

From Blind to Blinding: Saturated Phenomena and the Speculative Lyric of the Invisible in Andrew Joron's Poetry

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Abstract

This essay presents a critical reading of Andrew Joron's speculative *oeuvre* from a phenomenological standpoint. Proceeding from the poet's cosmic perspectives, it focuses on the central issue of language in relation to the emergence of meaning and the world. Through a close reading of both Joron's poetry and poetics, this essay demonstrates his conceptual affinity with the work of contemporary French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, arguing that both Joron's poetry and Marion's phenomenology of givenness postulate an emergence of meaning and the world that is absolutely unconditioned and unconditional, an emergence characterized by an intuitively blinding richness that saturates the phenomenon over and beyond any limit and, hence, makes the phenomenon invisible.

Keywords: *Andrew Joron, Jean-Luc Marion, speculative lyric, criticality, emergence of meaning, phenomenology of givenness, phenomenological reduction, saturated phenomenon, invisible/visible*

While continuing the critical energy and the experimental momentum characteristic of the innovative poetry scene of the second half of the twentieth century, Andrew Joron's work has distinguished itself, since the first decade of the 2000s, by embarking on a different path of poetic intervention. Although never losing sight of the aspirations of avant-garde poetry generally, it goes beyond the now all-too-familiar arenas of poetic practices into a domain of speculative thinking further removed from existing constraints. This phenomenon is importantly captured and brought to the fore by Calvin Bedient who, in his 2004 review of Joron's *Fathom* in the *Boston Review*, thus defines the epochal status of the poet: '[...] in the last few years, Andrew Joron, a poet who lives in Berkeley, has quietly begun to surface as a metaphysician-elect of contemporary American poetry.'¹

Joron's Poetic Perception and the Emergence of Meaning

Joron's metaphysics, when understood in the broadest sense as an emerging poetic-philosophical thinking bespeaking a new era, proceeds from what the poet himself

¹ Calvin Bedient, 'Desire's Nemesis', *Boston Review*, 1 June 2004; available at <https://bostonreview.net/articles/calvin-bedient-desires-nemesis/> [accessed 4 April 2022].

refers to as the ‘cosmic perspectives’.² Carried over from his earlier writing in science fiction on the one hand and, on the other hand, long informed by the philosophical polemics on language in relation to the search for the infinite,³ these cosmic perspectives are articulated in Joron’s work in the form of ‘poetic perception’.⁴ Central to this poetic perception are the two interwoven objectives: ‘metaphysical inquiry’ and ‘materialist critique of language’,⁵ with the former predicated upon the latter. At stake therein is, more specifically, the ‘word/world division’ (Gordon, in GR); or, as Joron himself puts it in the form of a question, ‘Does the way a poem is made have any relation to the way the world makes itself?’⁶

‘In a word’, the poet writes, there appears ‘the uncanny reflection of an unfinished world’ (CZ 10). Situated from such a perspective, Joron’s metaphysical inquiry into the unfathomableness of the unfinished manifolds of a world making itself begins with a materialist critique of language that endows the world anthropomorphically with the visibility and expressivity of a ready-made. ‘Poetic perception, however, reminds us that language is inherently opaque’, Joron argues emphatically, and ‘that language has a material body as mysterious and meaningless as any other natural object’ (Joron, NI). Therefore, for a word to reflect veridically the inscrutableness of an unfinished world, it has to fall flat in its received function of signification and its alleged capability of expression. Hence the performative role of poetry: ‘Where language fails, poetry begins’, Joron asserts, ‘Poetry forces language to fail, to fall out of itself, to become something other than itself’, thus turning the word into ‘the word of refusal, as the sign of that which cannot be assimilated to the system’ (CZ, 1, 4). In this sense, ‘the highest calling’ for poetry is, thus, ‘the de-anthropomorphisation of language’ (CZ, 1, 105), which in turn results in a radical transformation of the nature and function of language, stripping it of its instrumentality of representation and restoring to it its materiality, materiality, that is, understood and defined specifically by the poet ‘as a speculative substance’ (Joron, NI).

Joron’s interest in and engagement with de-anthropomorphized language as a speculative substance have significant implications, one of which is phenomenological. For it leads, perceptually, to an alien world: a world that makes itself, the unfolding of a cosmos that manifests itself to itself, the self-appearing of an unfinished conglomerate independent of individual intentions, conceptual mappings, psychological projections, and methodological impositions. When working with ‘Word beyond meaning’ (CZ, 6), Joron observes, poetry opens, ‘capable of rediscovering a wilderness, a cosmic

² Andrew Joron, in Christopher Nelson, ‘Interview with Andrew Joron on *The Sound Mirror*’, *Green Linden Press*, 28 April 2010; available at <https://www.greenlindenpress.com/interviews-and-reviews/#/andrew-joron/> [accessed 4 April 2022]. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as NI.

³ For these issues, see the Nelson Interview, where Joron offers sketchy but clear accounts of his own writing experience, his interests in philosophy, and, particularly, the influence of Gustaf Sobin’s work on him.

⁴ As clearly articulated in his interview with Nelson on his book *The Sound Mirror*, Joron’s ‘poetic perception’ focuses on the sound perception. However, given the poet’s own understanding and explanations of it, his idea of ‘poetic perception’ is, as this paper is going to argue, equally applicable to other forms of perception, such as visual perception in its extended linguo-phenomenological paradigms.

⁵ Noah Eli Gordon, ‘Review of *The Sound Mirror* by Andrew Joron’, *BOOKFORUM*, April/May 2009; available at <https://www.bookforum.com/print/1601/the-sound-mirror-by-andrew-joron-3534> [accessed 4 April, 2022]. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as GR.

⁶ Andrew Joron, *The Cry at Zero: Selected Prose* (Denver: Counterpath Press, 2007), 17. Hereafter referred to parenthetically CZ, with page numbers in the text.

bewilderment' (Joron NI). It follows, then, that such a 'poetic opening [...] does not communicate at all, except to announce the incommunicable', express 'the Inexpressible', and say 'the unsayable' (CZ, 5, 6). Hence a paradox, in that the resultant 'enigma' (CZ, 6) of communicating the incommunicable, expressing the inexpressible, and saying the unsayable functions, precisely because of its own inherent linguo-logical impasse, as both the incentive and the substance for speculative thinking, and that the rediscovered wilderness and cosmic bewilderment present themselves, by virtue of their defyingly formidable unruliness, as the vital site as well as the potential source for 'the emergence of meaning' (Joron, NI). In other words, poetry, as the embodiment of this phenomenal world through language as the speculative substance, presents itself as the essential provision for the emergence of meaning. For poetry is, as such, 'the self-organized criticality', Joron contents, which is 'a state of criticality, where single events have the widest possible range of effects', 'a condition of language in which single words have the widest possible range of effects' (CZ, 8). Totally uninhibited in its own intent, the emergence of meaning from such phenomenal world is then perceived as at once spontaneous and unpredictable in its concrete happenings, and excessive of and irreducible to 'rigid concepts' in its distinct significance, always 'exceeding the capacities of each to contain it' (CZ, 8, 9).⁷ 'That which is radically *other*', Joron thus epitomizes such emergence of meaning, 'does not reveal itself under interrogation'.⁸

Joron's statement that 'that which is radically *other* does not reveal itself under interrogation' highlights a particular inquiry carried out by his poetic perception: the manner of the emergence of meaning, or how this 'radically *other*' emerges or appears ('reveal') as a phenomenon. It postulates, albeit implicitly, two interrelated properties of its emergence or appearance. First, the 'radically *other*', which Joron recapitulates under the umbrella idea of 'The blues' as 'an expression' of the incommunicable, the inexpressible, and the unsayable (CZ, 5, 6), is invisible, which is to say unforeseeable, and it does not submit itself to visibility in terms of prescribed forms of foreseeability ('does not reveal itself'): '[...] blues / advance into invisibility',⁹ Joron states. Secondly, the emergence or the appearance of the 'radically *other*' is neither conditional on prior knowledge nor conditioned by the interpellations from anyone or the limits imposed by any schema but itself ('does not reveal itself under interrogation'). It is, differently put, a self-emergence, one that makes itself manifest on its own initiative, a self-appearance, that is, which shows itself entirely and absolutely of its own accord.

⁷ The general theoretical backdrop of Joron's notion of 'self-organized criticality' is that of complex systems as open systems. Joron also explains his idea by way of an illustration when he says: 'The concept of "self-organized criticality" can be illustrated by pouring a quantity of sand onto a tabletop: the fallen particles will build up into a conical pile. This shape is the product of self-organization, for the pile maintains itself around a critical vertex, a balance-point between order and chaos. Once this critical point is reached, the effect of a single particle's impact on the pile no longer can be predicated. One particle may cause a chain reaction of cascades upon impact, while another may rest where it falls' (CZ, 8). For more elaboration on this issue, see CZ, 7-9.

⁸ Andrew Joron, *Fathom* (New York: Black Square Editions, 2003), 25; original italics. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *F*, with page numbers in the text.

⁹ Andrew Joron, *The Sound Mirror* (Chicago: Flood Editions, 2008), 23. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *SM*, with page numbers in the text.

A Poetic Beckoning to Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology of Givenness

To the extent that Joron's poetic perception envisions the emergence of meaning as invisible due to its un-foreseeability and neither unconditional nor conditioned as the result of its enigmatic non-relation, his speculative thinking resonates, rather uncannily, with contemporary French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion and his phenomenology of givenness. Arguing against Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of transcendental reduction and Martin Heidegger's phenomenology of existential reduction, both of which center on, each in his own way of course, the reduction of the phenomenon to the phenomenon represented, Marion presents his phenomenology as the 'third reduction', which proposes a reduction of phenomenon to the phenomenon's own absolute and 'originarily unconditional' givenness.¹⁰ The Phenomenon appears unconditionally, Marion contends, giving itself, showing itself, and 'starting from itself alone' as 'a *fait accompli*'.¹¹ Considering such givenness as '[t]he phenomenality proper to the phenomenon',¹² Marion outlines further the ontological properties of givenness in terms of phenomenal 'datum':

Now, this datum [...] is distinguished from all foreseen, synthesized, and constituted objects, [...] This unforeseen happening marks it as given and attests in it to givenness. [...] givenness characterizes the given as without cause, origin, and identifiable antecedent, [...] the given – the given phenomenon – gives itself starting from itself alone (and not from a foreseeing and constituting subject). [...] givenness does not submit the given to a transcendent condition, but rather frees it from that condition. (*IE*, 24, 25)

Since the phenomenon gives itself by itself and for itself, starting from itself alone, Marion continues, its '[a]ppearing must thus remove itself from (if not always contradict) the imperial rules of the a priori conditions of knowledge by requiring that what appears force its entry onto the scene of the world, advancing in person without a stuntman, double, or any other representative stand in for it.' (*BG*, 69) Both originarily unconditional and thereafter unconditioned, givenness of the phenomenon as such thus entails that '[i]n the strict phenomenological sense', Marion proclaims, 'the phenomenon is no longer [...] visible' (*BG*, 69).

More importantly, this invisibility of the givenness of the phenomenon, Marion argues, results from a radical severance from the three characteristics of Husserl's "principle of all principles", a principle, that is, 'that (in principle) broadens unconditionally the heretofore conditional phenomenality': the intuition, the horizon, and the I (*BG*, 184, 185, 187).¹³ First, and schematically put in Marion's own words,¹⁴

¹⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 204, 205.

¹¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 25. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *IE*, with page numbers in the text.

¹² Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 19. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *BG*, with page numbers in the text.

¹³ Husserl's 'principle of all principles', in its English translation with modification, is quoted in Marion's text as follows: 'every originarily giving intuition [*Anschauung*] is a source of right for knowledge, that

the invisibility in question lies in that the givenness of the phenomenon as such is unintended, and hence unperceivable, by intuition because it 'would not tie its fate to intuition', which 'remains framed, inasmuch as it is intuition, by two conditions of possibility' of the horizon and the I (*BG*, 185), and which, grouped together with 'concept/signification' by the classical definition of phenomenon and empowered with the authority of knowledge, would 'determine in advance the possibility of appearing for every phenomenon' (*BG*, 197, 181). Second, the givenness of phenomenon is invisible because it does not 'admit limitation, *de facto* and *de jure*, by a horizon', which, meaning 'etymologically speaking, delimitation', functions to frame intuition by granting the phenomenon its visibility (*BG*, 187, 186), and which, co-intending with consciousness, presents itself as a determining structure, a 'visual prison', that is, where '[t]he intention always anticipates what it has not seen', so much so that 'the unseen has, from the start, the rank of a pre-seen, a merely belated visible, without fundamentally irreducible novelty, in short a pre-visible.' (*BG*, 187, 186) And third, the unconditional and unconditioned givenness of the phenomenon is invisible in that it 'precedes every other instance (including and above all the I)', to whom it shows itself 'on its own basis' rather than offers itself as a constituted object 'by and on the basis of the I' (*BG*, 187), and that such givenness 'obligatorily confiscates the function and the role of the *self*' (*IE*, 45), who, 'in the domain of givenness, [...] no longer decides the phenomenon, but receives it; or else, from "master and possessor" of the phenomenon, it becomes its receiver' (*BG*, 188).

Stated as such, Marion's givenness of the phenomenon lays bare the working principle at the heart of Husserl's phenomenology: the 'logic of penury' (*BG*, 185). Inscribed in and obeyed by intuition, in the finitude of which 'the two finitudes of the horizon and the I come together', this logic of penury determines *de jure* the 'finitude of givenness' in phenomena and delimits *de facto* the appearance of the phenomenon, thus rendering the phenomenon consequently 'poor in intuition' (*BG*, 197). The resultant 'poverty of intuition' that characterizes the phenomenon, Marion claims, follows an operational formula, which can be defined, more concretely, as 'the ideal adequation of intuition to intention' (*BG*, 197, 199).

It is against these three characteristics of Husserl's 'principle of all principles' armed with the logic of penury and operated through the poverty of intuition that Marion's phenomenology of givenness assumes a different 'hypothesis', an 'inverse one' (*BG*, 189, 187), to be exact. Situated 'at the limits of phenomenality', it posits a givenness of the phenomenon 'that is finally absolutely unconditioned (without the limits of a horizon) and absolutely irreducible (to a constituting I)' (*BG*, 189). Hence the imperative: the total inversion of the limit or the finitude of intuition, in which the two finitudes of the horizon and the I are conjoined into a tripartite structure of co-intending. For 'only [...] a finally nonfinite intuition could secure their givenness' of the

everything that offers itself originally to us in "intuition" [*Intuition*] is to be taken simply as it gives itself, but also only within the boundaries in which it gives itself there.' (*BG*, 184) For the original translation, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 25.

¹⁴ This is not the place for a full exegesis of Marion's phenomenology of givenness. For the purpose of this paper, and especially for the argument made regarding Joron's poetic perception, this section on Marion's phenomenology will focus on selected use, often in direct quotations, of his most pertinent ideas without elaborations of the wide scope as well as the intricate complexities of his arguments.

‘unconditioned and irreducible phenomena’ (*BG*, 197), Marion asserts, a givenness, that is, ‘in its widest possible scope’ (*BG*, 199). By collapsing the ‘equality of intuition and intention’, the inversion of the poverty of intuition would then make possible an intuition ‘that would give *more, indeed immeasurably more*, than the intention would ever have aimed at or foreseen’ (*BG*, 197). From ‘the phenomenon supposedly poor in intuition’, which makes intuition blind but the phenomenon visible, Marion’s inversion thus arrives at a phenomenon excessive or superabundant in intuition, which makes intuition blinding and the phenomenon invisible. It is, in other words, ‘a phenomenon saturated with intuition’, which Marion also refers to as ‘a saturated phenomenon’ (*BG*, 197).

Furthermore, excessive, superabundant, and surplus ‘over and above intention, the concept, and the intended’, the saturated phenomenon is invisible in that it ‘can never become knowledge’ (*BG*, 199, 197-8), Marion argues further, for the saturated phenomenon, otherwise called by Immanuel Kant an ‘aesthetic idea’, is that for which, as Kant himself makes it clear, ‘a concept can never be found adequate’ (*BG*, 198).¹⁵ In this sense, it becomes ‘inversely a question of a deficiency of the (lacking) concept, which leaves the (superabundantly given) intuition blind’, Marion continues, for ‘[t]he excess of intuition over every concept [...] prevents the aesthetic idea from making an object visible’ (*BG*, 198). In more concrete terms, Marion thus explains further:

[...] because it gives ‘much’, the aesthetic idea gives intuitively more than any concept can expose. To expose here equates disposing of (or organizing) the intuitive given according to rules. The impossibility of the concept arranging this disposition comes from the fact that the intuitive superabundance no longer succeeds in exposing itself in a priori rules, whatever they might be, but rather subsumes them. Intuition is no longer exposed in the concept; it saturates it and renders it overexposed – invisible, unreadable not by lack, but indeed by an excess of light. (*BG*, 198)

That being the case, Marion summarizes the four properties of the saturated phenomenon as ‘*invisible* according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, irregardable according to modality’ (*BG*, 199). The saturated phenomenon is ‘invisible according to quantity’ in the sense that it ‘*cannot be aimed at*’, ‘meant, or intended’, due to ‘its essentially unforeseeable character’ (*BG*, 199, 363); it is ‘unbearable according to quality’ in that it defies ‘intuition [that would] fix a degree of reality for the object by limiting it’ (*BG*, 202); it is ‘absolute according to relation’ because ‘it evades any analogy of experience’ (*BG*, 206); and it is ‘irregardable according to modality’ in the sense that it cannot be gazed at, kept visible either ‘under the control of the seer’ or ‘within the limits of a concept’ (*BG*, 214).

¹⁵ In his reading of Kant but against Kant, Marion credits him with ‘a foretaste of [...] saturated phenomenon’, which Kant refers to as ‘aesthetic idea’ (*BG*, 198). Here, Marion argues that, if Kant’s doctrine of ‘representation of an object according to a principle’ or ‘understanding’ dictates that an aesthetic idea is that ‘for which a concept can never be found adequate’ and therefore ‘can never become knowledge’ or ‘a cognition’, so does the surplus of intuition, ‘but for a contrary reason’ (*BG*, 197, 198). See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 218.

Joron's Speculative Lyric of the Invisible

Marion's phenomenology of givenness, thus theorized hypothetically, finds its poetic expression in Joron's speculative lyric of the invisible. Preoccupied with the transparent way the eye renders the world visible against the opaque way the world makes itself, Joron's poetic perception tackles the phenomenological polemic of visibility manifested in language, language, that is, as intuition, perception, and vision itself, informed by and adequate to intention and operated by concept. Against the world of wilderness or the cosmic bewilderment of the inexpressible, the incommunicable, and the unsayable out of which meaning emerges spontaneously, unforeseeably, excessively, and hence invisibly, the eye is presented, therefore, as a central problematic that punctuates Joron's work periodically throughout. In a poem titled, rather satirically, 'Post-Historic Pastoral 2', for instance, Joron relates a scenario paradigmatic of the poverty of intuition that delimits the possibility of visibility of the phenomenon:

At the end of every avenue
 In the circular city
 There stares a monumental Eye of Power
 empinnacled
 on a whirlwind

Inaudibly it roars ... subliminal commands
 & blessings hourly

Under the eye: grain molders in silos
 The weather is changed into an ideogram
 that is not for us
 to understand ¹⁶

Delineated in the poem is the co-intending structure of the Husserlian architectonics of phenomenology. Punning on 'I', which is the one, as Marion has argued, ultimately with the horizon, admitted 'as transcendental and as horizon' (*BG*, 188), the eye bespeaks intuition, which works with concept and signification. Positioned on high ('empinnacled') as the omnipresent ('every avenue') authority ('monumental Eye of Power'), the eye decrees ('roars') what can be seen, sweepingly ('on a whirlwind') and silently ('Inaudibly'), without one's awareness ('subliminal'), by directives ('commands') and benedictions ('blessings') alike. It delimits ('Under the eye') the possibility of the phenomenon's visibility by setting up the conditions in terms of which the phenomenon is allowed to emerge into view. 'Let *visible* speak', Joron writes, with regard to the delimiting function of visibility predicated on the poverty of intuition, 'as the exponent of *divisible*' (*SM*, 27). Therefore, the 'grain', which is so common a natural object as to be otherwise utterly unnoticeable, is granted visibility only when it disintegrates ('molders') in 'silos', a well-circumscribed visual prison, in which intention first determines, and then anticipates, the crumbling of the grain without showing any irreducible novelty, so much so that it presents this phenomenon as a fact in principle, forever present in view, which is to say a pre-visible. 'The veil of vision',

¹⁶ Andrew Joron, *Trance Archive: New and Selected Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2010), 20; original italics. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *TA*, with page numbers in the text.

indeed as Joron writes in a poem titled 'Citations from Silence', 'the curtain of condition' (*SM*, 70).

More pointedly, Joron's poem dramatizes Marion's critique of 'poverty of intuition' through what the poet himself calls the 'eye of poverty' (*TA*, 7). That the phenomenon is poor in intuition is staged in the poem in 'The weather is changed into an ideogram'. Under the 'eye of poverty', 'The weather', which is the most unpredictable, most unruly, most bewildering, and hence most ungraspable phenomenon, is not allowed to appear, 'advancing in person without a stuntman, double, or any other representative stand in for it', as Marion has stated earlier (*BG*, 69). Rather, its widest possible scope and effects are reduced to and represented by an object in the form of a pictorial configuration, in which visual representability is dovetailed with ideational legitimacy. At work in the reduction of the weather phenomenon to an ideogram for weather forecast is, then, the logic of penury, one that demands, both *de jure* and *de facto*, the ideal adequation of intuition ('the eye') to intention ('ideogram').

But 'This visible beam / supports not the Ideal world',¹⁷ Joron points out unambiguously in a poem titled 'The Reading Lamp'. His insight into the eye as a tripartite construct that orchestrates the appearance of the phenomenon by conditioning and delimiting the possibility of its appearing leads to sharp criticisms of the eye. '(Eyes knit what is not: white night)' (*SM*, 64), Joron declares, and, from this perspective, what is visibly identifiable is anything but the givenness of the phenomenon. Moreover, the end result of the 'knitting' function of the eye is found in a transparent and, therefore, unquestionable thing called 'fact', to which the phenomenon is ultimately reduced. In a tone that is both authoritative and accusatory, Joron then clarifies, in plain language, the nature of fact as such. Since the so-called 'fact' is nothing more than the artificial product of the eye's 'knitting' function, he thus concludes, '[...] fact is also / act, a faked effect', making it clear that 'Fact is fact! A forged object' (*SM*, 4, 62). Frequently paired with 'mind' as its own identical twin either explicitly or implicitly, the eye is further depicted in terms of mind's intention of phenomenological reduction of the intuitive superabundance according to a priori rules and concept. 'Mind / Blind / governance of the / In-given void' (*SM*, 55), Joron asserts, and 'to subtract the sea from its numberless waves is a contribution of the mind' (*TA*, 59). At the same time, however, Joron's critical insight into the 'eye of poverty' that makes the phenomenon visible by rendering it poor in intuition, hence a blind intuition, is sensitively juxtaposed with his keen awareness of the excessive or superabundant phenomenon in intuition, a saturated phenomenon over and above intention, concept, and the intended, which makes the phenomenon invisible by rendering intuition blinding. For Joron, then, the 'numberless waves' can never be exposed in the concept of 'sea'; rather, they subsume the 'sea' as such, saturating it with their givenness, and rendering it invisible in intuition's blinding light.

Joron brings this point to the fore in a poem titled 'The Invention of Zero':

The mind, a freezing reptile
Sits exposed upon a ledge
space falls away
in all directions

There is no sky

¹⁷ Andrew Joron, *The Removes* (West Stockbridge, MA: Hard Press, 1999), 17.

Enclosing this new world
 The wind's last breath
 Returns into the cave

The shields
 of a post-historic army
 Uncoiled like minor suns

a hierarchy of bells
 Cascades to a silent equilibrium

---second skin
 Of an escapeless circle

Its reflection
 Expansive as a sea-surface
 flattened
 by the weight of the invisible (*TA*, 25, 26)

A verbal caricature of 'the mind' as the paradigm of phenomenological reduction, the poem begins by identifying the anthropomorphic nature and function of the mind. Itself well predisposed in accord with the logic of penury, the mind organizes ('disposed') the phenomenon accordingly. It subtracts its intended object ('this new world') from its givenness ('space falls away / in all directions // There is no sky / Enclosing this new world / the wind's last breath / Returns into the cave') and regulates it into conceptual fixations ('freezing') according to a priori rules predicated upon that logic. More specifically, working with its identical twin of the eye of poverty, which puns on 'I' and, hence, intuition, the mind carries out the phenomenological reduction by resorting to the mechanisms of elimination ('The shields / of a post-historic army') via illumination ('Uncoiled like minor suns'). At work therein is a delimiting structure ('a hierarchy'), which is none other than the structure of the Ideal adequation of intuition to intention ('a silent equilibrium'). So armed conceptually and methodologically, the mind succeeds in bringing into visibility a world of its own making ('this new world') circumscribed by a horizon, a visual prison ('an escapeless circle'), that is, which is just another conceptual layer, or a formal variation, of the Ideal adequation of intuition to intention ('second skin'). Correspondingly, within this triply (mind/eye, intuition, horizon) delimited new world the givenness of the phenomenon is denied and driven into invisibility ('There is no sky / Enclosing this new world' / 'The wind's last breath / Returns into the cave'). That said, Joron ends the poem with a resounding counter-statement, however. As the product of the mind's phenomenological orchestration, he asserts, the visible world is no more than a house of cards, in that, suffering from the poverty in intuition, the mind's view of the world ('Its reflection'), as much all blanketing as it is ('Expansive as a sea-surface'), is at once limited and superficial ('a sea-surface'). The visible, so constructed as such, cannot therefore withstand the mass density of the invisible ('flattened / by the weight of the invisible'), which is the givenness of the phenomenon, the phenomenality proper to the phenomenon. Furthermore, the invisible institutes a 'Zero', as stated in the title of this poem and implied at the end of the poem. It is, for Joron, a 'zero point', which is 'also a crossing point, a crossing out and a crossing over of the Sign' (*CZ*, 107). Situated at this crossing point of the Zero, the invisible thus presents itself as the site wherein the anthropomorphic Sign, having fallen out of itself and become something other than

itself, as Joron has argued earlier, is turned into the sign of that which cannot be assimilated into any system. In this sense, the invisible is the inverted world of the givenness of the phenomenon, from which a different language is about to emerge, one that ‘attempts to say the unsayable’ (CZ, 105).

Acutely aware of “‘Vanishing into visibility’” as a ‘circus-like’ (TA, 86) manoeuvre in the phenomenological reduction of the invisible to the visible, Joron’s poetic perception then posits, as its speculative probe, a radically different eye in terms of a paradox: ‘*Eyes: the emblems of the invisible*’ (TA, 50). For the poet, the ground for such a Marion-like inversion is clear. ‘Preliminary to blindness, revision’, Joron thus announces with emphasis, ‘Form is given by that which it cannot contain’ (TA, 34). Just like the ‘sea’ as an abstract concept that is subtracted from but totally subsumed phenomenally by the ‘numberless waves’ it can never adequately register, ‘The limited cannot attain the limitless’ (CZ, 5), Joron reiterates. Hence the imperative: ‘Revise eyes over / sees, wave-woven’ (TA, 11). In other words, the eye, now rectified (‘Revise eyes over / sees’) in its intuitive function of aiming at (‘sees’) the ‘numberless waves’ as its intended objects, becomes the sign of the invisible that cannot be assimilated into any system (‘wave-woven’). It is an eye that is itself intertwined with the ‘numberless waves’, saturating the wave phenomenon with intuition so superabundant as to be immeasurably over and beyond what intention would ever be able to aim at or foresee. As the emblem of the invisible, the eye is blinding, brilliantly.

With his working paradox thus established, Joron continues to push his speculative trajectory in different contexts. In a poem titled, rather suggestively, ‘Inside a Ruined Observatory’, for instance, Joron makes an observation: ‘Here the eye / was stopped inside a star’ (SM, 23). The destruction of an institutional apparatus of observation or seeing, the function of which is to make selected celestial bodies visible as the intended objects of study by focusing – i.e., limiting – the eye *on* them as the intended,¹⁸ presents itself as the possibility for an alternative observation or seeing, which is suggested by a refutation on the part of the phenomenon: ‘Only a red leaf remains / to disprove the telescope’ (SM, 23). More specifically, ‘The eye / was stopped’ therein from its routine operation of delimiting the phenomenon, but not by the ruined and deserted instrumental mechanism. Rather, the eye has its functionality taken away by the givenness of phenomenon: ‘the eye / was stopped inside a star’. Here, the change of the eye’s position from outside to inside a star institutes an inversion. Conditional on accumulated knowledge, conditioned by instrumental apparatuses, and operated by the logic of penury, the poverty of the eye experiences its own blindness ‘inside a star’, where the givenness of phenomenon forces its entry into the eye over and beyond all intentions, concepts and the intended therein, overwhelming all the finitudes that characterize it and saturating it with its own brilliant invisibility. An eye ‘inside a star’ is, in this sense, the eye of the star itself, one that articulates the inexpressible, the incommunicable, and the invisible, announcing its own absolute givenness. Or, ‘Perhaps there is nothing to say’, as the poet thus speculates, ‘blues / advance into invisibility’ (SM, 23).

Continuing this trend of speculative thinking, Joron’s poetic perception then focuses, with an increasing intensity, on the fundamental cause that enables the vanishing of the phenomenon into visibility. In a poem titled ‘Voice of Eye’, which is dedicated to Gustaf Sobin as his kindred spirit, the poet inquires into the eye further by

¹⁸ My italics.

identifying it metaphorically with 'voice'. For, similar to the eye, the poverty of which makes the world visible, voice secures its desired communicative efficacy by relegating the sonic to the shadow of the semantic, and it sustains its own fine-tuned vocality by regulating the dynamic of air: '*Air* is merest modulation to *err*' (SM, 11). That being the case, Joron brings the 'voice of eye' into a larger context, going straightforwardly to the original source of its capability. He writes, pointedly, '—to entertain the world, the / ablest is A / Man of dark device. // His theater: shown blast, shone blind.' (SM, 11) Putting humanity ('A / Man') squarely in the seat of the accused, Joron defines the human rendition of the phenomenon ('to entertain the world') in terms of theatrical performance ('His theater'). Anthropomorphic in both intention and approach ('dark device'), such performance is not only violent in action and acoustics ('shown blast') but also poor in vision and interpretation ('shone blind'). Armed with such a dark device, the eye's performative ambition knows no bounds: 'Voice of eye, excepting / space to turn inside out— / as distance stares hard into the sun.' (SM, 12) To the extent that the poverty of the 'voice of eye' is so deeply entrenched in human attribute, Joron proposes, correspondingly as his solution, a radical shake-up, equally violent perhaps, of the condition of its possibility, so as to initiate an inversion, '*So convulse*.' (SM, 14) Then, for the eye as the emblem of the invisible, there appears, beyond the anthropomorphic theatre and absolutely on its own terms, 'Unblinded, blue / sun affixed to blinding heaven / Reverses the terms of exile' (SM, 14).

If 'the Eye to the Idea' (TA, 15) makes visible only what it intends, the poet contends, 'Closed eyes view / All that remains'.¹⁹ As self-organized criticality, poetry, for Joron, is the 'Book that wants invisibility' (SM, 21), a book in which 'A blank page is the flag of a secret conflagration' (CZ, 15). Corresponding to Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of givenness, his speculative lyric of the invisible thus articulates a poetic perception that intensifies an impulse in contemporary lyricism: 'the "singing of song's impossibility"' (F, 25). Furthermore, what characterizes this lyric impossibility is that, perceived as 'a version of the blues' of the invisible, it lays a 'strong ontological claim' to its 'unprecedented' and 'spontaneous emergence' (F, 25). From this perspective, the significance of the poet's speculative lyric of the invisible, which is its ontological status so granted, is historic or epochal. For while it spearheads the charting of a poetic path yet to be explored in contemporary lyricism, it also defines itself by way of 'an "ontological turn" away from' the innovative impasse of 'modern and postmodern poetics', whose 'epistemological dilemmas', Joron points out, lie in a mode of self-questioning that 'anticipates its answer', and hence is 'unprepared to receive the *Novum*' (F, 25). Not surprisingly, the ontological departure point for his speculative lyric of the invisible is thus situated on the 'originarily unconditional givenness' of the phenomenon, to use Marion's words. Since 'To truly perceive / Is to be reborn' (TA, 45), the poet finds his hope in an awakening, one with a powerful shock-effect that would effect a re-vision, an incipient perception, that is, at once unconditional and unconditioned. Joron writes:

---when certain 'useless' glands (long ignored by philosophers), embedded in our brains like eyes turned inward, like sleeping wasps, will awaken at last, to sting us with new Perceptions, & leave us stumbling, in a state of 'dispassionate bewilderment'— (TA, 58)

¹⁹ Andrew Joron, *Science Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: Pantograph Press, 1992), 12.

Itself a state of wilderness, or cosmic bewilderment, poetry is, for Andrew Joron, the phenomenal world making itself, from the givenness of which meaning emerges spontaneously, excessively and irreducibly in a blinding light, and ‘In a language about to be invented’ (*TA*, 19).

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De la orb la orbitor. Fenomenele saturate și lirica speculativă a invizibilului în poezia lui Andrew Joron

Acest eseu prezintă o lectură critică a operei speculative a lui Andrew Joron dintr-o perspectivă fenomenologică. Pornind de la perspectiva cosmică a poetului, articolul se bazează pe chestiunea centrală a limbii în relație cu emergența sensului și a lumii. Printr-o lectură atentă (pe text) atât a poeziei cât și a poeziei lui Joron, eseu demonstrează afinitatea conceptuală a poetului cu opera filosofului francez contemporan Jean-Luc Marion, argumentând că atât poezia lui Joron cât și fenomenologia donației la Marion postulează emergența sensului și a lumii care este în mod absolut necondiționată și necondițională, o emergență caracterizată de o îmbogățire intuitivă orbitoare care saturează fenomenul peste și dincolo de orice limită și, astfel, face fenomenul invizibil.