

Hanne De Jaegher

## *How We Affect Each Other*

*Michel Henry's 'Pathos-With' and the Enactive Approach to Intersubjectivity*

**Abstract:** *What makes it possible to affect one another, to move and be moved by another person? Why do some of our encounters transform us? The experience of moving one another points to the inter-affective in intersubjectivity. Inter-affection is hard to account for under a cognitivist banner, and has not received much attention in embodied work on intersubjectivity. I propose that understanding inter-affection needs a combination of insights into self-affection, embodiment, and interaction processes. I start from Michel Henry's radically immanent idea of self-affection, and bring it into a contrastive dialogue with the enactive concepts of autonomy and (participatory) sense-making. I suggest that the latter ideas can open up Henry's idea of self-affection to inter-affection (something he aimed to do, but did not quite manage) and that, in turn, Henry's work can provide insights into under-explored elements of intersubjectivity, such as its ineffable and mysterious aspects, and erotic encounters.*

**Keywords:** self-affection; inter-affection; Michel Henry; participatory sense-making; interactive experience; affect; intersubjectivity; sexuality; ineffability; social interaction; enaction.

Correspondence:

Hanne De Jaegher, IAS-Research Centre for Life, Mind, and Society, Dept. of Logic and Philosophy of Science, University of the Basque Country, San Sebastián, Spain; Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics, and Centre for Research in Cognitive Science, School of Life Sciences, Dept. of Informatics, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK. Email: [h.de.jaegher@gmail.com](mailto:h.de.jaegher@gmail.com)

## Introduction

For the purposes of this paper, I take intersubjectivity to be the meaningful engagement between subjects, or how we make sense of each other and of the world together. This happens in intricate interactions that may go well, may be difficult, may be hesitant, enthusiastic, tense, resistant, flowing, and so on. What many social encounters have in common is that in them we almost always *affect each other*. We are moved in one way or another, or noticeably not (the latter as such can affect us too). Our encounters often leave us transformed. This happens most obviously in love relations, where interactions can have profound effects on our way of experiencing the world, and can make one more or less curious, aware, averse, critical, sure or unsure, and so on. This is perhaps one of the experiences that gives rise to the call for social cognition researchers to pay more attention to embodiment and the dynamics of interacting than to propositions and representations. Researchers of intersubjectivity have been busy grounding and constructing the embodied-interactive focus shift, but while we daily experience the inter-affection that goes on in our social encounters, this is perhaps the one aspect of intersubjectivity that most easily slips through the net of current accounts.

Standard cognitivist approaches are not often concerned with affect and emotion, and when they are it is typically in terms of how affective states get transmitted from one mind to another, or how they relate to cognitive states (e.g. Matovic, Koch and Forgas, 2014). And while one of the main contenders of standard approaches — enaction — takes embodiment and interaction very seriously, it also has so far given little due to intersubjective affectivity.<sup>1</sup> While enactive accounts of affect exist (Colombetti, 2013), they in turn can be petitioned for doing better justice to its intersubjective aspects (Maiese, 2014; though see also Chapter 7 of Colombetti, 2013, and Colombetti and Torrance, 2009). When affect is accounted for, it tends still to be done mainly in individualistic terms.

In order to explore the relation between intersubjectivity and affect, let us first disentangle the main ingredients of inter-affection: subjects (individuals, persons), their being affected, and that which enables their mutual affection. I will argue that inter-affection can be fully understood only if we bring together insights into self-affection,

---

[1] While there are many embodied approaches to intersubjectivity, in this paper I focus on the enactive account rooted in the autopoietic/autonomy tradition (e.g. Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991; Thompson, 2007; Di Paolo, 2005; Di Paolo, Rohde and De Jaegher, 2009) and first introduced in De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007).

embodiment, and interaction processes, and enlist elements from phenomenology and enactive cognitive science to do so. In particular, in this paper I bring together Michel Henry's work on self-affection and the *a priori* community, and the enactive notions of autonomy and participatory sense-making. The aim is to provide a contrastive analysis between Henry's ideas and those of enaction, so as to let them mutually inform each other.

The journey begins at Michel Henry's phenomenological criticism of intellectualist approaches to intersubjectivity, which, he argues, leave out important elements like those we encounter in love, desire, resentment, hate, and so on. What Henry complains about is precisely that inter-affection is missing in explanations of intersubjectivity. His own proposal, which I discuss below, is based on the ideas of self-affection and primordial community. The reader may straight away wonder: why start with Henry's idea of self-affection, which (as we will see below) implies a radical and complete immanence of the self and thus, surely, leads us directly to solipsism? How is any inter-affection possible here? But Henry's ideas are of interest to us here precisely because of how he helps us understand the first two elements of inter-affection, *viz.* the individual self and its being affected. But Henry also provides an account of inter-affection that, I think, can provide us with some important insights, even if it has some problems of its own. His view eventually leads him on a pilgrimage that ends in mystical Christianity — a move that can be criticized in its own right, but I will not do so here. Instead, I will argue that, with his ideas in hand, we may also take a more integrative approach to subjectivity and intersubjectivity — in the style of a natural philosophy approach that includes phenomenology, science, philosophy, practice, and application (*cf.* Thompson, 2001). The idea is that work in all these fields is needed to form a proper understanding of (inter-) subjectivity.

Henry's idea of self-affection connects well with the enactive notion of autonomy or autopoiesis. Autonomy and autopoiesis, however, are notions that give rise to a similar criticism as that of Henry, since they are also based on an idea of self-enclosure. How can we explain being affected by the world, including other people, if the basis of subjectivity, whether understood in terms of self-affection or of autonomy, is essentially closed upon itself? I will try to show that looking at Henry's concept of self-affection and enaction's notion of autonomy together may allow us to move forward in our quest to understand inter-affectivity. Henry's insistence upon the radical immanence of subjectivity and of individual experience may open up ways of understanding and including affectivity in the enactive theory

of intersubjectivity. On the other hand, discussing autopoiesis and autonomy may help open up Henry's existential solipsism and provide possible alternatives to his mysticism.

Towards the final parts of the paper, this discussion will open up the affective subject to inter-affectation, when I bring in notions of embodiment and of autonomous social interaction processes and their experience, as developed by Merleau-Ponty and enaction.

### Self-Affection and Primordial Community

Michel Henry, in a chapter entitled 'Pathos-With', criticizes Husserl's account of intersubjectivity in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation* for being overly intellectualist (Henry, 1990/2008; Husserl, 1931/1960). This criticism may be limited in the face of Husserl's overall account of intersubjectivity,<sup>2</sup> but it is of interest to us here as a critique of intellectualism in approaches to intersubjectivity in general. According to Henry, there is a problem if we only have access to an other from within and through our own intentionality. As he says, '[t]his is not the other but what is intended as the other; this is not the real other but the other in thought' (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 102). In other words, I cannot apprehend the other solely from within my thought processes, since, in this way, I overdetermine her. Henry finds this unsatisfying. He asks, *what is the experience of the other?* and responds, 'It is a desire seeking out some sort of response or nonresponse, an emotion before the reciprocity of this desire, a feeling of presence or absence, solitude, love, hate, resentment, boredom, forgiveness, exaltation, sorrow, joy, or wonder' (*ibid.*, pp. 103–4). Henry deems intellectualism unable to address this experience.

With regard to standard cognitive science research on social cognition too, researchers have wondered about the place of emotional and concerned engagement in it, if the only way we approach others is from within our own (apparatus for) understanding them, whether by applying a mindreading, simulation, or other kind of mechanism for figuring out their intentions (see, for example, Reddy and Morris, 2004). There are other reasons to criticize this view as well, as we know (see, among many others, Gallagher, 2001; 2007; Hutto, 2004; Ratcliffe, 2007; Stawarska, 2009; Leudar and Costall, 2011). Here, I want to focus on what Henry has to say, because the alternative he proposes is directly and primarily concerned with subjectivity and affectivity. He also provides an account of inter-affectivity. This has

[2] See also, for example, Husserl (1989). Behnke (2008), for instance, gives an interpretation that differs from Henry's.

its own limitations, but at the same time it has something to add that is otherwise easily overlooked in contemporary scientific approaches to intersubjectivity. I come back to it below.

Henry's way out of the problem of intellectualism is to propose that we form a basic, primordial community with others. For Henry, we share something rudimentary, namely life, which he characterizes as self-affection or *pathos*. Life manifests itself in each living being, and partaking in life, in self-affection, connects us with others primordially. If life is self-affection (*pathos*), and we share life, then affection and self-affection are basic to intersubjectivity, in the form of being an *a priori* community with others, a *pathos-with*. Let us unpack this.

First of all, Henry characterizes subjectivity at its most basic as self-affection (Henry, 1963/1973). Subjectivity, for him, is purely enveloped in itself, purely immanent. Before any intentionality, i.e. before referring or relating to the world, subjectivity is radically self-affective. Why is this so? As a phenomenologist, Henry is interested in understanding the way things appear to consciousness, and in order to properly ground experience, for Henry, it needs to be understood first in its pure form, that is, as self-affection. Self-affection is the pure self-relational feeling and movement of every living being's own life, 'a feeling of oneself in the suffering and enjoyment of one's own life' (Henry, 1990/2008, p. xii, translator's preface). Self-affection does not relate to anything but itself. It is only given to itself, but not in the way of being an object for itself. It has no object, no intentional given of experience. This is necessary because if self-affection were to be an object for itself, if it would have to go outside of itself, to disconnect from itself in order to access itself, this would already not be pure self-affection. Only on the basis of self-affection can we build a notion of experiencing at all, for experience that does not first apprehend itself does not apprehend anything (Henry, 1965/1975). Take the example of vision. A vision that does not first apprehend itself does not see anything (see also Barbaras, 1998). A robot does not see things, it only processes images. It is the humans around it that see and interpret the images and, Henry says, this is because they are self-affecting beings. As Zahavi puts it, what Henry does with the notion of self-affection is 'to insist on the existence of an absolute dimension of subjectivity, without which no hetero-manifestation<sup>3</sup> would be possible' (Zahavi, 1999, p. 114). Without first being self-affective, the

[3] Manifestation of something other than itself, reference to or relation with the 'world of objects'.

‘outside’ world could not manifest itself to us — we could not experience it.

From self-affection, Henry moves to inter-affection through what he calls the primordial community with others (Henry, 1990/2008). What connects us with others is that they also partake in life and in self-affection. This happens, again, before referring to the ‘outside’ world. If every living being is self-affective, and shares in life, then the primordial, *a priori* community with others is nothing more than this sharing of life. Since Henry describes life as self-affection or *pathos*, the community with others is a ‘*pathos-with*’ (Henry, 1990/2008). Since life manifests itself in each living being as self-affection, life is also the essence of community: ‘this single and essential reality of the community and its members [is] life... every community is a community of living beings’ (*ibid.*, p. 119). All this takes place at the level of affect, and Henry explicitly excludes the role of reason in community, saying that it isolates rather than connects. What has truly connecting power is affect: ‘suffering, joy, desire or love, even resentment or hate all carry an infinitely greater connecting force than what is usually attributed to Reason’ (Henry, 2004, p. 159, my translation).

Implied in Henry’s idea of community as an *a priori* is that we are, at one level, always connected (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 131). To illustrate this, for Henry the primordial community is what makes it possible for one’s life to be overturned by the writings of an unknown author who lived centuries ago (Henry, 2003, p. 207). It is because we share with him the fact of being a living being that we can be so affected by his words.

But I think the idea can also be conceived as a never-connecting. We share, we have in common, but we do not — *cannot* — connect in the sense of mutually affecting each other’s self-affective structure. This is because Henry’s conception of self-affection is radically immanent (Henry, 1965/1975). In a way, as self-affecting living beings, we always remain within our own sphere (see also Zahavi, 1999). The fact that we all belong to a class of self-affectors does not yet make us able to connect. Take, as an illustration of this, Henry’s remarks on erotic encounters:

What, then, really happens in erotic pairing? The caress follows the trail of the other’s pleasure. It calls upon the other’s pleasure but what it touches is the other’s body-object. It does not touch the other’s original body, which is radically subjective and radically immanent; it does not touch the other’s pleasure in itself, which is outside the world, indeed outside of every possible world. This is why the moment of intimate union and amorous fusion is paradoxically the moment in which the

lovers watch out for signs, scrutinize indications, and send signals.  
(Henry, 1990/2008, p. 131)

Thus, for Henry, subjectivity is radically outside the world — self-affection is absolutely immanent, as we have just seen. This seemingly leads to the conclusion that we can never really meet another. There is only fusion or abyss.

But then Henry distinguishes between the primal experience of community and meeting in the ‘real’ world, the world of objects. On the *a priori* community, he says:

If one must say a word here about the experience of the other, how is each one of the members of the community related to the others in life, prior to being related in a world? This primal experience is barely conceivable, because it escapes every thought... The community is a subterranean affective layer. Each one drinks the same water from this source and this wellspring, which it itself is. But, each one does so without knowledge and without distinguishing between the self, the other, and the basis. (*ibid.*, p. 133)

To this he contrasts meeting in the world: ‘When, instead... the relation between the living occurs through the mediation of the world, when the living look at one another, represent one another, and conceive one another as egos or alter egos, a new dimension of experience emerges that must be described in its own terms’ (*ibid.*, p. 133). He illustrates the latter with the example of the regard: ‘The regard, for example, is an affect, which is what enables it to be a desire. At any rate, that is why it regards what it does regard, seeking without fail to see what it wants to see. In seeing, there is always a nonseeing and thus something unseen that altogether determines it’ (*ibid.*, p. 133).

Thus, for Henry, we share a primal plane (that of self-affection and community, of sharing in life, which escapes every thought, every apprehension), and when we meet in the real world (which is a different realm from the *a priori* community), much of what the other is remains unseen, because she remains determined by us in our regard. Seeing another (in the world) is always as much determined by, on the one hand, what we want to see of her and, on the other, by the unseen, by that of her which we do not have access to. Taking these two elements of perceiving the other together — the other as determined by the seer, and the other determined by herself, but which the seer does not see — it seems that the other cannot but escape us. What I see of her is determined by me, and anything else of her, I do not see. Therefore, she is determined by me and really, as she, eludes me.

Henry’s account is based in the self-affection of each subject, which is shared by all of them. This fact connects them, on his account — it is

like an umbilical connection to what he also calls the ‘Absolute Life’ (Henry, 2003; 2004). He himself asks where the meeting in the real, physical world happens (the world grasped by consciousness, but which consciousness, on his account, is not itself part of), but does not provide an answer beyond the *a priori* community, which, in the end, leads to a Christian mystical vision, to a sharing in the life and body of Christ (Henry, 2003; 2004). Maybe the reason why Henry’s description of life, self-affection, and the primordial community is somewhat obscure and mysterious (for instance, what is the ‘subterranean layer’ that he talks about in the quote given above?) is that he believes that there is something un-knowable, ineffable, about it.

Whether or not we follow Henry on a mystical path (which is not a central question for our purposes, and I therefore do not address it further here), two questions arise. The first one is whether an opening can be made where we *are* able to mutually affect each other in the real world — where we change through and with others. The possibility should be explored that the other does not have to escape us. Between or besides the observer-determined seeing-of-the-other and the other-determined-by-himself to which the observer is blind, there may be a third element, which opens up a range of different kinds of ‘meetings’ — meetings that fail, meetings that come halfway, tragic meetings, happy ones, meetings that increase or diminish the desire to keep seeing each other, meetings in which you understand or care for each other to varying degrees, and so on. Perhaps between fusion and abyss a gradation of encountering exists.

In a way, Henry’s account of intersubjectivity has two elements, one which is intentional, observational, much like how he characterizes the intellectualism that he criticizes, and one, the shared primal community, which is not reflective or observational, but in a pre-intentional realm. Neither of them are places where we can make a difference to each other, get properly involved with each other, influence each other’s self-affection, affect each other. Henry’s subjects remain self-enclosed — so self-enclosed that they cannot be entered by another. And when he does discuss worldly inter-affection, he either leaves the question open, or tells us of his distrust of it, because — as he seems to see it — this is where the shameful aspects of sociality are possible; its lies, pretence, indifference, and the social rituals that mask them (Henry, 2003, p. 206). Henry does not thematize interactions in the real world much and this may be why he misses out on inter-affection in its most mutual form.

In contrast with this, I propose that we can enter into, prod, and affect one another’s affect and really, indeed, co-author intentions and



affects, both in positive and in negative ways, and that to understand this we need to look at real-world interactions.

What I have done up to now is to introduce Henry's ideas of self-affection and *a priori* community, as well as opened up the question of whether, besides and perhaps from these, we can envisage true mutuality in inter-affection. The second question that now arises is whether we can give an encompassing account — that is, an account that does justice to the experience of such inter-affection as well as of its processes, by giving us both scientific and phenomenological handles on it. Such an account should allow us to investigate the spectrum of intersubjective affection that we have now reached, ranging from how we determine one another, to mutually affecting one another, to the maintenance of a self-determination and alterity. I will suggest that we can and, moreover, that Henry's perhaps strange starting points can in fact be brought into a fruitful dialogue with such an account. But before introducing this, a few further phenomenological excursions along the path are imminent.

### Stepping Towards Each Other

Intersubjectivity in this more engaged, practical, everyday sense — those times in our social life when we are transcendent to each other, but also those when we truly affect one another — for Henry, is graspable '[w]hen the human being is no longer enclosed in itself in a pseudo-interiority as if it were in a box it cannot escape, and when the human being is understood as a being-in-the-world and thus as being among things and with others' (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 124). Doing this would, in a way, resolve the problem of the other (see also, among others, Gallagher, 2001; Gurwitsch, 1979; Merleau-Ponty, 1988/2010) but, as we have seen, Henry himself remains encapsulated in a certain abstracted attitude that makes it hard to envisage how we can reach into one another. Nevertheless, precisely Henry's affect-layer, the basic self-affection of every living organism, gets us on the road to inter-affection. If Henry's self-affection indeed de-intellectualizes accounts of intersubjectivity and brings in affect as its basis, this brings us somewhat closer to accounting for what it means to make a difference to each other and to move each other. For what Henry installs with this is how, in the first place, things can make a difference at all, how they can mean something to us, namely: not unless there is self-affection and this self-affection is affective (*pathic*).

Another important step in taking the subject out of his interiority is to incarnate him, i.e. to take him out of the reflective mode and into the

pre-reflective body. This reshapes the problem of other minds, as we see in the work of Merleau-Ponty. Dillon describes it well when he discusses Merleau-Ponty's ontology of intersubjectivity. He says, '[t]here is a problem of other minds because others are conceived as minds; as soon as others are regarded as incarnate in their bodies, the problem disappears' (Dillon, 1988, p. 114). Indeed, when subjects (and thus also 'others') are conceived as embodied and unitary (mind and body at one), what they intend and feel becomes visible. Embodiment, for Merleau-Ponty, is a condition of possibility for intersubjectivity. In and through our bodies, we express intentions, and it is also our bodies that make us able to perceive intentions in others. The body manifests elements of both ipseity and alterity — it is both familiar and foreign to us at the same time, and thus it carries within it something of the dually-determined experience of the other we have seen above. And while we may never fully know ourselves, others may perceive intentions of ours that we were not aware of.

Merleau-Ponty, like Henry, is critical of overly intellectual accounts of intersubjectivity. In order to improve the situation, Merleau-Ponty brings the body into intersubjectivity, finds our feet and puts them firmly on the ground, so that now we can take a step closer to each other (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012; 1988/2010).

### Interacting

There is still an element missing before we can do full justice to the inter-affection in our encounters with others. Visibility of intentions, even of subjects affective to the core, requires no more than two individuals facing each other: one expressing, the other perceiving the expressed. For this, a static situation suffices. But such a situation still does not let us influence each other. If there were only this, inter-affection is not yet possible, because there is no interaction (De Jaegher, 2009). To properly step into each other's sphere of affect and signification, we cannot remain 'individuals over against others' (as in intellectualist accounts), or individuals in a primordial community (as for Henry). The inter-affectivity that we have been searching throughout this piece can only be grasped if we get a clearer understanding of the role of interaction processes and their experience in it.

Consider, to illustrate the need for grasping interaction as part of this story, the famous experiment by Murray and Trevarthen (1986), in which 2-month-old infants and their mothers interact with each other via a live video link, while each is in a different room. After a short while of interacting well, the infant gets to see, instead of a live

image of his mother, a replay of what she did earlier in the interaction. At this point, the infant gets upset. But in the replay situation, the infant still sees an expressive mother. So why is he troubled? One hypothesis is that it is because the infant is now unable to engage in interaction. There is no more live contingency. It seems that interacting is central to connecting, besides expressing on the one hand, and the perception of expressive behaviour on the other.

### Inter-affection

Now that the elements of inter-affection — subjectivity, affection, and social interaction — are laid out, are we there? Not quite yet. While we have indicated its importance, we have not yet said much about *why* social interaction is so crucial, about what its precise role is in inter-affection. In order to get this clear, it will be helpful to — for a moment — translate the issues we are dealing with into enactive theory, which starts from a similar set of elements as that identified for inter-affection. This will allow us to make some new theoretical connections to further our insights into inter-affectivity.

By enactive theory, I refer here to the school of thought initiated by Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) and further elaborated by, among others, Thompson (2007), and Di Paolo (2005; Di Paolo, Rohde and De Jaeger, 2010). My reference to the work of Merleau-Ponty and Henry in this paper is not coincidental. The two can each take a leaf out of the other's book, and the way in which they complement each other aligns well with an important pillar of the enactive approach. While Henry can provide Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment with animation and self-affection (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999), Merleau-Ponty provides Henry with a real body, a capable, actually moving, situated body.<sup>4</sup> This combination fits well with enactive principles.

First of all, for enaction, subjects are understood as self-producing and self-maintaining. They are seen as networks of processes that in turn generate the very same network, under precarious conditions. This is characterized as the system's autonomy (Varela, 1979; 1991;

[4] Henry indeed provides a *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* (1965/1975, see also Henry, 1963/1973), but he is so focused on the conditions of experience in self-affection that he does not reach an account of the living body in the world. See also Zahavi (1999, p. 115) for a similar criticism of Henry's phenomenology of the body. This is why Henry's work, for my purposes here, benefits from being complemented with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body — a body that is more transactional, never separate from the world, always involved in the world (see also Barbaras, 1998, who discusses precisely this tension and contrast between Henry and Merleau-Ponty's work).

1997; Weber and Varela, 2002; Di Paolo, 2005). The clearest example of this is the biological, living body and its explanation in terms of autopoiesis, but the same idea also applies to other cases (see Di Paolo, 2009). This notion is, at first sight at least, closely related to Henry's idea of self-affection, i.e. to a subjectivity that in the first place relates to itself.<sup>5</sup> Closure plays an important role both in Henry's concept of self-affection and in the enactive notion of autonomy or autopoiesis. In terms of Henry's idea of self-affection, the closure guarantees that the subject can experience anything at all, by grounding it in self-affection, as we have seen above. Similarly, enaction conceives as cognizers or sense-makers those beings whose norms come from the constraints of self-production and self-maintenance. The closure in the first case is affective, in the second, it is organizational. In both accounts, it is a condition for subjectivity.

The second element — subjects' affection, their being affected — is most closely related to the enactive notion of sense-making. Sense-making describes how subjects relate to the world in terms of the normativity that arises from their precarious self-constituting bodies (Di Paolo, 2005; Thompson, 2007; Thompson and Stapleton, 2009). It is the relational process of signification between an autonomous, self-organizing subject and the world, on which she has a certain perspective based in her self-organization, which entails certain needs and concerns. An upshot of this is that what subjects do is always, whether directly or indirectly, in some way related to their self-maintenance (understood, as I have said, not only in a biological sense), and thus also emotional and affective (Colombetti, 2007; 2010). Similarly, Henry's subjects are always self-affective. The primordial layer of self-affection is always there, and forms the condition of possibility for experience in the real world. Enactive self-organization always happens in a specific body, making for a specific perspective on the world, based in what is relevant for the continued self-maintenance. For beings that self-organize and self-maintain, encounters with the world are imbued with care and concern — things matter for subjects because their interactions with the world can mean the difference

[5] This connection was proposed by Ezequiel Di Paolo, in a presentation given in 2010 entitled 'The Social Invisible', at the Embodiment, Intersubjectivity and Psychopathology International Conference, University of Heidelberg, 30 September–2 October 2010. Answering the question of precisely how this connection works needs further research, because for transcendental phenomenologists, including Henry, processes like self-production and self-maintenance on the one hand, and subjectivity on the other are situated in two entirely different realms. It is precisely one of enaction's contentions, however, that investigating these different levels will be mutually informative (see, for example, Thompson and Varela, 2001).

between life and death. This requires at the same time a physical openness to the world, through which the living being can get what it needs for itself to keep living. Thus, organizational closure is joined by a material and energetic openness.

As for the third element of social interactions; from an enactive perspective, they are particular processes, which can take on a 'life of their own'. Social interactions are conceived as patterns of coordination that can sustain themselves in an encounter between subjects, who themselves do not lose their own autonomy while coordinating with others (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2007). Thus, when two subjects meet, the meeting itself (i.e. the set of processes of coordinating, co-regulating, coupling, etc.) can influence the individuals' intentions, over and above what they can do with and to each other (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2007; De Jaegher, Di Paolo and Gallagher, 2010). This is the idea of the autonomy of the social interaction process. It is only when we understand the process of engaging as having itself an autonomy (i.e. its course is underdetermined by individual actions) that we can conceive of a meeting of subjects that goes deeper than a reciprocal expression and perception of intentions. If sense-making is embodied through and through, and the interaction process is considered an effective factor through its self-maintenance as a process (i.e. an interaction process can, like the individuals engaged in it, be organized such that it self-maintains), then individual intentions can be created and transformed when individuals interact. Another way to put it is that subjects can participate in each other's sense-making (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2007). That is, in their encounters with each other, through the sometimes occurring autonomy of the interactions they engage in, subjects can generate and transform meanings that they could not have had alone. Social interactions play all kinds of roles, including enabling and constitutive ones, in the individual processes that underlie mutual understanding (De Jaegher and Froese, 2009; De Jaegher, Di Paolo and Gallagher, 2010). Interactions are not simply bits of information to be processed by individual cognizers, but rather, interaction processes move the participants in their sense-making activities, and these include affect. These forms of coordination happen directly in the interaction, not through an informational screen that needs to be processed by individual cognitive mechanisms (De Jaegher, Di Paolo and Gallagher, 2010).

There is no barrier to thinking that participatory sense-making cannot go even deeper than being part of the processes of mutual understanding and reach directly into the precarious network of self-maintaining processes that constitutes a subject's identity. Thus, our

encounters with others may not only modulate our very self-maintenance, but to some extent even enable and constrain it. This means that the constitution of our subjectivity can be strongly dependent on the history of social encounters. Thus, social interactions not only modulate us, they partly make us into who we are (see also de Haan, 2010; Kyselo, 2014). Of course, what exactly forms part of the constitution of subjectivity would need to be determined, but we have, for example, proposed that social interactions can affect how neural mechanisms are constituted in development (Di Paolo and De Jaegher, 2012; see also Trevarthen, 1989).

Now, to translate this back into the terms of our previous discussion. Henry missed something by staying away from real-world interactions. He could have found there aspects of how we mutually affect each other (and not only the negative ones). Merleau-Ponty suggests that we can mutually affect each other when he says that, for example, in appreciating a landscape, ‘it suffices that I look at [it], that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 142). His account is also reminiscent of Henry’s, however, when he further says that ‘it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property of the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever’ (*ibid.*).

Enactive theorizing shows that social interaction processes can reach into the core of our self-constitution. This would mean that in and through social interaction processes we can truly affect each other — even affect each other’s self-affection, *pace* Henry. That this may indeed be the case is illustrated, for instance, in research showing that social interactions can influence humour in infants and the development of self-conscious emotions (Reddy, 2001; 2003; 2008); that interactions with close others can modulate pain experience (House, Landis and Umberson, 1988; Turk, Kerns and Rosenberg, 1992; Krahe *et al.*, 2013); and that good marital relationships can make a spouse’s wounds heal faster, while difficult relations can slow down their healing (Kiecolt-Glaser *et al.*, 2005; Gouin *et al.*, 2010).

Thus, worldly inter-affectivity is in embodied, affective subjects’ social interactions and their experience.

Enactive theory establishes that we can literally participate in each other’s sense-making and, by implication, can affect the ongoing processes that give rise to our autonomy. We may be simply affected, we may become dependent on others, our autonomies may be at risk

because of others (Kyselo, 2012). If we link the self-enclosure of enactive self-production to that of Henry's self-affection, we see that there is no paradox, because we can also link the openness of sense-making to the openness to the world of bodily intentionality. Enclosure as a process at the basis of the constitution of subjectivity relies on, is affected by, and is eventually also constituted by relations with the world and with others.

Participatory sense-making, then, fundamentally allows us to reach into each other's self-affection. It is not only the case that we share self-affection with others merely by virtue of being living beings. Our self-constitution and our self-affection open up through our embodied interactions with others. Thus, self-constitution and self-affection happen with and through others while — importantly and basically — at the same time always retaining an aspect of closure. This is probably why inter-affection does not always happen instantly, but can sometimes take time, and also why we always remain 'other' and different to each other to an extent as well.

In fact, the most transformative changes in social encounters are probably those that affect one's self-affection. And here, as I mentioned, Henry makes an important point that is worth holding onto. We can theorize how we can affect each other that deeply, we can scientifically research it, measure its effects, but something remains elusive. Henry reminds us that human encounters are in part mysterious. Everyone in the throes of inter-affection knows this. The discussion of embodiment and enaction may thus allow for a new perspective on the phenomenon where Henry left us in existential solitude. In Henry's analysis of love-making in his chapter on *pathos-with* (Henry, 1990/2008), there seems to be little place for surrender, giving in, becoming subject to pleasure, resonating, melting into each other. However, both surrender and conscious, careful attention for where and whether pleasure happens can be part of a sexual encounter. Henry seems to overly focus on the latter, on scrutinizing where pleasure takes place. He concludes: 'the stronger and more unifying the associative pairing is... the more evident will be the alterity growing in it and opening up the abyss that forever separates the two places, namely, the one where the pleasure is pleasure and the one where it is presumed to be so. It is in and through this abyss that the other is the other' (*ibid.*, p. 132). But this abyss is one space of the erotic encounter. Henry is right about its existence, but at the same time, participation can really happen. Abyss, fusion (as seen above), and participation can all form part of the sexual encounter. Each can occur sometimes. Of course, sometimes an erotic encounter is not even especially connected or

disconnected. Or involves all of these. The point I want to make here, in order to supplement Henry, is that it *is* possible to partake in the other's pleasure — that, besides consciously, expressly, maybe anxiously searching for where pleasure is for the other, and besides now and then encountering the abyss between us, there also really is participation, sharing, and joint creating of pleasure, and knowing where it is without having to searchlight it. We can partake in each other's pleasure, and know, together, how it is, because we mutually affect each other and jointly make love, not just there and then, in the moment, but also in how this experience inscribes itself in our bodies and in our developing feelings for each other. This sharing in inter-affectivity comes through participating in a process that is not simply the summation of individual activities, but a jointly created and literally embodied pattern that affects each of our affections.

On the backdrop of this analysis, we also get a new perspective on lovesickness, a paradoxical feeling familiar to many of us. It seems a simultaneous enjoyment and suffering of one own's life, one's living self-affection as modulated, transformed, moved, upturned by another in the ebbs and flows of an intricate and intimate real-life encounter. It thus hints at the simultaneous existence of solitude and inter-affectivity, both equally existential.

In sum, considering — as enaction does — the interaction process as an effective factor (besides self- and other-determination) and sense-making as embodied and affective, makes it possible to understand how we move and affect each other. In every interaction, you push the other, move her, prod her, and she does the same to you. Because your sense-making exists in moving (in) your world and being moved by it, when we move each other, we participate in each other's sense-making. Thus, real connection, where we affect each other, is in moving together, literally and metaphorically.

### Final Remarks

I aimed to investigate an under-studied aspect of intersubjectivity: inter-affectivity. Bringing together work by Henry on self-affection and primordial community, by Merleau-Ponty on embodiment, and enactive concepts of subjectivity and participatory sense-making, I have proposed that the self-affection of embodied subjects is co-constituted in interaction, that subjects and interactions make, constrain, and enable each other, and that these processes are intrinsic to intersubjectivity and to mutually affecting each other.



In order to do so, I have had to modify Henry's conception of self-affectation, and to open it up in a way that seems — initially at least — similar to how an autonomous system's organizational closure is necessarily also open. I am aware that this may not be in line with all of Henry scholarship, and may be criticized from that field. Nor have I addressed all the precise connections, similarities, and differences between the issues of closure and openness in Henry's thought on the one hand and in enactive theory on the other. These remain to be further investigated. But my aim here was to investigate inter-affectivity, and to let Henry and enaction speak to each other in ways that might move us beyond an under-connected conception of intersubjectivity.

With respect to Henry's mysticism, I have suggested that another option is to take an integrative naturalistic approach (in the widest sense, including materiality, phenomenology, and perhaps even spirituality) to inter-affectation. I have argued that, speaking to Henry's argument, enaction may provide a possibly extended explanation of inter-affectivity, different to a mystic one, but one in which the ineffable and mysterious aspects of our intersubjectivity may have a place. In turn, for enactive theorizing, Henry opens up realms that it has so far not been able to speak about much: that same ineffable mystery in our encounters with each other. In line with this, recent work by Koubová (2014) brings to light an element of what she calls 'invisible excess of sense' in social interactions. She argues that the secret, the unknown, the hidden, the mysterious, and the ineffable have their own place in intersubjectivity, precisely *as* silent, invisible elements. The conclusion of this would be that understanding and affecting each other happens in figuring each other out, in interacting with each other, and in leaving each other be.

Henry's work also prompted a discussion of inter-affectivity in sexual encounters. Theorizing embodied intersubjectivity only skirts around the deepest aspects of the issue if it does not also address the theme of encountering another's body in the most intimate of ways. This excursion was thus a welcome one for enactive work on intersubjectivity, and one that certainly also deserves further research.

Inter-affectivity encompasses a range of ways in which we affect each other, from determining another in trying to grasp her emotions or intentions, over maintaining one's alterity in the face of another, to the deep mutual affection that can happen in intimate encounters. In this paper, I have focused on here-and-now, face-to-face meetings. But given this analysis, we may also start to rethink interactions across longer times and at greater distances. When, for example, fictional characters or people who are far away move us, this may be under-

stood in ways that rely on similar principles as the ones I described as constitutive of inter-affection in face-to-face encounters. Claiming that interaction is necessary for inter-affection does not entail that there has to be face-to-face interaction in each and every instance of inter-affectivity. Inter-affection is based, in part, on sharing with others some basic and primordial conditions of subjectivity, along the lines of Henry's self-affection and enaction's self-production and self-maintenance. However, what is also needed for this to work across time and space are the subjects who, *as* subjects — i.e. as self-organizing, self-maintaining, and self-affecting sense-makers — are present in situations of mutual affection, and thus able and likely to be affected.

These two inextricably intertwined points can also be illustrated with the example from Murray and Trevarthen's research discussed above. Here, a question might be: isn't what causes the infant to be upset (to be affected) the *absence* of interaction? Can we then speak of inter-affection in this case? I would say yes, since it is only on the background of interacting that its absence is so painful for the infant. If mother and infant are not allowed to come to an episode of engaging (interacting) well before the infant's monitor is switched to the replay, the effect disappears (Nadel *et al.*, 1999). The effect only exists within the context of interactive experience, and I would argue that this is because of our developmental and existential background of being thoroughly interactive, affective beings.

What I hope to have shown is that, in the gaps between under- and overdetermining each other, and between intellectualist accounts and ones that presuppose connection, it is possible to grasp how we affect each other. This can be done by giving due to social interaction processes, including their experience, between subjects understood as constitutively embodied, intersubjective, and affective. Only then can we understand *inter-subjectivity*.

### *Acknowledgments*

This paper owes a lot to stimulating discussions with and involvement of, in the first place, Ezequiel Di Paolo, and also Elena Cuffari, Graciela Fainstein Lamuedra, Mario Lipsitz, Beata Stawarska, the editors of this special issue Andreas Roepstorff and Glenda Satne, the audiences at 'Intersubjectivity as Interaction: In the Footsteps of Merleau-Ponty' (Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 6–7 June 2013) and at the 'Symposium Internacional Tendencias Actuales en Cognición Social y Neurofenomenología' (Universidad Diego Postales, Santiago de Chile, 24 October 2014), and three

anonymous reviewers. Any mistakes or misconceptions, and the views expressed here, remain of course my own. This one is for you, Doran Osterhold. Financial support came from Marie-Curie ITN TESIS: Toward an Embodied Science of InterSubjectivity (FP7-PEOPLE-2010-ITN-264828), and Spanish Government project El concepto de autonomía en bioética e investigación biomédica, MICINN (FFI2008-06348-C02-02/FISO).

## References

- Barbaras, R. (1998) *Le Tournant de l'Expérience. Recherches sur la Philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin.
- Behnke, E. (2008) Interkinaesthetic affectivity: A phenomenological approach, *Continental Philosophy Review*, **41** (2), pp. 143–161.
- Colombetti, G. (2007) Enactive appraisal, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **6**, pp. 527–546.
- Colombetti, G. (2010) Enaction, sense-making and emotion, in Stewart, J., Gapenne, O. & Paolo, E.D. (eds.) *Enaction: Towards a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Colombetti, G. (2013) *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Colombetti, G. & Torrance, S. (2009) Emotion and ethics: An inter-(en)active approach, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **8** (4), pp. 505–526.
- de Haan, S.E. (2010) The minimal self is a social self, in Fuchs, T., Sattel, H. & Henningsen, P. (eds.) *The Embodied Self: Dimensions, Coherence, and Disorders*, Stuttgart: Schattauer Verlag.
- De Jaegher, H. (2009) Social understanding through direct perception? Yes, by interacting, *Consciousness and Cognition*, **18** (2), pp. 535–542.
- De Jaegher, H. & Di Paolo, E. (2007) Participatory sense-making: An enactive approach to social cognition, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **6** (4), pp. 485–507.
- De Jaegher, H. & Froese, T. (2009) On the role of social interaction in individual agency, *Adaptive Behavior*, **17** (5), pp. 444–460.
- De Jaegher, H., Di Paolo, E. & Gallagher, S. (2010) Can social interaction constitute social cognition?, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, **14** (10), pp. 441–447.
- Dillon, M.C. (1988) *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Di Paolo, E.A. (2005) Autopoiesis, adaptivity, teleology, agency, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **4** (4), pp. 97–125.
- Di Paolo, E.A. (2009) Extended life, *Topoi*, **28** (1), pp. 9–21.
- Di Paolo, E., Rohde, M. & De Jaegher, H. (2010) Horizons for the enactive mind: Values, social interaction, and play, in Stewart, J., Gapenne, O. & Di Paolo, E. (eds.) *Enaction: Towards a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Di Paolo, E.A. & De Jaegher, H. (2012) The interactive brain hypothesis, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, **6** (163).
- Gallagher, S. (2001) The practice of mind: Theory, simulation or primary interaction?, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, **8** (5–7), pp. 83–108.
- Gallagher, S. (2007) Simulation trouble, *Social Neuroscience*, **2** (3–4), pp. 353–365.

- Gouin, J.-P., Carter, C.S., Pournajafi-Nazarloo, H., Glaser, R., Malarkey, W.B., Loving, T.J., *et al.* (2010) Marital behavior, oxytocin, vasopressin, and wound healing, *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, **35** (7), pp. 1082–1090.
- Gurwitsch, A. (1979) *Human Encounters in the Social World*, Kersten, F. (trans.), Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Henry, M. (1963/1973) *The Essence of Manifestation*, Etzkorn, G. (trans.), The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Henry, M. (1965/1975) *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, Etzkorn, G. (trans.), The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Henry, M. (1990/2008) *Material Phenomenology*, Davidson, S. (trans.), New York: Fordham University Press.
- Henry, M. (2003) *Phénoménologie de la Vie I: De la Phénoménologie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Henry, M. (2004) *Phénoménologie de la Vie, IV: Sur l'Éthique et la Religion*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- House, J.S., Landis, K.R. & Umberson, D. (1988) Social relationships and health, *Science*, **241** (4865), pp. 540–545.
- Husserl, E. (1931/1960) *Cartesian Meditations*, Cairns, D. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Husserl, E. (1989) *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy — Second Book*, Rojecewicz, R. & Schuwer, A. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Hutto, D.D. (2004) The limits of spectatorial folk psychology, *Mind and Language*, **19** (5), pp. 548–573.
- Kiecolt-Glaser, J.K., Loving, T.J., Stowell, J.R., Malarkey, W.B., Lemeshow, S., Dickinson, S.L., *et al.* (2005) Hostile marital interactions, proinflammatory cytokine production, and wound healing, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, **62** (12), pp. 1377–1384.
- Koubová, A. (2014) Invisible excess of sense in social interaction, *Frontiers in Psychology*, **5**.
- Krahé, C., Springer, A., Weinman, J.A. & Fotopoulou, A. (2013) The social modulation of pain: Others as predictive signals of salience — A systematic review, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, **7**.
- Kyselo, M. (2012) *From Body to Self — Towards a Socially Enacted Autonomy, With Implications for Locked-in Syndrome and Schizophrenia*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Osnabrück, Germany.
- Kyselo, M. (2014) The body social: An enactive approach to the self, *Frontiers in Psychology*, **5**.
- Leudar, I. & Costall, A. (2011) *Against Theory of Mind*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Maiese, M. (2014) Review of Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind, Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, in press, doi:10.1007/s11097-014-9393-8.
- Matovic, D., Koch, A.S. & Forgas, J.P. (2014) Can negative mood improve language understanding? Affective influences on the ability to detect ambiguous communication, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, **52** (0), pp. 44–49.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945/2012) *Phenomenology of Perception*, Landes, D.A. (trans.), London: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*, Lingis, A. (trans.), Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1988/2010) *Child Psychology and Pedagogy: The Sorbonne Lectures 1949–1952*, Welsh, T. (trans.), Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

- Murray, L. & Trevarthen, C. (1986) The infant's role in mother–infant communication, *Journal of Child Language*, **13**, pp. 15–29.
- Nadel, J., Carchon, I., Kervella, C., Marcelli, D. & Réserbat-Plantey, D. (1999) Expectancies for social contingency in 2-month-olds, *Developmental Science*, **2** (2), pp. 164–173.
- Ratcliffe, M. (2007) *Rethinking Commonsense Psychology: A Critique of Folk Psychology, Theory of Mind and Simulation*, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reddy, V. (2001) Infant clowns: The interpersonal creation of humour in infancy, *Enfance*, **3**, pp. 247–256.
- Reddy, V. (2003) On being the object of attention: Implications for self–other consciousness, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, **7** (9), pp. 397–402.
- Reddy, V. (2008) *How Infants Know Minds*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Reddy, V. & Morris, P. (2004) Participants don't need theories: Knowing minds in engagement, *Theory & Psychology*, **14** (5), pp. 647–665.
- Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1999) *The Primacy of Movement*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Stawarska, B. (2009) *Between You and I*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Thompson, E. (2001) Empathy and consciousness, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, **8** (5–7), pp. 1–32.
- Thompson, E. (2007) *Mind in Life*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Thompson, E. & Varela, F.J. (2001) Radical embodiment: Neural dynamics and consciousness, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, **5** (10), pp. 418–425.
- Thompson, E. & Stapleton, M. (2009) Making sense of sense-making: Reflections on enactive and extended mind theories, *Topoi*, **28** (1), pp. 23–30.
- Trevarthen, C. (1989) Development of early social interactions and the affective regulation of brain growth, in von Euler, C., Forssberg, H. & Lagercrantz, H. (eds.) *Neurobiology of Early Infant Behaviour*, vol. 5, New York: Stockton.
- Turk, D.C., Kerns, R.D. & Rosenberg, R. (1992) Effects of marital interaction on chronic pain and disability: Examining the down side of social support, *Rehabilitation Psychology*, **37** (4), pp. 259–274.
- Varela, F.J. (1979) *Principles of Biological Autonomy*, New York: Elsevier (North Holland).
- Varela, F.J. (1991) Organism: A meshwork of selfless selves, in Tauber, A. (ed.) *Organism and the Origin of Self*, pp. 79–107, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Varela, F.J. (1997) Patterns of life: Intertwining identity and cognition, *Brain and Cognition*, **34**, pp. 72–87.
- Varela, F.J. Thompson, E. & Rosch, E. (1991) *The Embodied Mind*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Weber, A. & Varela, F.J. (2002) Life after Kant: Natural purposes and the autopoietic foundations of biological individuality, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **1** (2), pp. 97–125.
- Zahavi, D. (1999) *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.