

The Visible and the Invisible: Jean-Luc Marion on the Artistic Phenomenology

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Abstract: Jean-Luc Marion, as a renowned phenomenologist today, transcends painting from the realm of aesthetics and, through a series of fundamental inquiries into painting, images, and issues such as idols and icons, rearticulates phenomenology's overcoming of subjectivity. This article will reflect on Marion's artistic phenomenology, focusing on the visible and the invisible and describing painting, idols, and the most visible from the perspective of givenness. Particularly noteworthy is that painting is no longer seen merely as the intentional object of the viewer; it transcends the ordinary object to become an idol. The idol evokes more gazes while also concealing itself beneath the subject. Contemporary painting rebels against dependence on nature, showcasing more possibilities. From Impressionism to minimalism, artistic creation breaks away from pure visibility, attempting to operate autonomously from intentional subjects and move towards the icon.

Keywords: Artistic Phenomenology, Jean-Luc Marion, Paintings, Idol, Icon

1. Introduction

In Reduction and Givenness, Marion navigates the labyrinth of ontology through intertextual references and interpretations of Husserl and Heidegger's own texts. Marion argues that phenomena still cannot demonstrate themselves based solely on their givenness, therefore, manifestation and existence must be articulated more thoroughly as much reduction as there is givenness. Marion proposes that ordinary visibility manifests as a self-constructed object, apprehended by self-experience in a foreseeable manner, while aesthetic visibility transcends ordinary visibility, surpassing objectivity in an entirely new manner. This phenomenon cannot be anticipated or continuously observed and requires re-seeing.

Painting reduces objects to pure visibility, generating the phenomenality of immediate access to the phenomenon itself, creating a tension where the visible possesses the invisible (Marion calls it "le paradoxe"). This paradox originates from the givenness of painting, which derives from the Other and thus from God. Idols and icons are the two fundamental images of painting, with idols representing painting's attainment of overflowing phenomenon, thereby arousing the desire to re-seeing. But the idol as a mirror of the gaze can be caught in a subjective dilemma. In the icon, the Other comes first, thus inverting the intentional structure of phenomenology. The icon is the more saturated phenomenon, interpreting to a greater extent its own phenomenology of givenness, and ultimately taking the path to theology. Phenomenology and painting are naturally related, and in Marion's view the visibility of painting is an important case in the study of phenomenology. By

bringing painting into phenomenological thinking, on the one hand, painting becomes a paradigm for philosophical reflection on phenomenology, and on the other hand, it extends the dimensions of the study of the discipline of painting and gives a new value to contemporary painting.

2. Idols and Painting

Marion analyses the inner structure and meaning of the word "object" in order to reveal the connotations of the ordinary visible; the French word for "objet", means something that is thrown in front of one's face, and Marion points out that the center of gravity of the word is the "ob-", that is to say, "objet" is centered on the object that is opposed to me, opposite to me, rather than on the object that is thrown in front of me. That is to say, "objet" is centered on the object that is opposed to me, opposite, not thrown. The ordinary visible is always seen by us as an object, its phenomenal nature is that of an object, and it is often manifested as an object, and so it is through the intrinsic structure and meaning of the word object that the substantive connotations and characteristics of the object-like mode of the ordinary visible can be defined. [1]

2.1. Art and givenness

In Marion's view, this mode of manifestation is derived from the mechanism of phenomenal manifestation in Edmund Husserl's constructive phenomenology, where Husserl argues that in the process of objectifying activity, there are three components of intentional activity: the act of intentionality, the content of intentionality, and the object. [2] Consciousness constructs the relevant items of meaning and intention through the synthesis of intuition, consciousness, conscious activity, and experience, and our knowledge of the object is through the act of the object to which the content of intention is directed, and the object is always an object of consciousness constructed by consciousness, and this construction emanates from the pure ego, and the way in which the objectivity of the object is manifested is also from the ego, and the ego takes the initiative in the manifestation of the object.

In intentional activity, intuition can enrich intentions, meanings, etc. and can enrich intentional objects. The ideal situation is to achieve complete enrichment, but the most common situation is partial enrichment or lack thereof. Marion points out that it is precisely this lack of intuition that allows self-consciousness to synthesize and grasp it comprehensively, thereby constructing intentional objects. This mode of experience also results in the predictability of the ordinary visible, where anticipation is even more important than observation, always being guided by vague intentions rather than direct presence.

Under the realm of experience, the manifestation mechanism of the ordinary visible relies on self-expectation and self-anticipation. Marion describes the act of surpassing self-expectation in observation and the emergence of entirely new visibility as the aesthetic visible. Through his study of Western painting, Marion reveals the transcendence of objectivity by the aesthetic visible. For Marion, painting is not an object constituted by human intentional activity, nor is it foreseeable. The painter transforms many invisibilities into visibility, imbuing artworks with richer meaning and significance than natural landscapes.[3]

Marion cites the artist Paul Klee as an example of a painter who concentrates on the invisible within a limited frame. The visibility given to us by the work of art is thus no longer the visibility of the original material surface, but the painting gives us a perspective from the pure manifestation of itself, and this dense and intense visibility, which dazzles and arouses the desire to see, attracts us to look again and again. In the viewing of paintings, the gaze will be put to its greatest use, i.e., admiration. As a result, painting in turn achieves excessive. Marion brings painting into the column of idols and points out from a higher latitude that painting's own givenness affects the painter, who,

in reducing the given to the purely visible and bringing in full visibility and presence, is also reduced to an idol of the subject's intention, transforming the given into a clear visible landscape, thus avoiding the dazzle, when the idol admired, becomes imprisoned.

2.2. Idol and the Most Visible

In Plato's problem of imitation, the distinction between the Original as well as the Image is centered on the view of painting as an object of natural imitation. According to Plato, the Original possesses a higher identity, while the copy is a poor imitation of the world of Ideas, resting on the illusory aspect of the object and failing to express its true nature. Marion, on the other hand, points out that painting is not a simple imitation or multiplication of the original, that a painter can make the look carry more weight than the original, and that people will be surprised to see miraculous reproductions in paintings rather than the original image.

Painting can evoke the pure visualization of a portrait, a detachment from all knowledge of the physical world into a new scene. The givenness of the painting itself evokes more appreciable and dominates the phenomena. These new phenomena cannot be found in the world or in nature, and the manifestation of these visible objects complements the natural things. Thus, the painter moves from the creation of one painting to another, implicated by the amazement and salutations presented by the painting, and different amazements are distributed on the canvas, manifesting, shining, and thus attracting our eyes, filling them in such a way as to saturate the idol.[4] Idol represents worship and admiration, radiating the brilliance of painting's overflow. As the primary visible, our ordinary sight cannot penetrate it, as it fully manifests everything given to it, gathering all praise and forming a dazzling spectacle that exceeds the scale of sensory perception. This saturated manifestation brings a sublime power, evoking feelings of awe and amazement. Its impact far exceeds the fulfillment of ordinary phenomena, to the extent that it no longer solely refers to anything, but is permanently frozen in a single moment.[5] On the other hand, the idol is like an invisible mirror, its existence determined by the maximum value of the recipient's interpretation of the idol, reflecting the viewer's own gaze, revealing the extent of desire to oneself, which is also the reflection of the idol.

Due to painting's transcendent visibility, it shifts worship from the original to the similar, bearing the responsibility of making us see. Material objects yield to the idol of painting, which breaks free from the subject's one-way gaze. This indomitable sensation brings something new with each viewing, as our visitations are summoned by its inherent visibility. A painting is evidently not an object constituted by our intentional actions; it is excessive, with its excess being beyond the manifestation of the objects of the natural world, overflowing the capacity of its own gaze.

3. The Crossing of the Visible

The crossing of the visible (La croisée du Visible) is Marion's interpretation of the field of painting, a work that goes beyond mere aesthetics to discuss the question of the two modes of visibility and invisibility hidden in painting from a phenomenological and theological perspective. It also examines the theoretical discussion of a series of fundamental issues of painting, such as the law of perspective in painting, creation and givenness, from icon to idol, and other aspects of painting. In the discussion of the visible and the invisible, Marion represents the paradoxical qualities of the law of perspective in painting, exploring the possibilities of perspective, and advancing the issue of perspective in painting into a completely new field. This multifaceted viewpoint and conception further contributed to Marion's realization of his phenomenological theoretical breakthroughs and to the formation of his later concepts such as the principle of givenness and the phenomenon of saturation. [6]

3.1. Painting and perspective

In Marion's discourse, paradox refers to an inversion of nature or common sense, the antithesis of the common sense landscape, which is more than just surprising, making the otherwise invisible visible, and manifesting phenomena that would otherwise be unmanifest; Marion equates paradox with miracle and combines it with a theological explanation of how paradox brings into visibility what should not be encountered in the first place, and that whatever this paradox is, the paradox brings about wonder and excessive visibility that can have effects that are more than just enriching and perhaps even hurtful.

Perspective in its own way is causing a paradox. By infusing the invisible with the visible, perspective makes it more visible, taking what would otherwise be a chaotic and amorphous pile of paint and organizing and loosening it around a single point so that we can see the prominent visible landscape. This is where perspective demonstrates that its basic function as a gazing device precedes the technique of painting. Perspective sets up a gaze that runs through the visible, a gaze that is consistent with the gaze of everyday life. In everyday life, if we see things in a diffuse way, then too many visible objects are like a jumble of colors, crowding towards us, making it impossible to see things clearly, as in a house, when you gaze at a certain object, the distance around the object will automatically be drawn away, so that you can see clearly the information contained in the visible object. Perspective is the law of gazing in this way, creating invisible voids (*le vide*) in the multitude of the visible so that we can see things for themselves. The void in the perspective of painting is, first, different from the physical void, which is a real, visible void that can be entered, walked on, measured, and so on. But the void in the perspective of painting is non-real and invisible, it is the painter's rendering of space in painting. The depth created on a flat canvas by the painter's subjective gaze on the visible. [7] Such depth is depicted layer by layer, and the painter suggests hidden layers of space in the picture through the arrangement of sky, buildings, and trees in the background. Thus, when you try to enter, it moves forward as you do, never being traversed or measured.

The void of perspective is nevertheless more realistic than real space, because it enables real space to be seen. In the perspective of the gaze, the stronger the authority of ideal space, the more powerful his organization of the disordered visible, and thus the more clearly the objects of real space can be revealed. It is precisely by reducing the given visible to the visible, by reducing the potentially visible to a pure and monolithic plane of vision that painting presents to the viewer, like the façade of a building, that the viewer is given a new and stimulating vision, and from which the painting itself emerges as an astonishing effect.

3.2. The Limits of Perspective

The painting was affected by its flatness, but the technique of perspective gives a certain depth to the painting as a whole, giving it a stepped spatial scene. Having a foreground, middle and rear view in the picture increases the layers of the picture and provides coherence to the whole with an invisible depth, creating such an ideal void in the painting and evolving diverse expressions in this conquest of space.

In classical painting, the painter would organize the visible objects in the picture according to the ideal rules of perspective, a non-substantial perspective that allowed more of the visible to be accommodated by the picture and distributed the visible through the hidden invisible construction of the visible. For example, Albrecht Dürer's illustration published in 1535, in which Dürer, through depicting the artist in painting, sets a wooden frame to frame the visible in through a certain fixed gaze perspective, actively giving up on the whole, constructing the picture intentionally against the perceptual common sense, against the original rule of the real. Under limited and scarce conditions, the visible is reduced to a purely flat surface that stimulates the viewer's vision while viewing the

painting. The paradoxical relationship between the visible and the invisible in painting, and whether perspective is the only one, has obviously developed more possibilities in the development of the history of Western painting. In modern Western painting, the traditional figurative image began to shift and slowly the traditional principles of perspective were discarded and unlike classical painting which constructed and modelled natural landscapes, modern painting began to turn to the experience of consciousness or focus on conveying the intentional object of the idea of the seen and the idea in an unseen way. [8]

Marion divides the turn in modern painting into two cases: one is Impressionism, body art, performance art, etc., which presents all the visible in the picture, producing an excess of view that transcends the grasp of intentionality and leaves only the manifestation of experience, while the object is no longer apparent. On the other hand, there is Minimalism, where the object is not missing, but the self is weakened and shown as having very few visible beings, so that intentionality is detached from the subject and operates on its own. [9] In Impressionism, Oscar-Claude Monet two famous paintings: *Houses of Parliament* (1905) and *Water Lilies* (1919), both of which blur the visible, as if a layer of fog, when you want to get closer to look at it but found that you can only see the color blocks. Monet submerges the object in the picture itself, the object is replaced by the perceived object. Thus, the goal of this paradox is to demand the disappearance of the visible object. In addition to this, Marcel Duchamp attempted to depict the movement of the object *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) In the same way as Monet's perceptually orientated representation, Duchamp used the act of descending the staircase as an experience that blurred the depiction of the object. Gradually, the artist's exploration of the act itself eliminated the canvas, identifying the act itself as a form of art that merges the experience of the visible with the experience of the visible without intentionality, support, or object, leaving the experience itself to be revealed. Minimalist painting, on the opposite hand, follows the principle of anti-subjective tradition and minimizes the visibility of things. For example, in the works of minimalist artist Frank Stella, squares are squares and stripes are stripes, freeing the painting from the visible, and removing the viewer's subjective view of the work, making it the most objective way of displaying the object.

4. Conclusions

Marion's phenomenological study returns to the subject as being given, from the self-centered subjectivity of recent philosophy of the subject. The dilemma of the subject in Immanuel Kant and René Descartes comes from the problem of the homogeneity of the subject and the objectification of the ego itself, such an inherent contradiction can't be resolved, but from the point of view of the being givens, this dilemma can be escaped, treating the ego as a receiver, thinking activity in the second place, not presupposing the ego as a principle, then the dilemma of solipsism is solved. [10]

Because of this, Marion's description of the subject focuses more on the process of receptivity that unfolds. An event, before it is known, first gives itself, so that the phenomenon is not grasped but received. At this point the viewer is freed from subjectivity and unlike the subject anticipates or produces the phenomenon, he or she accepts it and responds to it.

Marion here draws on Caravaggio's *Calling of Saint Matthew* to explain that the process of reception, as depicted in this painting, is one in which the active and the passive influence each other. The painting depicts a dimly lit room with a strong light shining into it, Jesus reaching out and pointing forward, all those present show amazement, but Matthew is the only one who is pointing his finger back at himself, and the artist, through his visual description, shows the viewer this invisible call and response. Matthew accepts the call while accepting himself, showing himself in response. In short, Marion's phenomenology of art, breaking the closure of the subjective gaze, describes painting as a manifestation outside of the natural object, overflowing our gaze to a revered idol, while on the other hand we are limited in our ability to perceive in this gaze as we gaze at the painting. Further,

from the idol to the icon, Marion slowly leads phenomenology to theology, and his own givenness ultimately to God, at which point Marion moves to the other end of the spectrum from the subject, and his theory relies heavily on theology rather than phenomenological interpretation from the possibility of painting itself. This also leads to certain limitations.

The idols in Greek civilization confined the divine appearances to human experience and created images for the gods. The subjectivity of viewing that Marion realized existed in idols ultimately reflected in fact the viewer's own experiences and expectations, and so also acted like a mirror, mapping the level of human experience and perception. Especially since the viewer is often unaware of it. In this strongly driven mode of seeing, the idol becomes an image that conforms to one's own will. This kind of viewing implies control. This "libido vivendi" (desire to see) is fulfilling the process of making idols and self-idols in the present age, a subjunctivization that deprives the human being of the space of transcendence. And Marion cracks this subjective viewing by leading the idol to the icon, to the invisible God. [11] In today's age of information overflowing taking the viewer's preference as a criterion to produce image products that satisfy the viewer's needs is turning into a goal and principle, and with the continuous advancement of technology, it is pushing this phenomenon to the peak. Marion's theory reveals the inner workings of the logic of contemporary image production, demonstrates a metaphysical critique of technology, and furthermore gives the possibility to go beyond this logic.

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