

GRADUATE STUDENT ESSAY PRIZE WINNER

THE THREAT OF GIVENNESS IN JEAN-LUC MARION: TOWARD A NEW PHENOMENOLOGY OF PSYCHOSIS¹

Joseph Carew (Memorial University)

Absent within Jean-Luc Marion's theory of selfhood is an account of psychosis that displaces standard phenomenological and psychoanalytic models. Working primarily with Book V of Being Given, my paper sketches the formal possibilities exhibited in a self who cannot manage the superabundance of the given and, swept away by an uncontrollable flood of givenness, thereby falls into a hysteria of self-experience and loses its ipseity. Then, contrasting psychosis with positive figures of the self, I explore the dynamic relationship between givenness and the gifted highlighted by the phenomenological diremption and effacement of selfhood displayed in both.

Jean-Luc Marion's *Being Given* is a rigorous attempt to retrieve and revitalise what he claims to be the essential insight driving all phenomenological research, the unconditional self-givenness of phenomena. Giving themselves of themselves from an *a priori* pre-phenomenal space, the night of the unseen, phenomena present themselves as self-constituting effects that burst forth into conscious visibility, thereby displaying an irreducible subject-independent interiority. But in order to think the possibility of a phenomenology of givenness, Marion has to dislodge traditional philosophical accounts of subjectivity by showing the primacy of a more originary self that, instead of self-subsisting in the nominative case as the centre of action, is acted upon and constituted *a posteriori* in the unfolding flux of

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phenomenological experience.

Marion understands his project as an attempt to exceed metaphysics by freeing phenomena from extrinsic horizons, thus opening the possibility of a more original and spontaneous relation to the upsurge of givenness within conscious experience and, consequently, also to the self. Entirely absent from the discourse, however, is the recognition of the striking implications that I perceive in his thought on standard phenomenological and psychoanalytic accounts of mental illness. Using primarily Book V of *Being Given*,² my paper is an attempt to sketch a new phenomenology of psychosis from Marion's determinations of selfhood, using hints and gestures in his text to develop my own appropriation of the nature of the self and its relation to the pulsating field of givenness that constitutes its phenomenal existence and self-experience.

Here, I am not investigating the phenomenal essence displayed by psychosis for its own sake. By interpreting the dissolution of the self displayed in psychosis in terms of the phenomenological dynamism between givenness and the staging of the gifted, my intention is to clarify and extend Marion's descriptions of the "scene, where the self that comes after the 'subject' is in the end *born*" by bringing them into a new area—an area where the self does not rejoice in the without-measure of saturation, but feels it as a burden, a pain, perhaps eventually as a monstrous standstill, an impasse without solution. (BG, 262) Although, in this sense, my essay is foreign to the general concerns of Marion's philosophy (there is a lack of reference to both phenomenological psychiatry and psychoanalysis in his work), I do believe that it helps advance a new conception of the peculiarities of the gifted by underlying the phenomenological essence of the self at stake in the surfeit of the spectacle of the fold. The diremption exhibited in psychosis has formal relevance for the understanding of other varieties of excess and vice versa.

Consequently, my paper is divided into three major sections: (1) the self that comes after the subject; (2) givenness and psychosis; and (3) the psychotic "self." Whereas the first section presents my own

² All quotations, unless specified otherwise, are from Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*, (tr.) J. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as BG.

synthesis of and spin on the upsurge of the gifted from the fold of givenness, the latter two contain a sketch of my specific take on and extension of Marion's thought and are largely meant to serve as the conceptual groundwork for further research. Because this terrain is a place into which Marion himself has not gone, the reader should expect to find emphases and paths of thought that are not directly raised in his phenomenology of the self or that may appear at odds with the general thrust of his thinking. My goal is merely to follow the unfolding logic of givenness, drawing out its implications from the zone into which it has brought me—the horror of its possible deadlock, the potential pain of its never-ending, never-weary thrust. I will begin, however, by examining two representatives from the traditions I claim it displaces, Ludwig Binswanger and Sigmund Freud, in order to orient ourselves toward the unique possibility of understanding the (psychotic) self in Marion's phenomenology that I wish to cultivate and explore.

A pioneering figure in existential psychotherapy, Binswanger sought an understanding of the lived experience of psychiatric illness that would make possible a genuine relation to the mentally ill and open a space for authentic healing. Seeing naturalistic and Freudian psychology as too limited to deal with human subjects, he developed a modified version of the ontology propounded in *Being and Time* that enabled him to give phenomenological accounts of various disorders such as schizophrenia. Emerging from his investigations is the claim that normative mental health—"our sense of being in harmony with things and circumstances, with others"—is "manifested in our *letting* beings—all beings—*be* as they are in themselves."³ Inversely, the pandemonium suffered in psychosis comes from a deficient openness to reality that "is accompanied by the weakening of every materially consistent existential order. Everywhere experience reveals its gaps, and nowhere can it make peace with itself or unfold freely."⁴ Losing contact with being and becoming entangled in its inwardness, *Dasein* slowly falls into inescapable insanity.

A structural similarity can be seen within conventional Freudian psychoanalysis. Charged with the task of relieving the anxiety and

³ Ludwig Binswanger, "Introduction to Schizophrenia," in *Being in the World*, (tr.) J. Needleman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 252.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

tension of the unconscious id, the ego is given energy to cope with the threats and dangers of the external world. But, if the problem-solving methods of the reality principle fail, the ego may resort to various defence mechanisms that, by falsifying and distorting objective reality, attempt to alleviate tension, ultimately impeding or preventing personality development. Unable to suppress or satiate the primordial activity of the unconscious, the psychotic and neurotic are incapable of forging an existentially healthy link to the world. Swamped by an interior psychic life, they, like the Binswangerian schizophrenic, are prohibited from further psychological development because of an obscured, deficient access to what presents itself in experience.

There is, however, in Marion's phenomenology of givenness, the suggestion of a complete reversal of this paradigm. While both Binswanger and Freud claim that what is at issue in mental illness is never the given but always the subjectivity or interiority of the self, it opens the possibility that psychosis occurs through an excessive receptivity to the unbearable alterity and infinity of that which gives itself of itself. The psychotic is unable to phenomenalise the given according to manageable schemata not because of a privation of being-open brought forth through an unconscious decision to limit the field of subjective awareness; rather, taking on too much, it completely loses its own-most life in the extra-conscious abyss of an uncontrollable twilight of givenness and represents, in this sense, the psychotic failure of the fold to launch a self, a dative *me*.

This new possibility of understanding psychosis is important not just because it represents a nuanced, unexplored possibility of thought. Its reversal of the traditional paradigm suggests that what distinguishes the mentally ill, the psychotic, from other forms of selfhood is not (at least primordially) a negativity of experience, an unconscious defence mechanism that produces a lack of contact with the external world, but an original upsurge of extra-subjectivity within intuition that radically resists schematisation and appropriation into the matrices of conscious experience. The self, seeing too much, feeling too much, loses itself in a chaotic sea of excess, not within a black hole carved within subjectivity, preventing the self from having contact with its exteriority. This brings the structure of selfhood in psychosis in close proximity to the positive forms of the gifted that Marion outlines—the artist, the prophet, the lover—in such a way that the experiential deadlock witnessed in the

former reveals the achievement and potential danger lurking in the latter, that which is always at stake in the encounter with the eruption of givenness within the infinite pulsation of the spectacle of the fold. By articulating the entire field of possibilities exhibited by the phenomenological birth of selfhood out of the dislocating experience of excess, thus extending Marion's own analysis, my intent is to express something primordial about the nature of the self in general.

I. The Self that Comes after the Subject

What is so striking in Marion's phenomenology is that the self, denied any constitutive power or transcendental freedom in a traditionally modern or existentialist sense, does not create its own ipseity through an original choice, but is given to itself as a being given. In the uncontrollable turbulence characteristic of the face-to-face encounter with saturated phenomena, the "I" is outright denied *any* self-grounding, self-effectuating dynamism and instead becomes lost in a primordial powerlessness, in the deep inner abyss of its own insubstantiality and lack of self-causing, self-positing interiority—"[t]he originary and irreducible posture of the *myself/me*—its selfhood—is thus accomplished in inauthenticity, originally non-originary." (BG, 270) The centre of activity is, for Marion, placed *outside* the "subject"; it receives itself from without, not from within its own-most singularity and non-relational activity. Its mineness coming from elsewhere and originally dependent upon an Other, the self dissipates in freedom and self-sufficiency: "[i]t no longer stands in a relation of possession to the phenomenon, but in a purely receiving relation—they are no doubt contiguous, but irreducibly separated—in short, in a relation of unlimited usufruct, but without any guarantee." (BG, 249) Responding to a silent, unknowable call arising transcendently from the exteriority of the immanent plane of consciousness, the self displays an intrinsic indebtedness to an unidentifiable source and remains always powerless by itself.

Denied a priority, the subject is made destitute within Marion's phenomenology by the unconditional givenness of phenomena. Disregarding even the unity of experience, they not only make sport of the horizons within which we intend them by always exceeding or subverting them, but they also lead the "I" back to itself, literally

stopping it in its tracks. Coming upon an uncontrollable noematic surplus overflowing in intuition, the subjective noesis loses all composure and becomes the objective of the object; the “I,” encountering an uncontainable excess that forces itself upon it, is submerged in the foreign waters of extra-subjectivity, as its intentional act backfires. Unable to be an active participator in the ascent of the phenomena, the “I” is left a mere witness to its own arising from pre-phenomenal obscurity: “[t]he gifted gives all his attention to an essentially lacking object; he is open to an empty gap.... Surprise, this obscure and suffered seizure, contradicts intentionality, this known and knowing ecstasy deployed by the I at its own initiative.” (BG, 269) Being open to the unpredictable landing of the phenomena and radically receiving itself from its incident, the self is never truly present or actualised, but exists as an anxious anticipation of the self-determining contingency and shock of phenomena. The self always opens unto an absence.

In order to receive phenomena (and, by implication, itself), consciousness must passively let their agency violently, vehemently upsurge into and intrude upon its region, ultimately dictating how to properly align itself to their self-manifestation. The “I” experiences a profound lack of jurisdiction and power as it is dominated by phenomena forcing themselves *into* its plane as an incision, sporadically affecting and coming upon it as an uncontrollable modification. The frightful upheaval of the phenomenon—the forceful emergence or surfacing of the not-I—encompasses and drowns us, dislocating all sense of self-equality, self-identity and originary freedom. Phenomena, experienced as a powerful, shattering eruption into consciousness, resonate upon its depthless screen, vibrating it with a shockingly alien force or energy: “[i]t *gives* itself because it crosses its phenomenological distance by arising from its non-seen into its final visibility, in a thrust that I have to receive, therefore contain, eventually fend off as violence.” (BG, 131)

It is this concept of the phenomenologico-transcendental “violence” of givenness and its unrealised possibilities for understanding the self that primordially interest me. It is of critical importance for understanding the nature of givenness in Marion, although it remains largely undeveloped and unthematized in the body of his work. My appropriation and usage of this concept plays off of two interrelated and inseparable meanings that it displays and should never be interpreted as a mere brute force from an infinite elsewhere, a monstrous attack from an

inhuman place that instills the horror of standstill within existential consciousness, as the colloquial sense of the term would suggest (although it could appear as such). While the first meaning merely articulates a formal structure at the heart of phenomenological philosophy in terms of the ego and its relation to the pulsating field of givenness, the second touches upon the self's relation to the experience of excess that constitutes its own proper phenomenal existence and self-experience.

Preventing the existence of a self-grounding, originary transcendental subject whose anteriority constitutes the conditions of the possibility of experience in advance in the nominative case of action, the violence (always more than the subject can endure) of givenness (1) establishes the powerlessness of the subject and an irremovable relation of asymmetry instead of priority. This transcendental powerlessness thus gives rise to (2) the expression of the prevalent existential modality of the relationship between the fold of givenness and the gifted, the constant pressure that is exerted upon the limits of conscious finitude by the infinite pulsations of an incomprehensible abyss as it attempts to cross from the night of the unseen into the twilight of conscious phenomenality. Consequently, this phenomenologico-transcendental violence is not necessarily negative, in the sense of an attack—it can be a source of profound joy, being devoted to something that you can never exhaust. It reveals that there is *always* a push, a crushing weight in experience, as if the self could be engulfed by that which calls upon it to be the field of its own auto-monstration, as the infinite seeks to dwell within the fragile opening of finitude, the frail depthless screen of consciousness.

Although Marion never directly says so, the implication of this is that phenomena have to be encountered, lived through like a dirempting, destructive experience, if their original subject-independent interiority (and thus the self) is to upsurge in all its excessive glory within the immanent plane of experience: "there is no neutral phenomenon, always already there, inoffensive and submissive. It makes a difference solely by its coming up. To see it, it must first be endured, borne, suffered."⁵

⁵ Although for most people the experience of phenomena usually remains at the level of objects (and, therefore, this claim must be qualified), this spectrum of phenomenality does not interest me in this paper. I am concerned with the experience of excess and

(BG, 125) Radically dependent upon the self-determination of phenomena that have to be carried along as if they were a weight that could not be lifted, a sickness that could not be cured, the self must be tense, anxious and permanently unsure of itself, if not existentially, then at least according to the structural schemata of meaning that constitute its phenomenal existence.

As a being given, the self has no self-grounding interiority and is unable to seize or take hold of itself originally or authentically—it is radically dependent upon the extra-subjective other that calls upon it and gives it to itself in an experience of excess. Always awaiting the unpredictable landing of the incident, the self is intrinsically *dirempt*, unsteady, in terms of the asymmetry in the encounter with the crossing of the visible. Here, we begin to witness the immense structural similarity between the experiences of trauma and *ecstasis*-inducing saturation: the necessary dissolution of self through an encounter that sweeps it away, destroying the coordinates of its hitherto realised phenomenal being, through a struggle with an intuitive surfeit that is originally non-schematisable, uncontrollable, too much. Paradoxically, it is only with the destruction of the self that a higher form of existence is realisable, but a great danger is hidden therein.⁶ Within the blossoming of selfhood, the primordial upsurge of the dative *me*, there is always an element of the surprise and uncertainty of an uncontrollable unfolding essence, as the self-grounding interiority of the self is given over to the thrust of the shock of its own anamorphosis.

The burden of the phenomena is, paradoxically, its own burden; infected with the netherworld of the “not-I” and lacking power, consciousness must give itself up to the infinitely other, recognising its debt to it as that from which it receives itself. In front of its autonomy

what it tells us of the nature of selfhood insofar as it is in the flux of saturation and the liberation of phenomena from extrinsic, imposed horizons that we are given most fully to ourselves, that we become *gifted*. In this sense, my paper focusses only on formal phenomenological structures of exceptional selves, even if the positive figures exist only in the margins.

⁶ This reminds one, of course, of the psychoanalytical notion of the death drive, specifically in its Lacanian register, where the “self-destructive” path of the death drive can lead to a more full realisation of desire through the devastation of imaginary-symbolic subjectifications (the sedimentations constituting ego-life), or, of course, unbearable suffering. The source of the poison is also the source of the cure.

and self-effectuation, consciousness withdraws into paralysis and dread; at all times confronted with a phenomenality that exceeds us, its radical finitude and powerlessness is an inescapable fact of its existence, evident in the encounter with the unconditional givenness within phenomenological experience that presents itself intrinsically as too much. The self is interpenetrated by an exorbitant alien alterity that always and already has erupted into its region and declared itself, strangely, as a constitutive aspect of its phenomenological essence. But this excess of the given is not only a cause of dread and despair but also of hope and joy. It describes the scene of the birth of the self from its consecrated (albeit terrifying) receptivity and openness to the infinite fold as that which sustains and preserves it without measure, without limit, "lost and without return." (BG, 86).

II. Givenness and Psychosis

But there is yet a striking suggestion in Marion's phenomenology. While emphasising both the spectrum of saturation possible within the wide expanse of phenomenality and the violent impact of the given upon the frail screen of consciousness, Marion implies a reciprocally developing phenomenological dynamism between the gifted and the gifted within the spectacle of the fold:

The excess of the given over and above the response provokes not only the bedazzlement of the gifted by imposing on it a visible that is ever more powerful than expected, nor of suffering or bearing an impact too powerful to convert into the unfurling visible. The given humbles the gifted. (BG, 305)

The gifted, inasmuch as finite, has nothing less than the charge of opening the entire flux of phenomenality.... This investiture of the responsal, set up as gatekeeper for the ascent into visibility of all that gives itself, can and should be troubling. (BG, 307)

Only capable of showing itself to the extent that it pulsates within conscious visibility, phenomenality is always circumscribed within subjective restraints; the without-measure of saturation admits limit and constraint in order to be even received and (re)constituted as an official

phenomenon and eventually burst forth as uncontrollable excess. This entails, however, that it is radically dependent upon the capacities of the gifted it calls upon. But this is much more than to say that the untraceable motion of the infinity of saturation within experience breaks the self-presence and self-sufficiency of transcendental consciousness, because it “sees nothing distinctly (in particular not an object), [and] clearly experiences its own powerlessness to master the measurelessness of the intuitive given—therefore, before all, the perturbations of the visible, the noise of a poorly received message, the obfuscation of finitude.” (BG, 216) What I claim is just the next logical move: It is not just that there is a limit to how much givenness can be brought forth through the always delayed responsal; there is only so much that can be experientially endured. The chaotic movement of the excessive light of intuited visibility can overexpose the film of consciousness—it shrivels, scorches, burns.

Obtrusive, commanding and oppressive, givenness is inherently and definitively *violent* in the twofold sense I outlined above and must be resisted in its *ecstasis*-inducing fullness. If the gaze, “no longer [able to] measure to the range of the given,” either lets too much in or cannot fend it off, the self risks collapsing in a hysteria of self-experience as the dative *me* falls adrift into the abyss of its open gap, the realm of blinding visibility where phenomenality itself cannot be subjectively sustained in preserving, bearable coherence. (BG, 206) The counter-current of intentionality explicit in saturation takes on a new, troubling meaning. If the unconditional self-ascent of phenomena always and already exceeds or makes destitute the transcendental role of subjectivity, then as we come across phenomena that display progressive degrees of excess there must be a necessary censoring of phenomenality, a subjective act of constraint and limitation upon its unadulterated auto-manifestation, not only to be able to receive it but also to keep oneself sane.

Lacking omnipotence as a constitutive actor in the self-showing of givenness and unable to bring forth adequately its full phenomenological specificity, the self for Marion is thus, by implication, also lacking power over its own-most self. But I dare to go even further, to take the next step. What is at stake is not merely the phenomenological limitations inherent in the articulation of unconditional givenness (and hence, the limits of phenomenology itself), but also the implicated frailty inherent in the existential determinations of

the self that is anonymously called upon as the region of such auto-manifestation. The self is the heart that preserves the visible spectacle of the fold by breathing life into and preserving its radiant self-showing. As that which receives itself from elsewhere and is dependent upon alien lifeblood, the self-experience of the gifted directly reflects the degree of (dis)order manifest in its ability to manage and restrain the without measure pulsation of givenness. If too much is taken into the chamber, as in the case of trauma, the pressure exerted on the valve causes it to rupture and the self breaks as the finitude of consciousness is torn apart, its defences made useless. Only so much of the specificity of the given can be subjectively or consciously retained and brought forth in a lived experience—only so much can be borne, suffered and undergone. The individuality of the self is at always risk and must be protected if the monstration is to be kept alive.

In this sense, even if Marion's own examples of saturated phenomena—kenotic love, art, religious experience—fail to address the possibility of a radical phenomenological diremption of selfhood through an overexposure to the extra-subjective pulsation of givenness in the spectacle of the fold, I believe my own appropriation is not only consistent with his phenomenology but also helps to advance it in several important ways. First, since, on the formal level, the violence of saturation is expressive of the impossibility of anterior transcendental subjectivity at the basis of experience, the next logical move is merely to jump from the level of the inherent limitations in the phenomenalisation of givenness to its possible effects on existential conditions of the gifted that constantly runs up against its own limits in the flux of counter-experience. This creates room for the possibility I am putting forth.

Consequently, and secondly, even in the positive exuberance of phenomenality without measure, a givenness that radiantly overflows its subjective schematisations, there is the suggestion of something "too much," something potentially abusive, devastating, in these experiences. There is the love that tears me apart, without remorse, without solution—a deadlock from which I cannot escape, except by a horrible *fiat*, although the love itself is not malevolent, or there is the call of the invisible as it strives for the openness of self-expression on the fragile screen of consciousness, driving the gifted to frustration, turmoil, despair, because its own efforts always disappoint the deafening silence of the call. And the prophet, who, left breathless and suffocating by the

play of the infinite upon the infinite in the moment of religious *ecstasis*, loses all categories to reorient himself in the world, as all language fails him and the coordinates of his phenomenal reality seem a mere play of grey on grey in comparison.

Thirdly, each determination of the given exhibits a dreadful possibility, a formal modality which opens up to the monstrous: the event—the abuses of history, genocide; the idol—the artefact that discloses an intuitive undercurrent that I cannot withstand, the revealing of a horrible field of truth; the flesh—the field of transgender entrapment, the body as the site of rape; the icon—the gaze that threatens, that traps me in the maddening labyrinth of a demonic gaze; and revelation—a god that does not distinguish itself from darkness. Since phenomenology deals merely at the level of formal possibility, according to Marion, it cannot only affirm the positive exuberance of givenness.

Fourthly, the violence of saturation contains within it, therefore, the structural possibility of a negative diremption, and it reveals a horrifying fact that lurks at the core of phenomenological selfhood: in the moment that the self gives itself over to, becomes devoted to, the spectacle of the fold, the self risks losing itself. Losing all pretensions to a self-grounding interiority of transcendental subjectivity, it is determined by the vicissitudes of its fate in the uncertainty of its *ecstasis*.⁷ Givenness is mercurial: it knows neither good nor evil because it is indifferent to both. It is the source of sorrow and love, of destruction and bliss, which play off of themselves in an infinite spiral along the dregs of human history. Putting ourselves into its hands, we can only hope and have trust. Yet, it is this very self-sacrifice and trusting embrace that keeps the monstration alive, allowing it to move from “surplus to surplus” and opening up the saturating non-finitude of the experiential world. (BG, 172)

⁷ Here, I do not mean to imply that the self is entirely *passive* to the movement of the fold that it puts up on the fragile screen of its consciousness: there is always a phenomenological dynamism between givenness and the gifted, so that conventional dichotomous conceptions of passivity/activity no longer have any currency. By “fate” I merely want to emphasise the lack of traditional existential/transcendental freedom in the birth of the self from a new scene. Although this is characterised by a radical receptivity to the fold, it must always be remembered that “the gifted remains in the end the sole *master* and *servant* of the given.” (BG, 319, my emphasis)

Givenness and self thus cannot be separated: they belong to one another. Without constraint and limit imposed *a posteriori* by the gifted, phenomena would be prohibited from showing themselves of themselves. Lingered forever in the night of the unseen, their infinite alterity would exist invisibly as abandoned, and, consequently, the self would remain empty, a mere "pre-phenomenal indistinctness... 'nothing more than the feeling of an existence without the slightest concept.'" (BG, 265) Yet, "the responsal wearies of showing what the call never grows weary of giving"; the "exhaustion of phenomenality never concerns the givenness of the call—invisible by definition—but only the respondent's fatigue—limited in his power of manifestation." (BG, 289) The call can never be fully phenomenised or adequately named, but relentlessly and incessantly forces itself upon consciousness to receive its untiring, dislocating eruption. Consciousness is always weary, unfit for its task and disappointed in itself (its accomplishments are never enough.)⁸ It is ready to lose its wits over the unbearable burden of givenness. Sometimes,

fainting before happiness as well as horror, the gifted disappears as givee of the excessive given, givee charged with its crushing rise into visibility. He decides to abstain, to absent himself, to take refuge in an absence—that is to say, to prolong into a permanent state the absence that he experiences in the instant.... We slip away and we faint as much as we can (or cannot) so as to no longer be there, as their gifted, when they burst forth. (BG, 315)

What is intriguing in this quotation is the parenthetical "or cannot." The gifted, unable to bear the "crushing rise into visibility" of the saturating flux of an unbearable impact, risks losing itself, risks scorching its screen, thus scrambling the gift in inconceivable disarray. Finitude, with

⁸ I take the category of disappointment from innumerable suggestions about the nature of the finite schematisation/phenomenalisation of the upsurging fold of givenness within conscious experience, but it is also a category that Marion himself uses to describe one of the specific characteristics of a counter-experience of excess; see J.-L. Marion, "The Banality of Saturation," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, (ed.) Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 402. I am merely thematising this concept further.

the upheaval of the incident, is dirempt. It does not say “No more” (it cannot speak), but is attacked, suffers a trauma—“[f]or resistance can go so far as to expose me to a danger, the danger of seeing too much, hearing too much, sensing too much, tasting too much, smelling too much. This resistance imposes itself as suffering.”⁹ Reconducted back to itself, the “I” does not merely stop in its tracks because of the intense counter-intentional current that it encounters; instead, it is swept away. Sanity is a necessary defection from the excessive givenness of experience because the shattering emergence of the infinitely not-I into consciousness establishes an irreconcilable asymmetrical relation between the “I” of consciousness and that which gives itself of itself. There is a split, an abyss of difference, between consciousness and its non-object or gap, the latter always exceeding the frailty of the former. To lose the ability to manage its ascent into visibility, to censor its givenness through adequate restraint and to let too much of its uncontrollable noemata loose, is to risk psychosis as noesis loses all strength to resist its violence. The eye, no longer merely bedazzled by the blinding light of excessive visibility, bursts, *ruptures* and loses perceptual awareness. Seeing too much, the self can see no more. Unable to see, it loses the capacity to receive itself and falls into a downward spiral. Wounded by an unmanageable pulsation of givenness, what is to be done?

III. The Psychotic “Self”

If one looks at the formal structure of the psychotic that I began to sketch in the preceding section, one will notice something striking—that the psychotic is in a fundamental sense just like any other. There is no radical difference. Whereas Binswanger and Freud claim that mental illness is a lack of being-open to the givenness of experience, Marion’s phenomenology of self hints at the possibility that, at least initially, it is an excess of being-open, a seeing too much, a not knowing when to look away or not being able to, a suggestion that brings it closer to exceptional forms of the gifted. By comparison, the sane are merely *more successful* at preventing the transcendently violent, intrusive self-ascent of phenomena from complete, unbearable auto-manifestation. The infinity

⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

of that which gives itself of itself is always more than the subjective container of consciousness can endure—there is a necessary suppression of the given; resistance is unavoidable.¹⁰ In Freudian terms, the censor, instead of acting as defence from the wish-fulfilments of the unconsciousness, defends the ego from the unbearable surplus of objective reality. Even one who can articulate the raw, unconditional excess of givenness on the depthless screen of lived conscious experience is already “psychotic,” according to the conventional definition, insofar as here too there is a lack of contact with the true surfeit of the fold.

Accordingly, what differentiates the psychotic from “normative” mental health or exceptionally gifted selves is merely the effect of the fractured, scorched screen, an untreated anomaly that damages the nerve of the eye upon the reception of the self and the blossoming of its historicity. If a breakdown or trauma mark the facticity of the self, then both the ipseity of its consciousness and the self-projection of phenomena on its screen will be mutually affected insofar as their ascent is limited by the finitude of its prism and its capacity to transform the overwhelming darkness of the call into exorbitant visibility. The unpredictable landing of the anamorphosis cannot be aligned through the mobile gaze of the “I”—the eye hurts to move, or it does not see at all; the incident of the event cannot make an impact upon consciousness—

¹⁰ Resistance as a technical term in Marion is underdeveloped, but it does exist. In a short section entitled “Resistance to the Revealed,” in *In Excess*, (tr.) R. Horner and V. Berrand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), Marion says “[t]he greater the resistance to the impact of the given (therefore first of the lived experiences, intuitions), the more the phenomenological light shows *itself*.... The more the intuitive given increases its pressure, the more a great resistance becomes necessary in order for *l'adonné* still to reveal a phenomenon there.” (51) Furthermore, “phenomenalisation depends on the resistance of *l'adonné* to the brutal shock of the given.” (*Ibid.*) Although it is obvious from this that my appropriation of the necessity of resistance does depart from the limited scope Marion gives to this concept, nevertheless my essay should be interpreted as an attempt to develop it further, to give an expression to its phenomenological multifacetedness as revealed by the apparition of the psychotic “self.” Resistance—understood now not only in the sense of fighting against the fold, standing up in face of it, not letting oneself drift away so as to bring it forth more powerfully, radically, fully—entails a censorship, a necessary cutting-off of its infinite push so as to be able to phenomenalise it at all.

the screen, scorched, either receives nothing or scrambles the transmission into a grotesque visibility, a terrifying hysteria of givenness. Knotted and wrought with disarray, the forms and structures that make possible the subjective (re)constitution of the phenomenon are powerless to manage the wide, infinite expanse of the fold. Unable to receive the given as it gives itself of itself, the “I” becomes lost and disoriented within a chaotic abyss of self-experience brought forth by the panic of givenness within its own facticity. Incapable of manifesting the given, the self instead distorts, loses and scrambles it, its capacity to receive it (and consequently itself) being ruptured and broken. It has seen too much: the gifted, “set up as gatekeeper for the ascent into visibility of all that gives itself,” has come upon an uncontrollable flood that sweeps itself away, leaving both givenness and the self unrecognisable to one another in a pandemonium of lived experience. (BG, 307)

But if givenness can only be brought forth into phenomenality by being received *a posteriori* and converted on the screen of consciousness, the psychotic says something phenomenologically interesting. Unlike the artist or the prophet who are called upon by an unbearable alterity and able to withstand the submerging nether world of the not-I, it speaks of the failure of the fold to constitute a self as gifted in the full sense of the term.¹¹ It speaks of a mis-happening, a failure in the phenomenological flux of givenness. Rushing in without limit or measure, the self—the dative *me*—falls adrift, scrambling and irretrievably losing both phenomenality and the unity of self-experience in the tumultuous counter-intentionality of unconditional surfeit. Within the pre-phenomenal space, the midnight *ecstasis* of dislocating excess, the self and the given collide, neither being truly formed nor manifest, yet neither truly absent and abandoned to the other. But whereas for the artist, the prophet or lover this ecstatic loss of self is a positive revelry

¹¹ It must be emphasised that this is a suggestion brought forth by my appropriation of Marion's phenomenology. Much more concrete phenomenological work would need to be done in order to justify this claim, but it is nevertheless a sound formal possibility—one that, I think, should be pursued further, if not for its implications for phenomenological/humanist psychiatry, than surely for its capacity for shedding light on the nature of excessive experiences in general. What is also obvious here is that my very specific technical use of *psychosis* perhaps would not coincide in many instances with individuals who are clinically diagnosed as psychotic. This strict sense of psychosis also must be more clearly elaborated, but I cannot do so within the body of this sketch.

with an inviting overabundance insofar as it can resist the pressuring flow of the pulsation of givenness and be the site of its radiant auto-manifestation, for the psychotic it is monstrous.

The consecrated given, the heart of the spectacle, lingering in a quasi-phenomenological expanse as its finitude is radically shredded apart and its individuality irreparably broken and lost, is incapable of joyfully bringing forth the excessive radiance of an obliging unseen; it is, therefore, incapable of receiving itself. There is no rebirth of the self from its dissolution in the surfeit of the fold, as with the experience of the splendour of the idol, the medieval *unio mystica* of the prophet or the erotic flesh on flesh of a lovers' embrace. There is only breakdown, standstill, the horror of deadlock.

But in the zone of psychosis, the gift of excess is not just abandoned; it becomes scrambled and torn as its phenomenality breaks on the screen of a scarred consciousness. It is not merely impartially brought forth in the exhausting efforts of the responsal, nor is it unrecognised by the blind stare of an autarchic subject that censors it completely. Of these two possibilities as outlined by Marion, there is also a third. Lacking definitive, de-limited form for its ascension, it crushingly and chaotically unfurls, not in infinite blackness of the pre-phenomenal night of the unseen, but in the impenetrable twilight, the halfway house of phenomenality, after the blinding supernova of the excessive visibility of an incomprehensible day. But then something fails, something that drastically distinguishes the artist, the prophet or the lovers from the mentally ill.

Unable to reconstitute or transform the given but still cognising an uncontrollable noematic surplus that prohibits any self-grounding "I," the noetic backfire instils an insanity that short-circuits all further intentional acts and existential attempts at selfhood. Seeing too much, the self can no longer phenomenalise givenness and is swept away in a monstrous sea of noematic superabundance. There is a subsequent malfunction in constitution, a loss of self; psychosis is not just a feature of a sick, isolated self lost in incommunicable disarray, but represents a break or rupture within the fold of givenness itself as it fails to constitute a vessel, a region of phenomenological lived experience, that could contain and render it visible within a specific demarcated space. Givenness itself, therefore, whimpers as psychosis is unleashed. The gifted, vanquishing under the stress of turmoil, is not (re)born out of the

flux of the fold and is unable to preserve the monstration of the spectacle. Unable to constitute a frame within which to receive the given, the self is on the brink of a downward spiral by an influx of unbearable excessive quasi-visibility. The longer the psychosis goes on, therefore, the harder therapy becomes and perhaps its eventual impossibility established as givenness fades into the chaotic twilight of a misshapen soul.

From the moment of rupture, the historicisation of the self risks slowly falling into the brink of an inescapable abyss of fragmentation and unbearable upheaval. Each new arrival, each new element of a series, as always already linked to and dependent upon the factual break, can never overcome it and threatens to institute a pandemonium within the self and the fold that, once unleashed, is the end. The gate, now cracked, faces collapse. Givenness in psychosis does not merely “remain in suspense” as it “awaits phenomenality,” but is itself fractured and dirempt, lingering in the unknown space of the undecidable as the heart that preserves the lifeblood of its spectacle undergoes damage and decays in atrophy. (BG, 319) As givenness loses the schemata through which it can give itself of itself, the self drifts into pre-phenomenal obscurity.

But within the twilight zone of phenomenality the dissolution of the self does not necessarily result in its irreparable loss and insolvable diremption, as the artist, prophet and lover testify. From the dislocating excess of saturation, the self can re-emerge, albeit a self reconstituted and modified by being engulfed by the shock of the abyssal waters of an incomprehensible extra-subjectivity. The self, after seeing too much, is scarred from the superabundance that ruptured its screen and poisoned its eye. But to mend, to convalesce from this turbulent violence, to see the abyss of the fold and survive the overwhelming turbulence of its crushing, unbearable fullness, the horror of its brute power over consciousness, is to undergo a shamanic, quasi-religious experience. Seeing and bearing more than others, but still carrying a disfigurement, an insurmountable reminder of a psychotic episode lodged within its facticity, the scrambling of givenness opens up to a self that, now able to coordinate its illness, can bring forth the given like no other, who can resist it. Like the poet who has seen the uncontrollable flux of infinity and can manage its unbounded phenomenality in the frail immanence of phenomenological consciousness, from the pandemonium of the fold the self is bestowed a gift and becomes truly gifted. The agoraphobic, who in every walker-by sees the call to responsibility in the counter-

intentional gaze inherent in the blackness of their pupils, is, through the gut-wrenching noematic surplus immanent in the icon, confined to a limited, solitary space.

The agoraphobic who overcomes this illness, living through it *à la Verwindung*, still sees the face in every Other. Every smile, every tear, every subtle movement of the lip, is expressive of an infinite alterity, the uncontainable, irrepressible givenness of another flesh; but now, bearable, the icon shines forth within the full phenomenal glory of a self that, arising from its ashes, from the darkness of psychosis, can contain all the light that impacts its prism and rejoice. Controlling its "insanity," givenness unfolds through its new-found strength and consequently the self receives itself to a degree never before imaginable. The twilight, the dim darkness at the brink of unfathomable chaos, is not a time for despair and resignation, but for hope and joy. The sojourn in the halfway house of phenomenality can open unto an indescribable radiance. The psychotic, like the figures of the self in Marion, can receive itself anew from the self-dislocating experience of excess.

jstephencarew@gmail.com