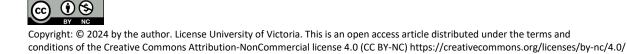**Paul Crowther**. *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Consciousness and Phantasy: Working with Husserl*. Routledge 2022. 178 pp. $180.00 USD (Hardcover 9781032079462); $54.99 USD (Paperback 9781032080239).

This compact but information-rich study is the first English-language monograph devoted to Edmund Husserl's important writings on aesthetic consciousness. A historically overlooked piece of Husserl's corpus, these writings consist of private notes, sketches, and lecture transcripts composed across three decades. Crowther's study follows the relatively recent English translation (by John Brough) of the *Husserliana* volume in which these materials are collected (nearly 800 pages in length), entitled *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*. As Crowther writes, Husserl's work on these topics not only offers a robust and highly original account of aesthetic consciousness, but also provides unique approaches for dealing with problems in contemporary aesthetics. While Husserl's positions do undergo some metamorphoses during the decades of his writing, Crowther's approach is to assemble the general views Husserl advances, as opposed to an historical exegesis of Husserl's development (1).

Crowther's book consists of five chapters plus a substantial introduction. The Introduction locates Husserl's work on aesthetics and related topics within the broader framework of Husserlian phenomenology. As Crowther writes, Husserl's well-known accounts of perception and time-consciousness lend themselves also to considering aesthetic, aspectual, and pictorial consciousness, as well as what we colloquially refer to as 'imagination' (3). These are reflective modes of consciousness borne out of how things appear, or, the manner in which they coalesce with the surrounding perceptual field. Husserl coins the term 'phantasy' in order to emphasize the dimension of consciousness whereby one can represent nonexistent perceptual content in an 'as if' attitude, treating it as if it were real and present, while positing its existence in a null attitude (5). Phantasy is thus a 'modified' state of consciousness. Overall, Crowther emphasizes that the rudiments of aesthetic consciousness, phantasy, and so forth are borne out of Husserl's more basic categories of consciousness, apprehension, and intuition of the actual world. Consciousness of the imaginary or aesthetic is derived from but always distinct from ordinary consciousness; we can imagine or fantasize because we know what is real (5-6).

Crowther's Introduction also briefly surveys the more well-known contributions to aesthetics in phenomenology after Husserl, namely those of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Dufrenne, and Sartre. This survey demarcates some of the reach and limitations of these figures, foregrounding the gaps Husserl's work stands to fill. Notably, Crowther criticizes Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in rather sharp terms, on the ground that both neglect attention to the particularities of art works as individual works, their manner of composition, and so forth. Neither philosopher analyzes in depth the mixture of subjective and objective truth in art; instead, both are guilty of invoking art in broad ontological terms as a vehicle for philosophical truth. Nor does either highlight the aesthetic dimensions of art (12-14).

In the book's first principal chapter, Crowther states his main thesis regarding Husserl's understanding of the aesthetic: 'aesthetic interest aims at the presented object in the How of its

presentedness' (24). Consciousness reveals an aesthetic dimension when one recognizes the difference of intentional states in the consciousness of an object alongside the consciousness of *how* the object appears (26). Moreover, a crucial qualification is the by-and-large pre-reflective attentional absorption of aesthetic consciousness (23). In other words, aesthetic consciousness or insight does not occur after the fact, as it were, but belongs to lived experience.

Crowther also analyzes in depth Husserl's descriptions of aesthetic consciousness at the level of minute details in art works, for instance, a work's containing contrasts of clarity and obscurity, or its way of evoking specific emotional reactions. In this account, aesthetic consciousness involves attention to the interactivity of these in a work (26). To draw this point out, Crowther contrasts the phenomenon of 'disinterestedness' for Husserl with Kant's well-known thesis on disinterestedness. Whereas Kant describes the disinterestedness of aesthetic consciousness from the perspective of admiring the object in its own right, Husserl describes disinterestedness not as focused on the object or its features but instead on the interplay between these. Kant's thesis on disinterestedness suffers from the inability to account for its origins (33).

Crowther rounds out this chapter with a look at Husserl's views on aesthetic consciousness of nature, and the role of phantasy of aesthetic consciousness. Aesthetic consciousness of natural objects, scenes, and places has a primacy in the movement of the human body, insofar as the ability to move around and through natural objects or places allows for constant modification of one's position and viewpoint relative to these. Aesthetic appreciation of nature therefore arises from the experience of observing how objects and scenes beheld complement one another, or suggest notions of vigor, vibrancy, decay, and the like. Of especial importance for Crowther is the contrast here with more classical notions of nature conceived as something other, such that aesthetic appreciation is only possible in terms of sublimity or grandeur severed from the human realm (37).

Finally, with the invocation of 'phantasy', Crowther develops a focused look at the imaginative components underlying both artistic creation and appreciation of art works. As stated above, phantasy refers to the human capacity to represent objects under the guise of presence, but without regard to whether they exist or are present. Objects of phantasy can likewise engage aesthetic consciousness. Likewise, in Husserl's locution, art works are comprised by the giving of form to phantasy (59). Decisive in Crowther's analysis is Husserl's claim that artistic beauty, and the repeatable, intersubjective appreciation of artistic beauty is founded on phantasy. While any given phantasy is an individual, singular experience, the objectivity of beauty in art is predicated on individual beholders 'seeing' the same identifiable content in the work each time: 'the objective *beauty* of the work in the fullest sense consists in how its objective physical features are internalized by the audience as a basis for their phantasies' (54). And similarly: 'The objective beauty of the artwork, then, is…the internalization of it in the phantasy-work of all those who engage with it aesthetically' (55). The art work exists in order to be structurally phantasied (60). I could highlight much more informative material; the chapter provides an essential overview of how Husserl understands art and aesthetics.

The book's second chapter, some sixty pages in length, presents Husserl's phenomenology of visual representation. Husserl often refers to visual representation as 'image consciousness'; more

colloquially, this notion refers to the human ability for picturing or seeing images as representations. This subject comprises perhaps the most in-depth area of study for Husserl among his writings on aesthetic consciousness and phantasy, so Crowther's extended treatment is warranted. Crowther is constantly mindful of broader issues in aesthetics for which Husserl's account has relevance. The bulk of the chapter examines the implications of Husserl's enumeration of the intentional states involved in engaging with pictures, painting, and other types of representative art. In brief, visual representation for Husserl consists in a number of distinct but overlapping intentional states, whereby one engages with a physical object or substrate; an image object; and an image subject 65-66). The 'framing' or edge of an image is similarly constitutive of this phenomenology (67). Thus, visual representation is built upon an interplay of these intentional structures, whereby one engages with an image that bears resemblance or likeness, and through it intentionally 'sees' this subject. A core thesis Crowther highlights here is that aesthetic consciousness arises from the viewer's reflection upon how the image subject emerges out of the image object, or in other words, the image object's way of presenting the image subject (78-80). This is to say, what makes art works interesting is the appreciation for how the image subject is rendered out of the underlying image object and out of the work's physical materiality. As Crowther rightly emphasizes here, Husserl's phenomenology of visual representation anticipates by decades the influential account of Richard Wollheim regarding image consciousness as 'seeing-in' (75).

The third chapter provides a very brief treatment of the overlap in Husserl's account of aesthetic consciousness and parallel accounts of 'aesthetic form' by the British scholar-critics Clive Bell (1881-1964) and Roger Fry (1866-1934). A goal here is to engage outside support for Husserl's relative lack of attention to the importance or value of aesthetic consciousness. Crowther leverages Bell and Fry in order to illustrate how aesthetic consciousness is akin to phenomenological reduction (130).

The fourth chapter treats the relevance of Husserl's work on aesthetics to literature, theatre, and music, while the fifth and final chapter highlights further questions and avenues for exploration. Both of these chapters, while brief, provide fine roadmaps for further study.

Crowther's compact book covers a lot of ground in a short space. His deep research background in aesthetics and phenomenology enables him to present much complex material very efficiently. One might prefer that the third, fourth, and fifth chapters were longer and fuller, but this book is intended more as a primer than an exhaustive account. The book is a genuine gift to Husserl studies and to phenomenological study of art and aesthetics.

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