The Sublime Subject in Kant’s Metaphysic and Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenology

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My house is on fire. I am standing before it, ghostly and insubstantial, as if I, myself had been engulfed by the flames shooting out windows, cracking through walls. All consuming, this inferno overtakes me, empties me into its irresistible presence. I am standing before the destruction of my ground—all that had been imbued with “mineness,” those objects that were transfigured, animated, by having dwelt with me, my home — a “sacrifice” to what? I am just watching, strangled by heat; trust is lost, reduced to ashes like tables and chairs, trust in some vague promise of happiness, of fullness in the world. As resignation seeps through my body, I begin to withdraw from the immediacy of loss, and somewhere on the path of this withdrawal, this distance that has carried me away from my life as I knew it, the cruelty of the vision has become almost beautiful, something like beauty but laced with terror, and, in spite of myself, a strange pleasure vibrates at the limit of resignation. I wonder if, until now, I had always been dreaming. All objects have fallen away along with their ground; only breath and flame are left of time. Suspended, falling, I am opened without reserve, without pity or conscience. Who can explain this rejoicing that has now come to me, this sharp satisfaction in watching solid ground transform into smoke? What has carried me back toward another possibility of myself, lifted me onto a higher ground—of groundlessness? What has revealed to me an abyssal realm to which I belong, recalling, perhaps, the dark night before my birth, unveiling me as one who has been given over, a radically passive being called by god-knows-what, to a strange freedom? This is my joy — that I am given, that all is given, even when it is lost.

Let us give this possible experience, this revelatory movement of a mind unhinged from propriety, a name: it is the sublime. The wayward home, or homelessness, of Romantics, the sublime, like some sanguinary fantasy, maintains a dark, surreptitious allure. Its destruction is sacrificial, dialectical—it appears as a promise of something greater than oneself. When it is institutionalized, made banal, it is fascist. But, both within and beyond politics, when it opens the subject to an interior abyss that is experienced as joy, as Lust or jouissance, its realm is religious. Indeed, for Kant, that “cunning Christian,” as Nietzsche called him, the sublime constitutes “authentic,” which is to say, “dignified,” religious experience; it is the aesthetic modality of the Good. When Kant, in Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, radically truncates the criteria for religious legitimacy and authority, relegating ritual practice, devotionalism, and cultic hierarchy to the flames of irrationality, he nonetheless preserves the sublime shattering of the phenomenal self as initiation into what remains of the Godhead: the “supersensible” or “intelligible” (though unknowable) world of freedom that is the source and goal of Reason, the noumenon. In Critique of Practical Reason, Kant confesses his sublime creed: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more seriously reflection concentrates upon them: the starry sky above and the moral law within.”¹

In the pages that follow, I trace the aesthetical judgment that renders as sublime the “starry sky above” to the sublimity of the mind itself, insofar as the mind is opened to its freedom from contingency (or natural “necessity”) through the absoluteness of the moral law. I rely on Kant’s analytic of the sublime in Critique of Judgment to emphasize the place of the sublime “in” the

subject, and not strictly in the phenomenon that engenders an impassioned response, such that the subject is returned, elevated, to an alternative modality of selfhood by way of violence to the judging mind; however, I have not followed Kant in his effort to heal the wound opened by the sublime through recourse to ideas of reason (moral purposiveness), which place the subject in a position of (smug) superiority to all that is given in the habitat of our natural world; that is, the world of contingent necessity. Instead, I invoke the phenomenological idea of givenness and revelation of Jean-Luc Marion that would allow the subject to remain wholly endangered, without a net, poised for abandonment and yet in a state of joy. Marion, while dependent on Kant’s analytic of the sublime for his advancement of the “saturated phenomenon” as the new category for phenomenology, refuses the security that Kant insists determines the sublime as sublime (and not simply as a nightmare of chaos and cataclysm that would offer us the face of transcendence as pure horror); Marion leaves the subject passive and wounded in its very structure, revealing his indebtedness not only to Heidegger, but to Louis Althusser and Emmanuel Levinas. His phenomenology leads the thinking subject beyond the self-certain gaze that seeks to determine and ultimately exhaust its objects through the proximity of knowledge, that determines in advance the horizon of possible experience. The exposure of the subject to its “sublimity,” according to Marion, demands renunciation of all self-grounding and enclosure within a trajectory of completion and arrival—of hermetic imperturbability; such exposure propels the ravished and devastated subject back to itself in its very groundlessness. “Groundlessness”—the freedom, and hence the joy, that is opened by the sublime, or the “saturated phenomena”—derives from the indeterminacy of that which has given givenness itself. God, emptiness, the noumenon, the Good, the nothing... all is possible, and freedom rests on this openness of possibility, on this uncertainty as to what, in its anteriority, claims the subject. Have we hereby “regressed” into metaphysical speculation? No, for we can posit neither determinate content nor identity, hence ground, to that which the sublime offers to be thought. To gain a more definitive picture of the sublime, I will progress with an analysis, both critical and reverent, of the Kantian sublime, and move to an investigation into the possible conflation of the sublime with Marion’s “saturated phenomena,” which Marion himself obliquely suggests. Finally, following Marion's idea of the *interloqué*, I sketch an alternative to Kant's sublime subject, which is ever being soothed and comforted by its appeal to the innateness of reason, its superiority over phenomenal givenness and its higher purposiveness (morality)—not because such security is undesirable, but because, alas, it is fetishistic, or, if you will, idolatrous: an illusion of power. If Kant’s sublime subject has, in fact, “been to the mountaintop,” it carried back only the memory of its duty and destination, making a practice of forgetting that it, as constituting subject, *was revealed as lost* in the throes of sublime pleasure, in the face of what Marion, with a coyness that would preserve distance between phenomenology and theology, calls “revelation.” With his analytic of the sublime, Kant has visited upon his own thought a violence that not only unsettling but overthrows and undermines; he is, if only

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2 Marion pays homage to both Levinas and Althusser as “master” and “teacher” respectively in his Preface to the English edition of *God Without Being*. The ungrounding of self-determinate subjectivity through an anterior call lies at the foundations of both Levinas’ ethics, as the face of the Other, and Althusser’s theory the political subject, who is unseated by the call, “Hey, you there!”

3 Cf. Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Chapter 6, for a trenchant critique of Marion’s dual use of the category of revelation, one phenomenological, one theological. For Carlson, the emptiness or indeterminacy of the category for phenomenology, as an excess of pure givenness, threatens Marion’s theological commitments, and, conversely, the shadow of the Father that lends revelation its resonance as a mode of perception, as experience, would infect phenomenological discourse. Marion, Carlson argues, cannot have it both ways—both theology and phenomenology are too deeply compromised.
for a moment of (forgive the pun) virtual “appendicitis,”\textsuperscript{4} willing to relinquish the reins of knowledge, of continuity between the understanding and the natural world that spur our empirical and technological adventures, but he is willing to give up neither the supremacy of the subject, nor the primacy of the moral law that secures the “dignity” of the subject—there can be no real danger.

For Kant, reason has its ground in that which cannot be critiqued, known, or even conceptualized beyond the figure of “limit”—this ground is the noumenon, or the supersensible. This abyssal or groundless ground, the “source,” Kant says, of reason and its moral idea of freedom, cannot be an object of knowledge precisely because it lies beyond phenomena, beyond the experience of time and space—the only reality that can, in the strict sense, be true for us. But through the absoluteness of the moral law the noumenon can, indeed must, be\textit{ supposed} by reason; this inaccessible ground of morality that secures human freedom may never be an object of knowledge, but it can provide the basis for judgment—in particular, the aesthetical judgment of the sublime. The experience of the sublime, as analyzed in \textit{Critique of Judgment}, offers a dramatic and shocking entrée—as if through a trap door—into this supersensible realm, beyond the natural world of our understanding. The sublime enacts a supreme violence, a sacrifice, in the name of morality; through the obliteration of the entire phenomenal realm of nature and the world of the senses—all that we depend on for existence. Out of this pain that is also ultimate pleasure, the sublime secures the “dignity,” the freedom or the “end,”\textsuperscript{5} of the subject in the face of annihilation. It reveals his nature as grounded in the noumenon by stripping the real to Reason alone, the agent of our freedom. In the sublime we are exposed to the noumenal abyss \textit{within us}, to our own supersensible nature, our divinity. Through the pure form of the moral law, to which the sublime mind is forced to appeal, we are propelled toward morality’s source, the founding abyss, and at the very limit of experience, we are given an intimation of our supersensible “destination.” The sublime awakens us to a revelation of our possession of a “supersensible faculty,”\textsuperscript{6} despairing of mortal life, we are comforted by our likeness to morality’s divine source. Kant opens his analytic of the sublime with the assertion that “the beautiful and the sublime agree in this that both please in themselves.”\textsuperscript{7} Sublime pleasure, however, is of a wholly different order than that of the beautiful, which, in its harmonious play between the imagination and the understanding, attributes a grand final pospositiveness to nature that unifies the mind’s faculties under the aspect of judgment. By contrast, the sublime in nature spurs a dialectical drama between faculties of the mind; the mind is “moved” in the presence of “boundlessness” or limitlessness, finding no rest in a concept that could even begin to contain it. Kant illustrates the occasion of the sublime with: “Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes with their track of devastation, the boundless ocean in a state of tumult, the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like…”\textsuperscript{8} Pleasure in the beautiful arises only with the presentation of delimited, manipulable objects, such that the imagination is able to appeal to indefinite concepts of the understanding for the excitation of a judgment of beauty, wherein the quality of the mind is

\textsuperscript{4} Kant rather uncomfortably refers to the analytic of the sublime as a “mere appendix” to the critique of judgment, because the bridge he intended to forge with this critique between pure and practical reason was collapsed with the sublime, rendering the object of his system of knowledge, phenomenal necessity, “as a mere nothing” in the face of noumenal unknowing and sublime excess. Cf. Preface to \textit{Critique of Judgment}, esp. the fabled “Table of Categories.”


\textsuperscript{6} Immanuel Kant. \textit{Critique of Judgment}, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1992), § 25: “(T)he sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense.”

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., § 23.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., § 28.
fundamentally “restful,” contemplative, and (notoriously) “disinterested.” In the face of such overwhelming onslaughts, however, the judging subject is wrenched into an immediate and negative “interest,” that is, fear, determined by the incapacity of the imagination to find an adequate concept of understanding. The imagination, or the faculty of presentation, is essential to the judgment of both the beautiful and the sublime, but it changes partners when the sublime is at stake. Denied recourse to concepts of understanding, with which it is at play in the beautiful, the imagination, overwhelmed by its failure to offer presentation, is finally forced into the arms of a more somber bedfellow, the concept of reason—moral freedom. 9 The “feeling of the furtherance of life”10 that the beautiful inspires, in its harmonious interplay between imagination and understanding, becomes, in the wanton face of sublimity that renders impossible aesthetic comprehension, a feeling of repulsion, something like horror for the imagination. Kant must describe the sublime as a “negative pleasure,” which, in a dialectical conflict between the imagination and reason, “arises only indirectly.”11 We receive a shock, repellent and fascinating, which denies us “satisfaction.” Something monstrous has happened. “The feeling of the sublime,” Kant says, “is a feeling of pain.”12

Whence, precisely, this pain? And more pressingly, whence the pleasure? Nature itself is not the cause of our feeling of pain, Kant tells us, because properly speaking, no phenomenon can itself be called sublime. Kant writes, “All that we can say is that the object is fit for the presentation of a sublimity which can be found in the mind, for no sensible form can contain the sublime properly so-called.”13 It is movement of the mind itself that, in the inadequacy of the imagination to present the “sublime object” within the bounds of phenomenal form, refers the mind back to itself, but in a new, supersensible register. When the imagination is confronted with such boundlessness as to render it powerless, “inadequate to [the mind’s] ideas,” when it faces “that in comparison with which everything else is small,”14 or the “absolutely great,” it has no choice but to summon reason in its search for adequate presentation. Kant writes,

The quality of the feeling of the sublime is that it is a feeling of pain in reference to the faculty by which we judge aesthetically of an object [imagination], which pain, however, is rendered at the same time purposive. This is possible through the fact that the very incapacity in question discovers the consciousness of an unlimited faculty of the same subject [reason].…”15

This discovery is the imagination’s own act of destruction; it is self-sacrifice to a greater faculty, and as such it achieves a negative, dialectical purposiveness “in reference to the whole determination of the mind.”16 The awesome violence of such a move erupts with the sublime recognition that with the imagination goes the phenomenal world with which it enjoys dependent and analogous relation. For this sublime state of mind, Kant says, “represents our imagination with its entire freedom from bounds, and with it nature, as a mere nothing in comparison with the ideas of reason.”17 This feeling of “superiority” over everything sensible is the pleasure in pain of the sublime mind—it is as if the imagination has seen God within. Kant writes, “The imagination, although it finds nothing beyond the sensible to which it can attach itself, yet feels itself

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9 Cf. Ibid. § 27.
10 Ibid. § 23.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., § 27.
13 Ibid., § 23.
14 Ibid., § 25.
15 Ibid., § 27.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., § 26.
unbounded by this removal of its limitations; and thus that very abstraction is a presentation of the Infinite, which can be nothing but a mere negative presentation, which yet expands the soul. Perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish law than the command, “Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything which is in heaven or in the earth or under the earth.”

The “negative presentation” of the Infinite is only possible through reason—the imagination spurred by reason’s demand for “totality,” for “comprehension in one intuition,” forces the imagination out of the sensible and into the supersensible realm: “The bare capability of thinking this infinite without contradiction requires in the human mind a faculty itself supersensible. For it is only by means of this faculty and its idea of a noumenon, which admits of no intuition but which yet serves as the substrate for the intuition of the world as a mere phenomenon, that the infinite of the world of sense…. can be completely comprehended under one concept…”  

This concept is the concept of freedom, which, as the domain of reason, relates only to the subject and not to phenomena—thus, the aesthetical judgment of the sublime lifts us to an intimation of our destiny beyond sense, of our superiority to all that is given in appearance. He writes, “The feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own destination, which by a certain subreption, we attribute to an object of nature.” This “subreption” is the false attribution of respect to an object that in fact belongs to “our own state of mind,” to “the idea of humanity in our own subject.” “Sublimity….does not reside in anything of nature,” Kant continues to insist, “but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious that we are superior to nature within, and therefore, also to nature without (insofar as it influences us).”

The superiority of the moral law of reason over imagination is in the same breath our superiority over the laws of nature, over necessity, now regarded as entirely contingent, conditioned, lacking the absoluteness that only the mind, in complicity with the noumenon through the moral law, can rightly claim. Kant’s terse formula is this: “the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense.” While the sublime affords us veneration of our own minds, it carries us over to the limit of the mind, to the very idea of limit, to the law, itself sublime. Our pleasure in vibrating along the wire of this limit is the intimation of our “supersensible destination,” which, Kant says, “is only possible through the medium of pain.”

Initially, the sublime is terrifying, repulsive. It opens the possibility of total loss, for, Kant says, “the transcendent is for the imagination like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself.” But, he continues, “for the rational idea of the supersensible [the sublime] is not transcendent, but in conformity with law to bring about such an effort of the imagination.” Where the imagination gapes at the infinite in fear and trembling, pushed—by law—beyond its ken, reason smiles in its conscious superiority. It remains wholly secure, even in the face of the whirlwind, for it knows that there is nothing to fear. He writes,

In the immensity of nature…we find our own limitation, although at the same time in our rational faculty…we find a superiority to nature even in its immensity. And so also the irresistibility of [nature’s] might, while making us recognize our own [physical] impotence, considered as beings of nature, discloses to us a faculty of judging independently of and a superiority over nature, on which is based a kind

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18 Ibid. § 29.
19 Ibid. § 26.
20 Ibid. § 27.
21 Kant, Judgment, § 26.
22 Ibid. § 29.
23 Ibid. § 26.
24 Ibid. § 27.
25 Ibid. § 26.
of self-preservation entirely different from that which can be attacked and brought into danger by external nature. Thus humanity in our person remains unhumiliated, though the individual might have to submit to this dominion. In this way nature is not judged to be sublime...insofar as it excites fear, but because it calls up that power in us, which is not nature, of regarding as small the things about which we are solicitous (goods, health, and life), and of regarding its might (...) as nevertheless without any dominion over us and our personality...26

This mysterious assurance of security even in the face of physical destruction is a “state of joy,” and in this soaring elevation over every created thing, we anticipate our sublime destination. Freedom for Kant is not to put oneself radically at risk. It neither wounds nor bleeds, as it serves as a “faculty of resistance,” a sense of “inner freedom” through the moral law that gives us “courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.”27 The sublime does not throw us down before an alien transcendence, because we, ourselves, are sublime; we are that abyss in which the imagination fears to lose itself. Our destination to the noumenon, source of the law of freedom, morality, and of nature, may reduce to nothing all that had appeared to further life, but it is another life that opens before us, beyond sense and sensibility. The “negative pleasure” of the sublime requires a supreme “sacrifice,” in Kant’s idiom, the sacrifice of the imagination, and with it the entire given world of nature. Hence the pain. This sacrificial economy, which is to say, the dialectic, knows only one supreme value: security in morality. “The object of a pure and unconditioned satisfaction,” Kant writes, “is the moral law in that which it exercises in us over all mental motives that precede it. This

might only makes itself aesthetically known to us through sacrifices, which, causing a feeling of deprivation, though on behalf of internal freedom, in return discloses in us an unfathomable depth of this supersensible faculty, with consequences extending beyond our ken....28 Though Jean-François Lyotard, in clear antipathy to the Kantian sublime and its (terrorist) explosion of the bridge between faculties of knowledge, declares this “aesthetic of denaturing,” where “nature is sacrificed on the altar of the law,” to be “without future,”29 for Kant, when the veil of the beautiful is rent, when the abyss opens, we are suspended and in suspense at the bosom of the moral law, destined to return to its source, the sublime God of justice.

For Kant, the sublime is impossible without the cultivation of morality; it is necessary to presuppose this freedom in order to raise such aesthetic judgments out of the realm of psychology and into that of philosophy. The sublime is an operation whereby the subject, in facing the extremity of its limit, surpasses that limit, and in so doing returns to itself as transfigured — it has a glimpse of its destiny. The subject is determined by this experience, undergoes a “modification of its state,” which would imply a degree of passivity. Yet reason is ever active, intentional, and morality is propulsive, so that the opening of the subject onto its own sublimity is at the same time its closure, its insularity, its security in the lap of noumenal transcendence. Kant has determined the ground of the sublime, though it may admit of no direct intuition, through principles which ensure the safety and self-preservation of the rational subject—which ensure his “absolute value.” In Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant writes:

Persons... are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value

26Kant, Judgment, § 28.
27Ibid. § 28.
28Kantor, Judgment, § 28.
for us: they are objective ends—that is, things whose existence is in itself an end, and indeed an end such that in its place we can put no other end to which they should serve simply as a means; for unless this is so, nothing at all of absolute value would be found anywhere. But if all value were conditioned—that is, contingent—then no supreme principle could be found for reason at all.30

Kant here intones the very possibility of morality: negatively, the refusal to reduce any person to a mere means, be it political, aesthetic, erotic, techno-scientific, what have you, and positively, the conferral of absolute value on every human life, however mean, such that no human being is replaceable, no human being can be reduced to a “price.” Who, besides committed “immoralists,” would object to such fundamental principles? Not I. What I cannot accept, however, is that such principles, however noble and desirable, find assurance, ground, and security in the supremacy of reason to all contingency. Morality, like the sublime, is a risk, an abyssal leap (or fall) into givenness itself; its “universality” and “transcendental necessity” are grounded in desire, in a will to what “ought to be” without recourse to an absolute that can find its measure in three critiques, however voluminous, without the sacrificial promise of destination to God on the basis of moral purity. Likewise, with morality’s aesthetic analog, would it not be possible to conceive of the “astonishment that borders on terror, the dread and holy awe” as sublime even if we were not in fact ensured of safety and could not rely any determinate content (moral purposiveness) that would infallibly preserve our well-being? What if the wound were to remain open, and if that very wounding, in its indeterminate anteriority, brought with it a strange, almost inexplicable, feeling of joy? Anxiety, of course, is more likely, but here we will have quit the rarefied realm of the sublime—I will remain with Kant in his insistence that the sublime brings with it a distinctive flooding of pleasure, however negative. I will also follow the dialectical movement of the sublime as a pain that is hurled against the extremity of limit, a loss of immediate ground that transfigures, by the negation of this ground, the subject by returning it to its “authenticity” as radically given over to becoming. This sublime “subject” may, in fact, not have any determinate “supersensibility” that will rescue it from its abyss, but finds itself in sublimity by the very fact that it must remain radically open and unknowing — qua subject, or, as Marion will term this subject that “comes after the subject,” “interloqué.”

To serve as an interlude between the Kantian subject and Jean-Luc Marion's interloqué, I will explicate Marion's notion of the “saturated phenomena,” which, while bearing striking family resemblance to Kant's sublime, points to a subject that is not assured of its superiority, but is radically “undone” by the movement of the sublime. Marion begins with the question of the possibility of the religious phenomenon, and, in its impossibility of arising within a phenomenological horizon, the possibility of phenomena in general. According to rational philosophy, for a phenomenon to be possible, it must be visible. Further conditions are set, both by Kant and by Husserl, such that possibility “does not follow from the phenomenon, but by the conditions set for any phenomenon.”31 The saturated phenomenon is posited as a direct response to Kantian and Husserlian limits placed on possibility for the arising of phenomena. While Husserl moved beyond Kant with his “principle of principles,” rejecting the Kantian distinction between sense-objects and things-in-themselves, he nonetheless, in seeming contradiction to his first principle of phenomenology, whereby intuition is given as fully sufficient in itself to receive phenomena, without reliance on a reason, requires first, that all

30 Kant, Groundwork, 96.

phenomena appear within the scope of a horizon, within limits, and second, that all phenomena must be given to the “I” as the “now” of an occurrence. Marion asks, “But that being the case, if every phenomenon is defined by its very reducibility to the ‘I,’ must we not exclude straightaway the general possibility of an absolute, autonomous—in short, irreducible—phenomenon?”

Thus, although Husserl opened possibility by freeing intuition, he has jeopardized this very principle by placing strictures on the possibility of appearance. Marion thus offers the possibility of unconditionality and irreducibility:

Let us define it provisionally: what would occur, as concerns phenomenality, if an intuitive givenness were accomplished that was absolutely unconditioned (without the limits of a horizon) and absolutely irreducible (to a constituting “I”)? Can we not envisage a type of phenomenon that would reverse the condition of a horizon (by surpassing it, instead of being inscribed within it) and that would reverse the reduction (by leading the “I” back to itself, instead of being reduced to the “I”)?

This provisional hypothesis is precisely what would be given in Marion's offering to phenomenology, the saturated phenomenon. We can hear the echoes here of Kant's sublime, wherein the imagination, or intuition, reaches its limit in the bombardment of the “sublime object.” Here it is not a matter of the poverty of intuition, but its excess, surpassing every horizon; this excess at the limit leads the “I” back to itself in a dialectical violence recalling that of the sublime. Marion speaks of phenomena “appearing at the limits of phenomenality,” or possibility, and by appearing at those limits, they “appear there all the more.” Marion, I should note, is asserting the possibility of such phenomena, not their actuality, in order to bring them into the realm of phenomenological discourse. Such phenomena would bring with them an excess of intuition, not the poverty of intuition taken as the norm by Husserl, a poverty which in itself delimits the possibility of phenomena by seeking adequation between intention and intuition as the ideal, denying a boundlessness which might be given to intuition to be thought.

As intuition is what determines the horizon of possibility, so long as its potentiality is reduced to the conditioning “I,” intuition remains finite:

In order for a phenomenon to be inscribed within a horizon (and therefore find its condition of possibility), it is necessary that a horizon be delimited (it is its definition), and therefore that the phenomenon remain finite. In order for a phenomenon to be reduced to an obviously finite “I” who constitutes it, the phenomenon must be reduced to the status of finite objectivity. In both cases the finitude of the horizon and of the “I” is indicated by the finitude of the intuition itself.

Invisible and “invisable,” that is, incapable of being aimed at by the intentional subject, the saturated phenomenon “exceeds the categories of the understanding — it will therefore be invisable according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, and incapable of being looked at (irregardable) according to modality.”

These Kantian categories, operable for both the sublime and the saturated phenomenon, at each turn cripple the understanding and humble the imagination. First, according to quantity, we are led back to the “mathematically sublime,” whereby intentionality of the imagination is thwarted due to the “essentially unforeseeable character” of the saturated phenomenon in its

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32 Ibid., 106.
33 Ibid., 107.
34 Ibid., 113.
absolute greatness, its surpassing of every standard of measure, such that it resists “synthesis” of an aggregate of parts, and so appeals to an aesthetic judgment, an “instantaneous synthesis.” Nothing here differentiates the saturated phenomena from Kant's mathematical sublime; “amazement” characterizes this unforeseeability on the basis of a summation of parts, this absolute greatness in the face of which everything is “small.” Did I say nothing? While Kant will affirm the sublimity of reason, due to its capacity to totalize a conception of infinity, Marion makes no such move. Ever and always, the saturated phenomenon renders the intuitive subject radically open and passive, claiming the sublime advantage for itself.

Second, according to quantity, Marion argues that the saturated phenomenon, in its unlimitedness, cannot be delineated and made visible by the intentional gaze of the subject: “Bedazzlement characterizes what the gaze cannot bear... It is in fact a question of something visible that our gaze cannot bear; this visible something is experienced as unbearable to the gaze because it weighs too much upon that gaze ... what weighs here is not unhappiness, nor pain, nor lack, but indeed glory, joy, excess...”\(^{35}\) We are blinded givenness that cannot be objectified in an intentional, hence limited, gaze; bedazzlement becomes a negative visibility, a scorching and unsustainability of the gaze, as with the philosopher who emerges for the first time out of Plato’s cave “πρὸς τὸ φῶς,” into the light. “Bedazzlement begins when perception passes beyond its subjective maximum.”\(^{36}\) This “maximum” or limit, which defines the possibility for intuition, is obviously the limit of finitude. Marion leaves Kant for the moment and tacitly invokes Aquinas, for his analysis of bedazzlement:

As previously with unforeseeability, so bedazzlement designates a type of intuitive givenness that is not only less rare than it would seem to a hasty examination, but above all, that is decisive for a real recognition of finitude. Finitude is experienced (and proved) not so much through the shortage of the given through our gaze, as above all because this gaze sometimes no longer measures the amplitude of the givenness. Or rather, measuring itself against that givenness, the gaze experiences it, sometimes in a suffering of an essential passivity, as having no measure with itself. Finitude is experienced as through excess as through lack—indeed, more through excess than through lack.\(^{37}\)

Whereas with Kant we found, in the experience of the excessive might of the dynamically sublime, a superiority to all givenness through the moral purposiveness—freedom—of reason, intimating a “higher destination,” here we are returned to ourselves through bedazzlement as radically finite in our incapacity to withstand the excess of givenness. We are thrust back upon our own passivity, cut open and left wounded, yet elevated into “authenticity”—transfixed, like Job in the face of revelation: “I am but dust and ashes.”

Third, according to relation, there can be no analogy of experience. The interconnected correspondence of sense-experience presupposes a unity of experience, such that nothing may arise outside a preestablished “system of coordinates.” Is a unique event possible, such that it remains “unforeseeable (on the basis of the past), not exhaustively comprehensible (on the basis of the present), nor reproducible (on the basis of the future); in short absolute, unique, occurring?\(^{38}\) If so, any analogy of experience would disfigure a “pure event” by inscribing it within a unified textuality, impoverishing the phenomenon by relegating it, according to analogy, to a

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 115.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 116.
projecting system of already-having-been. Within such a system we can never be surprised, dislodged, shaken from the textual bounds of foreseeable experience. The horizon for givenness will have “first awaited in advance,” preceded all givenness by an anteriority that exercises dominion, manipulability, and delimitation over all phenomena. The saturated phenomenon exceeds every horizon by presenting intuition with an obliteration of ordinary experience. The limit is strained to the point of collapse; a danger arises from overwhelming givenness, where there is “neither door nor window, neither other [autrui] nor others [outré].” The breaking point is averted when one “allows [the phenomenon] to operate on several horizons at once.”\(^{39}\) This pluralizing of horizons renders the phenomenon “tolerable,” and at the same time frees it from experience “that is already seen, objectivized, and comprehended. It frees itself therefrom because it depends on no horizon.”\(^{40}\) Marion will thus name the saturated phenomenon “unconditioned” according to relation.

Finally, according to modality, Marion strives to extricate the saturated phenomenon from power of the knowing “I.” For both Kant and Husserl, the possibility of the arising of phenomena is reduced to the transcendental “I,” the one who regards through the conditioning power of the eye. But, Marion wants to argue, the saturated phenomenon cannot, in fact, be looked at. The “I” is incapable of constituting an object because “it appears with a multiple and indescribable excess that suspends any effort at constitution.” It refuses the controlling gaze of the subject, yet appears nonetheless. The “I,” as the imagination in Kant’s analytic, confronts its own impotence as it stands before the deluge, bringing a surfeit of intuition with no concept to serve as sanctuary. “The eye sees not so much another spectacle as its own naked impotence to constitute anything at all. It sees nothing distinctly, but clearly experiences its impotence before the unmeasuredness of the visible, and thus above all a perturbation of the visible, the noise of a poorly received message, the obfuscation of finitude.”\(^{41}\) This humiliation of the “I” is not relieved by an appeal to supersensible \(a\) \(priori\) categories of reason that would reassure the subject of its precedence over all phenomena. The impotence is real, and occasions a dialectical revolution, as with the Kantian sublime, but such that intentionality and constitution are reversed: The “I” (eye) is no longer master of its house:

Let us call this phenomenological extremity a paradox. The paradox not only suspends the phenomenon’s relation of subjection to the “I,” it inverts that relation. Far from being able to constitute this phenomenon”; the “I” experiences itself as constituted by it. It is constituted and no longer constituting because it no longer has at its disposal any dominant point of \(view\) over the intuition that overwhelms it... The “I” loses its anteriority and finds itself, so to speak, deprived \(destitute\) of the duties of constitution, and thus itself constituted: a “me” rather than an “I.”\(^{42}\)

This passage proves crucial in the assassination of Kant’s sublime subject, who ever retains his superiority over givenness by crowning as sublime his own mind, in its entire determination and purposiveness. The activity, the constitution is here no longer the privilege of the subject, but of superabundant givenness itself, which dislodges the subject from his nominative priority, anteriority, and intentionality, and, cutting him to the quick, renders him “dative.” The phenomenon itself engenders this return to self as an essentially passive witness that is called to itself, as “me,” by “surprise.” This subject, whose ground has been undercut and is left suspended, caught unawares, given

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 117.  
\(^{40}\) Ibid.  
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 119.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
over to a “more originary,” irreducible givenness, is termed *interloqué.* What ground have we covered? Marion writes:

> There is no drift or turn here, even “theological,” but, on the contrary, an accounting for the fact that in certain cases of givenness the excess of intuition may no longer satisfy the conditions of ordinary experience; and that the pure event that occurs cannot be constituted as an object and leaves the durable trace of its opening only in the “I/me” that finds itself, almost m spite of itself, constituted by what it receives. The constituting subject is succeeded by the constituted witness. As a constituted witness, the subject remains the worker of truth, but no longer its producer.⁴³

Marion wants to insist that a phenomenology of the “impossible” alone truly fulfills the “principle of principles,” that the surpassing of the conditions of possibility as set by Husserl, which define the saturated phenomenon under the figure the impossible, alone opens the possibility of a phenomenon to appear “as itself, of itself, and starting from itself, since it alone appears without the limits of a horizon and without the reduction to an “I.” The pure event is not determined but determining, transfiguring the “I” in its return to itself as passively given over as witness. The appearance of the saturated phenomenon, in its unforeseeability, irreducibility, incomprehensibility, and non-repeatability, is termed “revelation.” Marion “insist[s] on this,” that revelation is to be understood not as theological and hence laden with determinate content, but simply “a matter of the phenomenon taken in its fullest meaning.” This revelation is a revelation for the “I,” but the ground of this “I” is obliterated, and what has remained hermetically sealed is now open and exposed. The “surprise” of having-been-given-over by an indeterminate anteriority that determines the *interloqué* is, we may say, the sublime call back to oneself as essentially passive and wounded, yet given over to freedom, which is, in the realm of the sublime, an ineffable, ecstatic, joy.

Although the basic structure of *interloqué* has been delineated, Marion’s contribution to the eponymous question, *Who Comes After The Subject?*, entitled “L’ Interloqué,” offers a more nuanced profile of the heir to the modern (sublime) subject. Here, Marion engages Heidegger’s overcoming of the subject in Dasein. Dasein has renounced the intentionality of the subject, its “objectivization of the object,” in favor of the “opening of a world,” and has renounced self-grounding in favor of its exposure to Being, to its own being-toward-death, the “possibility of the impossible.” Thus does Dasein “sublate the subject,” insofar as all claims to self-foundation by an unconditioned “I” are renounced, as is the substantality of the subject, through the “mineness” of Dasein’s being, ever ecstatic in exposing itself to its ownmost possibility — death. Marion’s critique concerns the “mineness” of Dasein’s “selfhood,” which is its existing as itself, without substitution, in its singularity. Marion characterizes this selfhood as “autarky,” which “mimes” the intentionality of the modern subject in a transmuted intentionality: Being-in-the-world, anxiety, conscience, Being-toward-death. This intentionality is, in the same breath, a self-reflexivity characteristic of the metaphysical subject, a self-reflexivity that Marion finds in Heidegger’s notion of care, as well as the encapsulation of Dasein in its own thrownness and being-toward-death:

>[T]he Self, positing itself as such through anticipatory resoluteness toward possibility, does not accept any intrinsic determination: neither the world (which this resoluteness opens and therefore precedes), nor the entity (which it transcendens), nor time (whose authentic

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⁴³ Ibid., 120.
temporality becomes phenomenologically accessible only through this resoluteness)—so that nothing, not even nothingness, itself, can here evoke, say, or even sense Being."44

No opening is possible for extrinsic determination; the Self remains self-positing, and hence autarkic, through anticipatory resoluteness. For Marion, Heidegger remains within the realm of modern metaphysics, insofar as the radical wounding that Being and Time ostensibly confers on the post-Hegelian subject is not really so radical after all: Dasein supplies its own call to itself, and its openness is solely toward its ownmost possibility—not even the "call of Being" can reach Dasein in its obsession with its "ownmost."

The overcoming of the "I" can only arise with the claim. "The claim, then calls me. I have not yet said I, since the claim has already hailed me, hence named and summoned me as me. Moreover, the only appropriate answer to the claim that names me is, "This is me! without any I."45 The identity that is given by the claim can no longer be that of an autonomous, transcendental "I," but merely the one upon the claim is made. The claim is a "pure and naked experience," a saturated phenomenon, directed to me by an "inconceivable, unnamable, unpredictable agency: the claim itself to be precise."46 The agency cannot be named; this is the very condition of the claim and of interloqué, its pure anonymity, for otherwise the interloqué would not experience the surprise of the claim. This surprise is the "disaster of the 'I'" forcing it into a relation that is absolute and not at all to its advantage, wherein it loses all self-constitution, -autarky, -any polarity-by which it might overcome the precedence of the claim. Surprise "seizes the interloqué in

the sense that it seizes all polarity of subjectivity in the me—the interloqué is less torn away from the me—since it perceives itself precisely without even the least self—than, constituted by an unassignable claim as a me without ground, without subject, without any place other than this very interpellation."47 The interloqué is one whose ground has become groundless, whose subjecthood is eradicated utterly, without a trace, and whose place is the sublime suspension of having been called, having been given over by the call, not to ecstasy, but to surprise. The claim is the absolute determination of the interloqué, which, arising outside of ordinary experience, opens the one called onto him/her/itself as the recipient of a claim, embroiled in a relation to that which must remain anonymous and absent. Amazement, bedazzlement, admiration, all in the presence/absence of a radical indeterminacy, characterize the response, "This is me," of interloqué.

The interloqué, as with the Kantian subject, is the locus of sublimity, but not according to its precedence over all givenness, its superiority and safety, but according to its very exposure to givenness, its profound uncertainty, its groundlessness. The call that must always remain anonymous claims the interloqué by a radical anteriority that cannot be bridged. And so the pain of the abyss, of the limit, cannot be soothed with the balm of supersensible ideas; it opens the "subject" upon itself as already determined by the unnamable claim, as "me," not "I," always called in advance by an "absolute givenness" to oneself as given, as "adonné." Marion's indebtedness to Levinas is clear, except that Levinas, without thereby acquitting the subject or easing her burden (far from it), will give determinate content to the caller—the face of the Other—so that ethics may unseat ontology as "first philosophy." Marion, qua phenomenologist, wants to preserve the (sublime) anonymity of the caller; however, it is not difficult to see why Derrida will hear the distinct call of "the Father," the trinitarian Christian God, in Marion's ostensibly atheological, that is,

46 Ibid., 242-3.
47 Ibid., 243.
phenomenological, analysis of interloqué. What interloqué, coupled with the saturated phenomenon, does provide, unequivocally, is an occasion to reverse the dialectical movement of the Kantian sublime, leading the subject back to itself as one who has been given over and called, left wounded and hence open to an indeterminate freedom. Amazement, bedazzlement, astonishment, joy—wasn't this the birthplace of philosophy?

48 Cf. Jacques Derrida. Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 52. “Marion… seems to me also to make ‘the call as such,’ ‘the pure form of the call,’ conform to the call of the father, to the call that returns to the father and that, in truth, would speak the truth of the father, even the name of the father, and finally the father inasmuch as he gives the name.”