. While we seldom confuse vision disturbances with real objects, it is clear to us that the disturbances and the sensed qualities of visible objects in public space somehow do belong together. But how do they belong together? We can speak of a scotoma 'covering' something in space in front of us only equivocally, because it is clearly not located in the space between us and the 'covered' object. The utterly unique sense in which scotomas and spatial objects belong together is that they both arise within the same visual hyletic field. ¹⁵

The hyletic field possesses a continuity of its own that is distinct from the

continuity of the space of objects. Within the continuity of the hyletic field, there arise two additional kinds of continuity: the continuity of the facing surfaces of spatial objects and the continuity of the public space within which objects exist. But there is even a third further kind of continuity, which might be called the continuity of the horizon of possible substrates. The following considerations lead to the identification of this unique horizon: The result of constitution is our perception of distinct objects together in continuous three-dimensional space. These objects in this space are perceived through continua of spatial profiles which are not themselves in constituted space. But prior to the identification of distinct objects in space, the spatial world is given to us as continuous. That continuum is given as a horizon which allows itself to be explicated through the grasping of individual objects as substrates. Each individual substrate has an internal horizon susceptible to explication as determinations or parts, and an external horizon which in turn gives itself as susceptible to explication as other substrates. This continuum of possible explication given within any object's external horizon is itself a unique kind of continuum, distinguishable from spatial continuity itself, from the continua of perspectives, from the continua of surfaces, and from the continuum of the visual hyletic field. The immanence in the hyletic field of the continuum of possible substrates is tantamount to the primordial affection of what Lee calls the non-objectivating instinct. But it should also be pointed out that there are two kinds of possible substrates: objects in space and areas on surfaces. Even the spread-out expanse of the hyletic field, or the expanse of a phantom like the sky or a rainbow, or of the surface of a natural object, can be explicated in terms of parts as areas: we can take the bottom third and compare it to the top two thirds, for example, even in the absence of any objective feature marking the boundary. The infinitely determinable horizon of possible

areas is also essential to the nature of any expanse. All of these continua are given prior to the explicit identification of objects. These continua are the determinable foundation of the determinate. The dependence of intentionality upon these pregiven horizons of determinability represents one important sense in which intentionality contains, by essential necessity, non-intentional moments. Yet if one holds with Henry that our hyletic affection of shape and color has an essentially non-objective dimension, one must also acknowledge that this non-objective dimension is inseparable from intentionality in the sense that the determinable is inseparable from the determinate. Though the shapes and colors spread out over the expanse of a painting by Kandinsky do not represent natural objects, they themselves, even as mere patterns of shape and color, nevertheless are objects. The life in them, though not reducible to the objective, is nevertheless inseparable from their objectivity.

While it belongs to the essential nature of an expanse to be infinitely determinable, the essence of its continuity can nevertheless not be reduced to its infinite determinability. Hyletic continuity, at the primordial level, essentially eludes objectivation as such. Husserl's marvelously perspicacious analysis of the intentionality of time consciousness in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* is one attempt to analyze the nature of continuity. But Husserl's analysis falls short in one small way. He analyzes time in terms of the relationship among units. This is legitimate in a sense, but it overlooks the fact that a continuum, whether temporal or spatial, cannot be adequately understood in terms of objective units. Husserl would rightly identify moments in time or points in space as 'dependent moments' rather than 'pieces.' A dependent moment cannot exist by itself, but only in the context of other dependent moments. But one fact whose significance Husserl overlooks is that points in time or

space, as dependent moments *constituting continua*, cannot be objectified at all—even in terms of 'one' moment which would then require 'another.' In the sense that we can identify edges—say, the edge of a knife, or the edge of one colored area abutting another colored area—we may be able to identify something like lines in space extended in only one dimension. And in the sense that we can identify beginnings, say, the sudden beginning of a tone, we can in a sense identify points in time. And those edges and points are in a sense definite objects of experience. But we *cannot* identify *as an object* the 'very next' point in time right after the beginning of the tone. And we *cannot* identify *as an object* the 'very next' line in space 'right next to' the edge of an object or an area. We can identify beginnings and edges, but we cannot analyze continuity as such. The continuity of space and time presents itself as that within which objective determinations can be made, but at the same time the continuity cannot be reduced to those objective determinations, and continuity itself cannot be understood merely in terms of objective determinations. This means that the nature of a continuum in awareness cannot be understood merely in terms of intentionality.

The continuity of a colored surface is already a completely positive reality—it is not merely a potential for division and determination into units. But color is also not merely that which is spread out over a surface—it is, well, just color. There is something simply gratuitous about the existence of a quality like a color in its concrete specificity, something that must finally be acknowledged as unique and indefinable—and, indeed, miraculous. But we can note that that which is unique and indefinable in quality is experienced, on the most fundamental level, through the affection of continuity, and not through intentionality.

The considerations I have raised about visual perception indicate how objectivity

essentially depends upon prior non-objective experience. They also indicate that such prior experience cannot be reduced to the status of mere potential objectivity, even as it is intimately bound to objectivity as the determinable to the determinate. But I want to argue that fully realized objectivity is also a lived-through experience. Lee calls attention to Husserl's description of the non-objective affection of objects that precedes their explicit perceptual identification. Husserl calls that affection 'a being-there-with-it-feelingly of the "I," and to be sure not at first as a being-there-with-it through going-over-to-it and arriving-at-it [*ein fühlendes Dabeisein des Ich und zwar nicht erst als ein Dabeisein durch Hinkommen und Anlangen*]' (C 16 V, 18, Lee, p. 121) I will claim that the 'being-there-with-it-feelingly [*fühlendes Dabeisein*]' remains essential to our experience of an object even once we have perceptually grasped and identified it explicitly, even once we have 'gone over to and arrived at' the object. It is true that Husserl also refers to this primordial affection as a primordial 'being directed toward it.' But the phrase Husserl does also use, "*fühlendes Dabeisein*" is an apt expression of Henry's notion of the way we ourselves live through the life of objects. I maintain that while what Henry regards as the life of objects and their qualities is indeed not reducible to intentionality, it is nevertheless inseparable from intentionality. The particular nature of the intimate connection between intentionality and its non-intentional essence is such as to call into question Henry's contention that intentionality derealizes all that it makes objective.

The Noema as Lived-through Experience

In his analysis of perception in *Ideas I* Husserl distinguishes between those elements that are real parts of consciousness, and those which are not. The real parts of consciousness include both the hyle and noetic acts such as the act of seeing with its

synthesis of profiles. The noema, or the object as experienced, Husserl held, is not a real part of consciousness as the noeses and hyle are. And the noema is not a distinct object over against the transcendent object itself. The noema is not in any sense a representation of the object experienced. And yet the distinction between the object as experienced and the object experienced is a meaningful one—as Husserl says, while the tree itself may burn up, it would be meaningless to say that the tree as experienced burns up.

How then are we to understand the relationship among the pure 'I' (non-objectively experiencing itself), noesis (or the 'I's activity), noema (the object as experienced), hyle, and the transcendent object itself? Husserl makes it very clear that the relationship between consciousness and its object is not the same as the relationship between noesis and noema. The noema, he insists, contains within itself as its 'innermost moment' its relation to the object.¹⁶ Husserl distinguishes in this context between what he calls the noematic core, which he defines as 'the noematic meaning in its fullness' and the 'X' which is the bearer of the object's properties. The innermost moment is that 'X' itself as the core of the core. I am here relying upon Drummond's explication of this issue in Husserl (although as I hope to make clear, I have a somewhat different interpretation of the meaning and status of hyle than he does).¹⁷ Drummond argues convincingly against the interpretation of Husserl's view according to which the objectivity of an spatial object *is* simply the totality of ordered spatial perspectives.¹⁸ According to Drummond's interpretation, which I am here adopting, in perceiving a particular spatial object, *what* one grasps is not a perspective on the object or even the totality of perspectives or possible perspectives. Rather, one grasps the single object *through* the perspectives. And while I agree with Drummond's assertion that, for Husserl, the innermost moment of the noema is the transcendent object itself (*Husserlian Intentionality* 1990, p. 138), I

would like to suggest that even this formulation fails to express the closeness of the intimacy between noema and object.

Perhaps Husserl's most essential point, and also the one most difficult to grasp, is that the noema belongs essentially to consciousness but is not a real part of it. And the noema is no more a real part or moment of the transcendent object itself than it is a real part or moment of consciousness. Perhaps the best way to make sense of this puzzling situation is to consider that since, for Husserl, consciousness is essentially that which has meanings,¹⁹ and since perception is prior to judgment, the perceptual noema is the object as perceptual meaning. Meaning, and for that reason, the noema, does not wait upon the emergence of ideal objects.²⁰ And perceptual meaning is neither an object nor a real part or moment of any real object. The meaning of anything cannot be considered a real part or even moment of anything. If it were, then, in knowing that thing, the question would again arise of the meaning of the meaning through which the meaning itself was known, leading to an infinite regress. I question whether it is even appropriate to consider the object a moment of the noema. In describing the transcendent object as the innermost moment of the noema, we are clearly asserting the inseparability of object and noema. But in the case of a perceptual noema, this inseparability has such an intimate character that there is simply no question of two distinct objects being objectifiable in any sense, even within their inseparability. And if the real object were a moment of the noema, the question would still arise, how do we know that moment? Through another noema? The unique, incomparable, connection between meaning and object is demonstrated by the infinite regress this question leads to.

An object's meaning in actual perception, in a sense, simply is that object. But objects do not simply exist. Objects have meaning, and the sense in which that meaning

is identical to, and yet distinguishable from, the object, is utterly unique. 'Meaning' in this sense is similar to 'being.' The being of an object, whether in the sense of its sheer being or its being determined in any certain way, is neither a quality, nor a part nor a moment of any object, since the question would arise in each case, what is it then that has the quality, has the parts, or has the moments?--leading to an infinite regress.

It should also be noted that 'meaning' and 'I' are inseparable. Meaning might be considered to be the availability of objects to 'I.' That objects have, or are, meaning is to say that an 'I' can be involved with them, in being conscious of them. But this involvement is of a kind utterly unlike any other relation. It is certainly not a relation of cause and effect. It is not a real relation within the world of any kind. How to define what sort of relation it may be, and whether it is even a relation at all, remains a problem. That consciousness is not a real part of objects, and that objects are not real parts of consciousness implies that the involvement with objects that constitutes perception is an utterly unique type of involvement.

If all this is so, then how can we understand the (for lack of a better word) 'relation' of 'I,' noesis, noema, hyle, and transcendent object? First of all, the noema means the object. That meaning is not merely the content of the object's determinations, but also fundamentally the object itself, the 'X,' which is the bearer of determinations. The crucial question I then would like to put to Husserl is, what is the relation of the noema, or 'the object as experienced,' which is a meaning, to experience, and to the lived-through experience of an 'I'? Husserl makes it quite clear that experience, as such, cannot be reduced to the noetic activity. Experience is not merely a relation which forms a kind of bridge between 'I' and object. The object as experienced belongs inseparably to experience. Like experience, and unlike the object itself, it cannot burn up etc. I take

this to mean something Husserl does not assert explicitly, and indeed might balk at affirming: that the noema, as meaning, is itself a lived-through experience; in other words, noetic activity is not all that we live through.²¹ I suggest the reason it at first seems plausible that hyle are 'real parts' of consciousness, is that we live through the qualities spread out over the surfaces, facing us, of spatial objects. But consciousness is, as such, that which has meanings. We live through not only the qualities of objects, but through the objects themselves, in their very objectivity. The connection of 'I' with what I experience is that I participate in a meaning. A meaning is a part neither of 'I' nor a part of a quality or object. The 'relation' among 'I,' a meaning, and a quality or object is of an utterly unique kind.

Mckenna's analysis of hyle sheds light on what is at issue in my claim that objects are lived through: 'When we perceive a triangularly shaped object before us in space, our perceiving, in part, is composed of what I will call a "triangular sensing," a lived through and non-thematized flow of content in the shape of a triangle.... The whole idea of a flowing triangular content and the like may seem odd.... But for now this much is clear: it is an example of precisely what Husserl means by sensation' (p. 225). The idea seems odd because it seems to imply that in seeing a triangle, I become triangular. I claim instead that seeing a triangle involves living through the triangularity as perceptual meaning. Living through perceptual meaning is not a matter of exemplifying spatial properties. In seeing a triangle I do not become one. But the crucial point about aesthetic experience that I am trying to make is that in seeing a triangle, I do feel like one.

The danger of the view I am proposing is that it risks swallowing intentionality up into self-experience. I would like to suggest why this need not be so. The 'I,' on the deepest level, experiences itself non-objectively. And on the deepest level the 'I' does

experience itself as a unity which transcends all of its many acts and moods, and all of the experiences it has of all the many objects it experiences. But it does after all experience more than sheer self. It lives through acts and moods which in some sense are self-modifications, and which represent a kind of internal difference within the self. But these acts and moods are not objects before the 'I.' The 'I' lives through acts and moods as surely as it lives through its sheer self. But if I am to claim that the noema is also a lived-through experience, how does the noema differ from an act or a mood? The view I am suggesting might well be taken to imply the absurd conclusion that the objective world is merely an 'I's' self-modification. Can this conclusion be avoided? At issue is the 'innermost moment' of the noema. My own self experience—as sheer I, as mood, and as act, does not have such an innermost moment. It is pure self-coincidence. But the noema as lived-through experience is the lived-through experience of an object which is not an experience, which is other than I, and which is not a modification of 'I.' In perception, it is my living through the perceptual meaning 'this object.' I live through the very presence of the transcendent object as such. My living undergoes a modification of an entirely new order in comparison to the self-modifications of mood and of act. This modification is absolutely unique. The dimension of objects as lived-through meanings is the non-intentional dimension at the heart of intentionality. The meaning of the elusive distinction between object as experienced and object experienced is precisely the distinction between the object as lived-through experience and the object as non-experience.

Drummond defines the 'X' in these terms: 'The intended objectivity is contained within the noema just as it is intended, and the determinable 'X' is that object considered formally, apart from its determinations' (*Husserlian Intentionality*, 1990, p.136-37). One

complication that arises out of this view is, however, that we never *perceive* any visible object in abstraction from its determinations. The 'X' is not itself a discernible object, but must rather be that by virtue of which the object is an object. I am claiming that we live through the 'X' itself as the very objectivity of the object. The problem remains of understanding what it means to live through the perceptual meaning, 'object,' as that which is able to be experienced but is not experience. One wonders, at this point, what further considerations might ever be brought to bear to deal with such an enigma.

In experiencing objects, we experience bearers of properties. As a bearer of properties, but in abstraction from all properties, an object is meaningless. The meaning of being a bearer of properties is being a bearer of meaning. The properties that visible objects bear are shape and color. In living through the noema of an object, we are also living through the object's shape and color. In living through that shape and color, we are living through a meaning. I am here taking the position that while intentional objects such as objects in space are transcendent to consciousness in that they are objects and not experiences, nevertheless consciousness is involved in the being of those objects. Objects do not merely exist—they have meaning and truth. Indeed, truth is what it means to exist and meaning is the capacity to be experienced. In experiencing objects we experience unitary substrates with qualities. By grasping a unitary substrate, I am participating in the meaning and truth of the object. But objects do not merely exist as units, and their truth and meaning is not merely that of units. They also have what Henry calls life, and that life is inseparable from *what* those units are. My lived-through experience of hyle is my participation in the life of what those units are, which is inseparable from their shape and color. Shape and color are not merely experiences, since they are the qualities of objects, and could not exist without objects. But the

feeling of a shape or color saturates that shape and color absolutely. No objective discrimination is possible, such that we can attend to one object 'a color' and another object 'the feeling of that color.'²² And the experience of shape and color as an experience of *value*, specifically aesthetic value, is only available through the experience of living through what Henry calls their life.

Aesthetic Experience and *accroissement de soi*

In order to better illustrate both the claims I am making about the experience of hyle and the qualifications I am introducing into Henry's view, I would like to bring them to bear upon an concrete example of aesthetic experience. I live near a well managed metropolitan park which includes extensive woodlands, and controlled-succession fields as well as picnic grounds, playgrounds and other open areas. I have spent many hours in this park, both alone and with my wife and daughter. I have often stood on the edge of one of the park's unmown fields in Spring on a bright sunny day. I can recall one of those times. Across the field is a row of deciduous trees, their branches reaching up to the sky. I can see the blue sky through the slightly swaying green leaves on the branches. It is a moment of delight. What makes this experience an experience of beauty and not just another perception of various objects stuck together before me? For I could perceive and even accurately describe these objects very well in an experiencing numb or blind to beauty. For example, if I were a forester assessing a stand of trees for the kind of wood it would yield for commercial purposes, so long as I remained engaged in that task of assessment, aesthetic experience would be excluded, even if I was a person whose personality included sensitivity to natural beauty. The experience of beauty seems to involve a certain stillness and detachment. It suspends any action, or consideration of action, upon the things themselves that one confronts. The experience

simply allows the things to appear. And the trees' particular way of appearing is essential to the experience. The beauty is in these particular colors, in these particular shapes, of these particular spatial things, in this particular relation. And despite its stillness and detachment, in another sense the experience of beauty involves an intense activity. As I look across the field I see a row of trees reaching up to the sky, my attention ranges avidly from tree to tree, from field to tree, from tree to field to sky. The grasping of substrates, the explication of internal and external horizons, and the holding together in consciousness of different substrates or parts in their particular spatial configuration, are essential to aesthetic awareness. However, all of the further steps along the path toward idealization Husserl describes--from the stage of 'impressing something on oneself' and certainly the stage of judgment onward--are *completely optional* as far as aesthetic experience is concerned. My consciousness is not oriented toward the fixing of ideal objects such as states of affairs, toward the making of judgments those objects depend upon, or even upon 'impressing on myself,' fixing in my mind, what the characteristics of the objects before me are, so that I can make reference to them later for other purposes. In aesthetic awareness, my perceptual activity brings to vivid awareness the particular shapes of the branches of the trees, particular shade of green of the leaves, the particular play of light and shadow, the particular texture of the grass, the particular blue of the sky, all in their particular relationship as they appear to me from the particular 'here' I occupy. My perceptual activity is motivated not by the aim of noting facts for later use but by its burgeoning discovering of the life in things. One dimension of this recognition of life is of course the recognition of what we normally call living beings--trees moving in the breeze, grass growing, birds flying, cicadas singing. But the life I see is not confined to the life of individual living beings.

The vivid blue of the sky in its depth, in its intensity and vibrancy, also has an essential quality that can also be called life. And the particular way these two trees are outlined against the sky, and sway next to each other, and stand above the field, also has life. The life we see is not merely the life of individual beings, but the life of the experienced whole before us which is also a life we participate in. And this life, this intensity, this vibrancy, is precisely what motivates the objectivating activity of explication essential to aesthetic experience.

How would Henry understand the experience of beauty I am describing? For Henry, the genuine reality, as such, of an object and of its shape and color, is the same as what he calls its life. In our experience of the world and its objects, we tend to fall into a forgetfulness of their life. The remembering of life in this sense does not take place through attention directed toward life. Rather, it takes place through a modulation within autoaffection itself. In *I Am the Truth* Henry asserts that this modulation takes place through deeds of mercy. (CMV, p. 213) In *Voir l'invisible* Henry finds the same sort of modulation at the heart of aesthetic experience. Henry's position on this question emerges through his approach to a familiar question (which of course takes on a special significance in his own philosophy): 'If the content of art is life, what good is art if life already exists in every way, without art, before there is any art?' (VI, p. 209) Henry goes on to ask : 'how is life present in art any differently than in ordinary life ?' And Henry's answer is : 'Life is present in art according to its own essence.' (VI, p. 209) The *essence* of life then, is for Henry 'not just self-experience, but as its immediate consequence, an inward growth of self' (*Non pas seulement l'épreuve de soi mais, comme sa conséquence immédiate, l'accroissement de soi,* VI, p. 209).

Henry evidently holds that while consciousness self-affects itself as its very

essence, and in a way impossible for it to escape, nevertheless, such autoaffection, *as* autoaffection, is capable of transforming itself in a certain way. This self-transformation is not merely the transformation in which any change in feeling consists—such as between the feeling of a cloudy day and the feeling of a dark night, or as between the feeling of anxiety and a feeling of pleasure. This transformation is not a change in the particular quality of a feeling, but rather a transformation in the quality of self-awareness specifically *as* self-awareness—and yet this change is precisely *not* that of a reflection which objectifies. Henry on the one hand *defines* autoaffection as ‘life’s entering into itself.’ But life’s internal growth of self is something more than our usual self-experience in autoaffection. ‘To experience oneself, in the way that life does, is to enter into oneself, to enter into the possession of one’s own essence. It is in fact an the self’s inward growth [*s’accroître de soi*], it is being affected by a ‘more’ which is a ‘more of oneself’ [*plus de soi-même*] And this 'more' is not the object of a regard or of a quantitative evaluation: as internal the self’s inward growth [*accroissement de soi*] and, as experience of its own essence, it is a way of enjoying oneself, it is enjoyment.’ (VI, pp. 209-10) Henry’s expression ‘more of oneself’ points to the central paradox of his notion of ‘the self’s inward growth’ (*accroissement de soi*). While autoaffection is absolute self-identity, without separation or difference, the notion of inward growth yielding more of oneself, itself must imply a difference of some kind, but that difference must be a difference utterly unlike differences among objects.²³

While Henry states that life is present in art ‘according to its own essence,’ he does not appear to be claiming that life is present ‘according to its own essence’ *only* in art. As we have already seen, Henry and Kandinsky affirm that finally, art and life are one: the world itself, and in fact ‘nature is but a particular case of art’ (VI, p. 241).

Henry points out that for Kandinsky 'Every being, and consequently every object, has its interior resonance : the most trivial things of our everyday environment as well as the most elaborate graphic inventions with their complex combinations' (VI, pp. 228-29).²⁴ While it may be the artist who is especially attuned to these resonances, it is clear that for both the resonances belong to the things, and the experience of things, as such. By the 'inward growth of self' Henry means precisely the experience that emerges as we allow those resonances to sound within us. The definition of aesthetic experience for Henry is precisely the experience of the resonances, and the potential for such experience is at the heart of all experience.

In my experience of what I too am calling the life in shapes, colors, and objects, the life I discover in aesthetic awareness is not itself an object. This discovery of life takes place within my lived-through experiencing the shape and color of objects. Essential to the experience of beauty is that the life I discover in the objects I see should also at once be my own life. The feeling of life, of vitality, of joy, that I experience is not an attitude or a noesis but a lived-through experience of the feeling that saturates the hyle in my experience which are the shapes and colors of the objects I see before me as I gaze upon them from my 'here.' An experience becomes an experience of beauty not through the discovery of some objective feature of any sort, but through an inward transformation of lived-through experience of the kind that Henry calls '*accroissement de soi*'--inward growth of self.

For Henry and Kandinsky, what resonates, again, is not just the shape and color of an object, but *the object itself*. For Henry, aesthetic experience demonstrates that the genuine reality of the object is affection. Since Henry holds that intentionality makes unreal all that it objectifies aesthetic experience must for him be a kind of recovery of the

reality intentionality had driven away. But I have been attempting to call attention to the evidence that intentionality saturates aesthetic experience. And in reflecting on my experience in the park, it seems to me that while my lived-through experience of hyle is the essence of that experience, the intentionality inseparable from the hyle are also essential to that experience *as an experience of beauty*. That the colors of the sky and the leaves are *spread out over a surface*; that the sky is ‘above’ me, the trees are ‘in front of’ me, at the earth is ‘at my feet’; that the colors and shapes I see are the colors and shapes *of objects*; and even that these objects are natural objects with physical and living energy; all these aspects of intentionality modify the quality of my lived-through experience and are inseparable from its meaning. Henry rightly describes that meaning as the discovery of ‘more’--not ‘more’ in the sense of more objects, but more in an indescribable sense of more life, which is growth within autoaffection itself. And Henry is right that my experience of objects as such—and not just of their shape and color--is a lived-through experience, and that aesthetic experience returns us to that essential dimension, which we forget when we fall dupe to the transcendental illusion, identifying reality with objectivity. But the lived-through experience of intentionality is itself a unique and incomparable experience of being carried out beyond oneself, of surpassing oneself. In aesthetic experience, a lived-through self-surpassing is essential to my encounter with the brilliant sky and the trees gently swaying in the wind, as objects beyond me which nevertheless somehow carry within them my own deepest feelings. And the ‘more’ essential to that self-surpassing is also inseparable from the ‘more of self’ I discover as I surpass myself through the growth of life within my own most intimate non-objective self awareness. The object itself is not an experience, but it is nevertheless not only that which essentially offers itself to my objectivating grasp, but also that which

presents itself as the bearer of an experience which leads me to discover a further inwardness which expands my life in a way I could have never foreseen.

Reference List

- Bescanon, Alain (2000), *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Drummond, John (1978), "On the Nature of Perceptual Appearances or Was Husserl an Aristotelean?" *The New Scholasticism* 52, pp. 1-22.
- (1990), *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Hart, James, G. (1992), 'Being's Mindfulness: The Noema of Transcendental Idealism,' in *The Phenomenology of the Noema*, Ed. J. Drummond, The Hague: Kluwer.
- (1998), 'Genesis, Instinct, and Reconstruction: Nam-in Lee's *Edmund Husserl's Phänomenologie der Instinkte*,' *Husserl Studies* 15.2: pp. 101-23.
- (1999), 'Michel Henry's Phenomenological Theology of Life: A Husserlian Reading of *C'est moi, la vérité*,' *Husserl Studies* 15: pp. 183-230.
- Henry, Michel (1988), *Voir l'invisible: sur Kandinsky* [VI]. Paris : Bourin, 1988.
- (1990), *Phénoménologie matérielle*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.
- (1996), *C'est moi la vérité : pour une philosophie du christianisme* [CMV], Paris: Seuil; *I Am the Truth*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003.
- Husserl, Edmund (1952), *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch*, Hua 4, The Hague: Nijhoff.
- (1959), *Erste Philosophie II*, Hua 8, The Hague: Nijhoff.
- (1966), *Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis*, Hua 11, The Hague: Nijhoff.
- (1972), *Erfahrung und Urteil*, ed. Ludwig Landgrebe, Hamburg: Meiner;

- Experience and Judgment*, trans. James Churchill and Karl Ameriks, Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ Press, 1973.
- (1973), *Ding und Raum*, The Hague: Nijhoff, Hua 16; *Thing and Space*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997.
- (1976), *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Hua 3.1, The Hague: Nijhoff; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982.
- Kandinsky, Wassily (1955), *Rückblick*, Baden Baden: Woldemar Klein.
- (1977), *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, New York: Dover.
- (1982), *Complete writings on Art*, Boston: Hall.
- Lee, Nam-in (1991), *Edmund Husserls Phänomenologie der Instinkte*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Mckenna, William R. (1984), 'The Problem of Sense Data in Husserl's Theory of Perception,' in Lester Embree, ed., *Essays in Memory of Aron Gurwitsch*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, pp. 223-239.
- Sokolowski, Robert (1978), *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.
- Steinbock, Anthony (1999), 'The Problem of Forgetfulness in Michel Henry,' *Continental Philosophy Review* 32: pp. 271-302
- Yamagata, Yorihiro (1991), 'Une autre lecture de l'essence de la manifestation: immanence, présent vivant, et altérité,' *Études philosophiques* 2: pp. 173-91.
- Zahavi, Dan, (1998), 'Self Awareness and Affection,' in N. Depraz and D. Zahavi, eds., *Alterity and Facticity*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998: 205-228.

----- (1999), *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation*.

Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press.

¹*C'est moi la vérité* (hereafter CMV), Henry 1996: pp. 76/57. Page references will list the French or German original first, followed by the English translation.

² (my translation) 'das Sein des Ich ist immerfort Für-sich-sein, ist immerfort Sein und Für-sich-sein durch Selbsterscheinen, durch absolutes Erscheinen, darin das Erscheinende notwendig ist. Und der Urmodus des Erscheinens der *vor* [my emphasis] der Selbsterfassung [i. e. reflection], ist darum doch Erscheinen besonderer Gestalt.' (*Erste Philosophie* vol. II, Beilage XVII, Hua VIII, 412). The texts I have quoted are ones that Zahavi has called attention to in his demonstration that Husserl did hold there to be pre-reflective self-awareness in his article, 'Self Awareness and Affection,' in N. Depraz and D. Zahavi, eds., *Alterity and Facticity* (1998): pp. 205-228; See also his *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (1999) esp. pp. 115-127. But even if Husserl does accept pre-reflective self awareness, the problem remains of its status in terms of givenness, since Husserl holds that pure givenness is a matter of a grasping regard.

³ (my translation) 'als absolut Gegebenes, bzw. zur Gegebenheit im apriori möglichen Blick fixierender Reflexion zu Bringendes, ist es ganz und gar nichts Geheimnisvolles oder gar Mystisches,' *Ideen II* (1952), p. 97, sec. 22.

⁴ (my translation) 'c'est sous ce regard, dans cette vu pure, que la cogitatio devient une donnée absolue.' *Phénoménologie matérielle* (1990), p. 64.

⁵ (my translation) 'Dans le s'éprouver soi-même de la subjectivité absolue prend naissance l'Ipséité originelle, le Soi-même saisi dans sa possibilité intérieure et

auquel tout 'soi', fût-ce le plus extérieur, renvoie secrètement.' *Phénoménologie matérielle* (1990), p. 74.

⁶ See VI, pp. 191-204.

⁷ As quoted in *Voir l'invisible* (hereafter VI), pp. 14-15. I have here translated the French version Henry quotes.

⁸ Alain Bescanon's dismissive discussion of Kandinsky and of Henry's interpretation of Kandinsky in *The Forbidden image* (2000), pp. 330-357, esp. 340 and pp. 347-48, is a clear example of what it means to fall prey to the all-too-easy misunderstanding of Kandinsky's analysis as an ideology rather than as a phenomenology.

⁹ VI, pp. 239-40, translating the French version of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* from which Henry quotes.

¹⁰ Summing up a list of Henry's limitations, Zahavi (1999) concludes: 'in short, his analyses remain deficient, since they never take the interplay between self-manifestation and hetero-manifestation into sufficient consideration' (p. 115).

Sympathetic critiques of Henry's treatment of the issues of world and alterity from slightly different viewpoints may be found in Steinbock and Yamagata.

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, ed. Ludwig Landgrebe (Hamburg: Meiner, 1972) *Experience and Judgment*, Tr. James Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 139/123-24, sec. 25.

¹² 'auch einem universellen Medium gleiche, das schliesslich alle Erlebnisse, auch die selbst nicht intentional charakterisiert sind, in sich trägt.' *Ideen I* (1976), p. 191/203, sec. 85, translation altered.

¹³ One of the few disagreements Hart expresses with Lee is specifically on this point. See Hart (1998), p. 106.

¹⁴ Zahavi continues: 'Thus the use of the terms "immanent" or "interior" does not indicate that the hyle is after all a real (*reell*) component of the experience itself.' But Husserl is not consistent on this, as Zahavi notes: 'to give but a single example, in 14-46, Husserl writes that the hyle belongs to life as its essential *correlate*. Six pages later, in a text from the same year (1921), he writes that the hyle, "sich als reell einig mit dem Ichlichen gibt" (14-52).' Zahavi, 1999, p. 120. See also Hart's comments on Lee's treatment of *Urhyle* (1998, p. 112)

¹⁵ Drummond (1990, p. 145; "On the Nature," p. 16) claims that the examples Husserl employs in order to isolate hyle (in the sense of *Ideas I*) do not in fact do so. Hyle as sensed qualities are not in fact elements of perception and are not needed in order to explain appearances. 'The appearance, therefore, unambiguously reinterpreted, is *the object precisely as it appears under present conditions*, i.e. the psychophysically conditioned perceptual noema' ('On the Nature,' p. 18). However, I think an ambiguity remains, which is in fact the central ambiguity of intentionality. Do the appearances belong to the object or to the 'I'? I agree that the appearance *is* the object in the sense Drummond specifies. But the object as it appears at any one moment has surfaces which face me. Having surfaces facing me is inseparable from the continuity of the visual field, which is spread out before me as a pattern of shape and color even as it is at the same time that in and through which objects and surfaces appear. That the appearances should also belong to me is inseparable from the reality of this visual hyletic field.

¹⁶ 'Errinnern wir uns ferner an den "Blick auf," der unter Umständen durch die Noese hindurchgeht (durch das aktuelle cogito), der die spezifisch thetischen Momente in

Strahlen der Setzungsaktualität des Ich verwandelt, und achten wir genau darauf, wie dieses Ich sich nun mit ihnen als seinerfassendes, oder vermutendes, wünschendes usw. auf Gegenständliches "richtet," wie sein Blick durch den noematischen Kern hindurchgeht—so werden wir darauf aufmerksam, daß wir mit der Rede von der Beziehung (und speziell "Richtung") des Bewusstseins auf sein Gegenständliches verwiesen werden auf ein *innerstes* Moment des Noema. Es ist nicht der eben bezeichnete Kern (im gegenständlichen Sinn selbst), sondern etwas, das sozusagen den notwendigen Zentralpunkt des Kerns ausmacht und als "Träger" für ihm speziell zugehörige noematische Eigenheiten fungiert, nämlich für die noematisch modifizierten Eigenschaften des "Vermeinten als solchen." *Ideen I*, sec. 129.

¹⁷See Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality* (1990), p. 136-38 for his discussion of the relevant passages on the noema in *Ideen I* secs. 128-129. See pp. 144-46 for Drummond's position on hyle.

¹⁸Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality* (1990), Chapter 4. Drummond, on p. 150, quotes Aaron Gurwitsch, 'Husserl's Theory of the Intentionality of Consciousness in Historical Perspective,' in L. Embree, ed., 1974, *Phenomenology and the Theory of Science* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press), pp. 236-37: 'The thing cannot be perceived except in one or the other manner of adumbrational presentation. It is nothing besides, or in addition to, the multiplicity of those presentations through all of which it appears in its identity. Consequently, the thing perceived proves to be the group or, more precisely put, the systematically organized totality of adumbrational presentations.'

¹⁹Nun, in anderen Worten: Sinn zu haben, bzw. etwas im Sinne zu haben, ist der Grundcharakter alles Bewußtseins' (*Ideen I*, sec. 90, p. 206/217).

²⁰This is the point I take Drummond to be demonstrating in his refutation of the Fregean interpretation of the noema in chap. 5 of *Husserlian Intentionality* (1990).

²¹The notion of act directed toward object cannot completely explain being aware of something. For one thing, in order for us to direct an act toward an object in the ordinary sense—for example, in order to pick up a ball—we must first be aware of that object. In the case of perception the same applies—and in *Analyses of Passive Synthesis*, Husserl thoroughly explores the issue of the prior, passive affection that is necessary in order for the active grasping of an object in perception to come about. But even once an object is grasped, it seems incorrect to simply define consciousness as noesis. Noetic activity, for example the direction of attention and perceptual explication, has a result. That result is an enriched noema. But I am claiming that our noematic awareness, as for example, thus enriched by noetic activity, is itself not merely a matter of noetic activity. Our noematic awareness, which experiences the result of noetic activity, is itself a lived-through experience.

²²Hart sees in Henry's view the claim that 'qualities are mere substitutes for or projections of self-affectings' (1999, p. 218). Henry's statements about how intentionality produces unreality justify this criticism. Does my revision of Henry's view escape this objection? If I assert—as I do—that the color the object *has* (not merely 'appears to have') really does change in different lighting, does that mean I must be claiming that color is *merely* an experience? It is clear that in *the world we live in*, objects really are colored. And yet things really having color clearly depends upon conscious beings seeing those things. I suggest that this implies not that color is the mere projection of a subjective experience, but rather that consciousness is involved in constituting the being of the very world we

live in. A similar point can be made about *surfaces*. The very idea of a surface involves the perspective of a perceiver. Without that perspective, nothing like a surface could exist. And without a surface, it is difficult to see how there could be a shape. Apart from this intrinsic involvement with possible consciousness—including a hyletic field in the experience of an ‘I’--being would be meaningless, and nothing could be or be what it is. It is not merely that all objects have the property of being knowable. Rather, what it means even to be, is to be knowable. See Hart (1992), pp. 112-13: ‘The primacy of intentionality’...now refers to the view that the problem of being is inseparable from intentionality.... Intentionality is properly explicated to mean that consciousness is the ‘there’ of being (cf. Heidegger’s *Dasein*) and being is necessarily inseparable from consciousness or its being-known (*Bewusst-Sein*’; See also Robert Sokolowski (1978), *Presence and Absence*, e.g. pp. 28-29, 46.

²³ In reference to this very question, Hart asks: ‘Is the basic non-reflexive living through of life all that is necessary, or is there not a mode of self-reference and self-directedness required both for the explication as well as for the authentic living of this life, one that is neither an active intending nor the sheer simple living of life?’ (1999, p. 211). Henry’s idea of ‘*accroissement*’ seems to correspond to such a ‘mode of self-reference.’ But nevertheless two problematic issues remain: the nature of the difference between the growth of life within itself and the sheer living of life, and of the nature of the relationship between the growth of life within itself and the intentionality of reflection.

²⁴And Henry goes on to quote Kandinsky:

‘Every ‘dead’ thing trembled. Not only the stars, the moon, the forests, the flowers of which the poets speak, but even a cigarette butt lying in an ashtray,

even a patient white trouser-button looking up from a puddle on the street, even a submissive piece of bark an ant carries through the tall grass in its strong jaws for undetermined and but important ends, even the page of a calendar, toward which the conscious hand reaches out and then tears from the warm companionship of the block of remaining pages--everything showed me its face and its innermost essence, its secret soul which tends more toward silence than to speech.'

(translation modified, quoted in VI, p. 229—Kandinsky quote from *Rückblick*, p. 92, trans. in *Complete Writings on Art*, 1982, vol. 1, pp. 360-61)