

The study of Marion's Painting Theory

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Abstract. Marion's painting philosophy primarily addresses the dialectical unity between the visible and the invisible, suggesting that neither can be deemed more "real" than the other. Instead, they act as mutual validations of each other's existence. The concept of visibility is constrained by human perceptions and physical limitations, often leading individuals to see only what aligns with their desires and past experiences. This selective perception underscores the inherent limitations or "void" within visibility. Marion quotes in her book: "Fire in water, divinity in humanity, paradoxes arise from the intervention of the visible in the realm of the invisible." This highlights why philosophical discussions on painting inevitably involve introspection. Artistic creation is about transforming the visible into the invisible and then manifesting the invisible as visible. Throughout this transformation, individual consciousness merges with collective human consciousness, allowing art to preserve its uniqueness within the broader narrative of art history and to establish its own value. This personal perspective can also be termed as one's gaze, a human attribute adept at self-justification and pattern creation within one's cognition. Through vision, we acknowledge the 'void of visibility,' which becomes a dense, chaotic mass at the moment of observation, generating an 'invisible void'—the brain organizes the visible and extends it into the invisible, blending the unseen into the seen.

Keywords: the visible, the invisible, paradoxes, gazing, perspective

1. Introduction

Marion's painting philosophy primarily addresses the dialectical unity between the visible and the invisible, suggesting that neither can be deemed more "real" than the other. Instead, they act as mutual validations of each other's existence. The concept of visibility is constrained by human perceptions and physical limitations, often leading individuals to see only what aligns with their desires and past experiences. This selective perception underscores the inherent limitations or "void" within visibility.

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2. Main Part

Gazing is a crucial function, enabling the release of the invisible from the visible. Both the visible and the invisible form integral parts of an individual, allowing self-reflection through observation. The invisible represents people's idealization, a logical void that always exists a step behind the visible, denoting depth within coordinates. In contrast, amidst this void, through observation, individuals craft a 'visible void.' Conversely, Chen Hui contends that "the act of gazing merely utilizes the invisible to organize the visible, thereby rendering the visible more perceptible." In other words, the unveiling of the invisible goes hand in hand with interpretation, which is perceived as making phenomena visible.

Through perspective, prominence is stimulated, forming a process where people perceive the visible and extend it into the invisible through a framework. Gazing acts like flesh to a skeleton's bones. However, this flesh is not the original but one reconstructed from the skeleton, derived from the initial visible but nurtured by the invisible transformed through visibility. Marion often uses perspective in her book to highlight the paradox that arises in the process before the visible and invisible completely retreat. That is, perspective is not truth but a rule organized by humans within their cognitive boundaries. Just as focal perspective in Western painting or scattered perspective in Eastern painting, neither is absolutely right or wrong; both are manifestations under the enhancement of the invisible by the visible. The dominion of the invisible over the visible leads to varied interpretations of the same artwork by different viewers. The creators offer clues, and through these clues, viewers engage with the artwork, experiencing the creators' illusions through their own. Marion discusses proactive saturation in overinterpretation, where people are constantly immersed in saturation as if they are submerged or overwhelmed daily. But at this moment, saturation belongs to the invisible, enabling the visible through the creator.

Painting is a record of the self, capturing the perceptible through repetitive actions. Hill mentions, "From the perspective of life phenomenology, art mystically frees the artist or viewer from Kant's epistemological confines of time and space. Life phenomenology is a philosophy characterized by an inner and infinite purity." [2] This represents the overflowing absence of the visible, where the images in artworks are the culmination of the creator's initial experiences with the visible, an overflow after the saturation of the invisible. [1] Zhong Xia states in her article, "The concept of the saturation phenomenon draws inspiration from Kant's views on the sublime, where, in Kant's aesthetics, 'beauty is an affirmative pleasure.'" [5] Aesthetics, being sensory, fosters the birth of art. In artworks, this overflow lacks a visible void or invisibility; it contains only the creator themselves.

People are persuaded by their own gaze, a conviction that empowers the gaze further, intensifying the visible in relation to the invisible. Marion writes in her book, "The enhancement of the visible is directly proportional to the invisible. The stronger the invisible, the more profound the visible becomes." Jia Bochen states in his article that Marion was greatly influenced by Merleau-Ponty's views on how the invisible completes the visible. He also mentions, "Infusing the invisible into the visible, softening the visible, and endowing it with a spatial form, amplifies the visibility." [3] In the real world, before gazing, people observe and select the images they need through their gaze. This is precisely the daily endeavor of the creator, who, with the aid of his eyes or mechanical forces, captures the visible, i.e., the material, in his brain. The choice of material originates from the creator's transformation of the visible to the invisible, becoming the foundation. This part might represent a single moment or a sequence composed of many frozen frames. The base is enhanced by the painter's choice. However, most people can only see what they want to see, a tendency difficult for creators to alter. Thus, people are likely living in landscapes of their own creation, collecting limited and biased materials.

Viewing paintings offers an opportunity to transcend these limitations. In paintings, what people witness is the transformation of the invisible into the visible, a scenario manifested through the painter's gaze, which infuses new meanings into the visible and disrupts the established boundaries of visibility. The painter "refines" their work, bringing forth the unseen that follows the invisible; the invisible remains perpetually hidden, whereas the unseen is merely temporarily obscured. Through their desire to express and create, the painter renders it visible. In the realm of the unseen, the unseen exists without form, representing an abundance in relation to the visible where only the unseen prevails. The painter determines the existence of the unseen, endowing it with the capacity to manifest, decreeing that the unseen can become visible. It is precisely the painter's vision, imbued with the unseen, that fulfills the painter's prophesy—that the unseen will, at some future point, become visible. In this moment, the painter acts as a conduit, a seer interpreting another dimension of reality.

In "Genesis", it is noted, "The painter toils amidst the enigmatic darkness of chaos." This state of chaos predates the separation of the waters above from those below. The painter's vocation is fraught with the risk of disorientation. This disorientation arises from the painter's conviction of having perceived the unseen, thereby clashing with the tangible world. Artistic endeavor is akin to a series of plunges, continuously oscillating between what is visible above and beneath the water's surface. They observe what is apparent to most yet remains concealed. However, extended immersion beneath the surface may lead painters to overlook that the reality above should serve as their lifeblood, progressively asphyxiating in the abyss of the unseen until they ultimately relinquish their grip on this realm. Alternatively, it could be posited that transitioning from the netherworld to the realm of the living is akin to an artistic rebirth.

The unseen is a revelation that springs from the visible. The painter's unseen emerges from the invisible, where the painter merely receives and presents without foreknowledge of what the future may hold. Without envisaging the unseen, for the unseen is always that which remains unencountered. The unseen is the precursor to the visible, unveiling itself through disappearance. For the painter, creation traverses the unseen, braving the unpredictable. Creation that is foreseeable is often dismissed as mere replication and imitation, frequently devoid of the painter's genuine desire. Conversely, this desire is fraught with peril, ensnaring the painter in a vacuum devoid of reality, as if inadvertently engaging an anesthetic mode for the artist. In the throes of desire, the painter disregards his physical well-being, succumbing to the compulsion to create. The painter extracts the unseen from the invisible, thus possessing the autonomy to unveil this new realm of the unseen. Motivated by desire, indifferent to whether the newfound world before him is a cursed Pandora's Box, yet unveiling it. Having glimpsed a facet of the world, one cannot forget; everything observed will eternally endure scrutiny and contemplation.

The real essence of painting is apprehended by the visible, as the painter does not exert control over the painting. The painter, as the creator, merely engages in the act of painting, and often feels a sense of surprise upon completion, as if encountering his own creation for the first time. The painting, once completed, becomes distinct from its creator, embodying a notion that creation is driven not by a predetermined motive but by the amplification of the visible through the invisible. The painter serves as a guide through the artwork, navigating his own artistic journey, poised between delving beneath the surface and resurfacing for creation. It is akin to wandering into a forest, an artistic wilderness, where getting lost becomes a means to profound understanding, confronting the unfamiliar, the non-existent, the unpredictable. Neither the painter nor the viewer can foresee what lies ahead; the unknown and the act of creation kindle new desires, propelling the unseen into the realm of visibility, thereby offering a renewed perspective of the world through the lens of art.

3. Conclusion

The palpability of the visible intensifies with the infusion of unreality and concept, concurrently surrendering itself to perception. Marion draws a distinction between everyday perspectives and those encountered in painting; in the tangible world, by observing the visible, individuals reach into the realm of the invisible, idealizing spatial perspective. However, this perspective can be constricted by tangible objects, with the void influenced by perspective constituting a tangible absence. In contrast, within the realm of painting, the artist extends the visible into the invisible, casting it onto the canvas. The painting retains the idealized perspective elicited through observation, albeit in a two-dimensional form, existing solely within the conceptual domain, rendering the void of the visible an intangible absence, or what Marion describes as the “void of voids.” Consequently, the invisible assumes supremacy over the visible, transforming the facade of the visible through its extension by the invisible, as painting ushers in an alternate dimension of visibility. Jia Baochen discusses the profound depth engendered by the invisible, which captivates and perpetually shifts the gaze, simultaneously generating and deconstructing the visible, thereby destabilizing its certainty and compelling the gaze to remain dynamic.

Marion lauds Picasso as a preeminent visionary, who reinvigorates the painting with an intrinsic nobility rooted in the essence of visibility. Through Cubism, Picasso revisits the core of the world in graphic form, challenging conventional perspectives. Chen Hui contends that the reconfiguration of visible elements and landscapes through the prism of voidness is not mere illusion but the culmination of pushing perspective to its zenith, a fundamental attribute of observation. [4] Through the lens of Cubism, Picasso’s work defies conventional wisdom and the boundaries of possibility, embodying what Marion terms a “paradox,” where the ostensibly impossible manifests, and the unseen becomes visible. This encapsulates the intricate interplay between the visible and the invisible.

References

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