Love at Loss
Jean-Luc Marion’s Concept of Erotic Reduction and Paul Thomas Anderson’s Magnolia

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There is only one single proof of love – to give without return or chance of recovery, and thus to be able to lose and, eventually, to be lost in love. But love itself is never lost, because it is accomplished in loss.¹

1. Marion’s Phenomenology of Givenness. The Central Categories of Analysis

In the following remarks, I will introduce Jean-Luc Marion’s categories of his phenomenology of the given and of the erotic in the narrow context of one film, Paul Thomas Anderson’s Magnolia (1999). Apart from using Marion’s terminology as a set of analytical categories, I will also apply his method of the so-called ‘third’ phenomenological reduction, the reduction to givenness, to inquire into the central topic of this article – love at loss.

In his influential study Etant donné [Being Given] (1997), the noted French philosopher and theologian Jean-Luc Marion proclaims givenness [donation] to be the third and ultimate phenomenological reduction, one that goes farther than objectness (Husserl) and Being (Heidegger) (see Marion, 2001: 39f.). ‘Being given’ is conceived of here as a primary phenomenological state endowed with absoluteness and universality. Marion’s project thus attempts to translate ‘phenomenality into the terms of givenness […] [by] reducing the phenomenon to the given or giving a phenomenon reduced to givenness” (ibid.: 173).² It goes

¹ Marion, 2007: 71. The original reads as follows: “Il ne se trouve qu’une seule preuve d’amour – donner sans retour, ni reprise, donc pouvoir y prendre et éventuellement se perdre. Mais l’amour lui-même ne se perd jamais, puisqu’il s’accomplit dans la perte même.” (Marion, 2003: 118)

² The original reads as follows: “Traduire la phénoménalité en termes de donation, […] réduire la phénomène au donné, ou de se donner un phénomène réduit à la donation.” (Ibid.: 287)
without saying that the origin of Marion’s reflections on givenness lies in the German idiom *Es gibt* [there is; literally, ‘it gives’] that predisposes the metaphysical tradition, most prominently in Husserl and Heidegger, to consider the basic ontological question of being in its proximity to the proposition of ‘being given’ (see Marion, 2011: 10f.). However, Marion’s endeavor seeks to overcome this inevitable linguistic determination (see Marion, 2001a: 61f.).

The new maxim “[s]o much reduction, so much givenness” (ibid.: 3), promoted by Marion as the first and the last principle of phenomenology (see Marion, 2002a: 25f.), leads to two essential consequences in his radical revision of that branch of philosophy. First, by considering givenness as being more original than phenomenality itself, Marion reworks phenomenology in such a way that even the keystone of phenomenology – the phenomenon, *die Erscheinung*, the manifestation – becomes dependent on, and subordinate to givenness. “What shows itself first gives itself” (Marion, 2001: 5) – this formula assumes that nothing precedes givenness, least of all manifestation. This assumption is radicalized in yet another step, for, according to Marion, not everything that gives itself shows itself: “all that which gives itself does not show itself necessarily – givenness is not always phenomenalyzed.” (Marion, 2002a: 30) Givenness therefore allows us to access the limits of the visible, or to put this differently, to approach those phenomena that reveal themselves as escaping both objectness and beingness, because nothing, as Marion argues, escapes givenness itself. Everything is given, even love, even death, even nothingness, for “givenness is not equivalent to intuition and does not necessarily require it” (Marion, 2001: 55).

Marion’s phenomenology provides a categorical apparatus for approaching certain exceptional phenomena which lie beyond the purview of traditional metaphysics and phenomenology. In his view, traditional philosophy confines itself to the consideration of either ‘poor’ phenomena (in which intention gives more than intuition) or of ‘common’ phenomena (in which intention is equal to intuition). By contrast, the phenomenology of givenness strives to approach those phenomena that are characterized by an excess of intuition over signification, “where the duality between intention (signification) and intuition (fulfillment) certainly remains […], but to the contrary of poor and common, intuition

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3 The original reads as follows: “[ajustant de réduction, autant de donation” (ibid.: 4).

4 The original reads als follows : “Ce qui *se montre*, d’abord *se donne*” (ibid: 8). Italics are in the original if not otherwise indicated.

5 The original reads as follows: “tout ce qui *se donne* ne *se montre* pas pour autant – la donation ne se phénoménalise pas toujours” (Marion, 2010: 38).

6 The original reads as follows: “la donation n’équivaut pas à l’intuition et ne l’exige pas nécessairement” (Marion, 2013: 93).
Marion defines such phenomena as paradoxes or saturated phenomena, since they demonstrate the inversion of intuition and intention by interrupting or blinding the intentional aim, and therefore surpass the Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality (see further below). The recourse to Kant seems to be important insofar as Marion’s notion of paradox is in fact very close to the Kantian concept of the aesthetic and his analysis of the sublime – something that Marion recognizes himself (see Marion, 2001: 198). Paradoxes in this sense thus touch directly on the problem of visibility. In paradox “intuition subverts, therefore precedes, every intention, which it exceeds and deceters” and the “visibility of the appearance thus arises against the flow of the intention” (Marion, 2001: 225). As a result, the given can no longer be constituted as a finite object inscribed within a delimited horizon. The surplus of intuition prevents the given from becoming visible and thus expands the boundaries of the horizon: “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.” (Ibid.: 198)

This inversion of intention and intuition also appears to be decisive in Marion’s rethinking of the subject. This is the second consequence of his phenomenological formula ‘so much reduction, so much givenness’. Here, Marion goes much further than simply criticizing or doubting the metaphysical ego cogitans or the intending I of classical phenomenology. Rather, he argues that the excess of intuition must withdraw primacy from the I and render the initiative of appearing back to the phenomenon itself:

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7 The original reads as follows: “où certes demeure la dualité entre intention (signification) et intuition (remplissement) […], mais où, au contraire des phénomènes pauvres et communs, l’intuition (se) donne en excédant ce que le concept […] peut en prévoir et montrer” (Marion, 2010: 141).

8 Marion suggests four basic figures of excess: event [événement], idol [idole], flesh [chair] and icon [icône]. These four figures play a central part in Marion’s phenomenological apparatus (see Marion, 2001: 3f.) and are elaborated at greater length in his book De surcroît [In Excess] that appeared in 2001.

9 The original reads as follows: “l’intuition subvertit, donc précède toute intention qu’elle déborde et décentre: la visibilité de la preence surgit ainsi à contre-courant de l’intention” (Marion, 2013: 370).

10 The original reads as follows: “l’intuition ne s’expose plus dans le concept, elle sature et le rend surexposé – invisible, illisible non point par défaut, mais bien par excès de lumière.” (Ibid.: 327)
What gives itself shows itself, always starting from the irreducible and prime self of the appearing. The I is made the clerk, the recipient, or the patient of this process, but almost never the author, or the producer. (Marion, 2002a: 26)

One might say that the subject endures a phenomenological epoché – reduction to givenness – in order to be able not to think or intend, but to experience the surplus of intuition and lack of signification imposed on him or her by a saturated phenomenon. Marion calls such an alternative, phenomenologically more intrinsic type of subjectivity the gifted [l’adonné]. The gifted no longer constitutes phenomena, but receives the pure given and is received from it. This peculiar formulation, a passive participle, derives from the French reflexive verb s’adonner [literally, ‘to give oneself over’], which conceals a paradoxical merging of activity and passivity, a subtle passage from one to another, and hence a crucial annulment of both categories.

Marion develops a chain of synonyms nuancing l’adonné: “the one who receives itself from what it receives” (ibid.: 48) is the receiver [attributaire] (see Marion, 2001: 248; 2013: 405). In terms of metaphysical grammar, the gifted appears neither in the nominative that intends the object (as in Husserl), nor in the genitive of Being (as in Heidegger), nor in the accusative – accused by the Other (as in Levinas), but rather in a more original dative-ablative – the me [moi] (see Marion, 2001: 269). Another word Marion uses for the gifted is the witness [témoin] (Marion, 2013: 355), the one who “does not see the given in its totality (by excess of intuition)” (Marion, 2001: 217) and therefore is only capable of registering the given in a reduced fashion. The prism [prisme], the screen [écran], and the frame [cadre] refer to the ability of the gifted to reveal and phenomenalize the given akin to a projection surface (see Marion, 2002a: 50; 2010: 62). In his more recent book Le phénomène érotique [The Erotic Phenomenon] (2003) Marion develops his phenomenology of givenness further and offers an even more unexpected alternative to the Cartesian subject. He now speaks of the ego amans, the lover [amant], instead of the ego cogitans, the thinker. Marion writes:

11 The original reads as follows: “[C]e qui se montre se donne et ce qui se donne se montre toujours à partir du soi irréductible et premier de l’apparaître; de ce procès, le Je se fait le greffier, le destinataire ou le patient, mais presque jamais l’auteur ou le producteur” (Marion, 2010: 31).
12 The original reads as follows: “celui qui se reçoit lui-même de ce qu’il reçoit” (ibid.: 60).
13 The original reads as follows: “[l]e témoin […] ne voit pas en totalité le phénomène donné (par excès d’intuition)” (Marion, 2013: 356).
Man is revealed to himself by the originary and radical modality of the erotic. Man loves – which is what distinguishes him from all other finite beings [...]. Man is defined neither by the logos, nor by the being within him, but by this fact that he loves (or hates), whether he wants to or not. (Marion, 2007: 7)\textsuperscript{14}

Descartes, according to Marion, made a mistake: his ego cogitans thinks, but it does not love. Whereas in Descartes love is excluded from the subject’s modalities, Marion’s inquiry into the erotic proceeds from the fact that “I love even before being” (ibid.: 8)\textsuperscript{15} and that love determines the final and original ipseity of the subject.

2. Love and Erotic Reduction

In Marion’s third phenomenological reduction, love appears as a phenomenon defined in terms of intersubjectivity, saturation and givenness (see Marion, 2002a: 37f.; Marion, 2002c: passim). Inquiring into the problem of intersubjectivity, Marion recurs initially to the traditional metaphysical approach of the self, which, he argues, remains by definition solipsistic and autonomous. In his view, metaphysics and phenomenology concentrated primarily on the subject’s most inner self and thus excluded the Other.

2.1 Separation and Distance

Indeed, one must admit that even one of the most profound thinkers of love, Emmanuel Levinas, to whom Marion deliberately refers and with whom he inevitably polemicizes – even Levinas did not overcome that very solipsism. Although Levinas subordinates the ipseity of the subject to the absolute alterity of the Other and defines existence as desire of the Other and “being for the Other” (see Levinas, 1979: 302),\textsuperscript{16} he nonetheless conceives of ipseity as the act of the subject’s individuation which he ultimately calls separation [séparation de moi]:

\textsuperscript{14} The original reads as follows: “L’homme se révèle au contraire à lui-même par la modalité originaire et radicale de l’érotique. L’homme aime – ce qui le distingue d’ailleurs de tous les autres étants finis [...]. L’homme ne se définit ni par le logos, ni par l’être en lui, mais par ceci qu’il aime (ou hait), qu’il le veuille ou non.” (Marion, 2003: 18)

\textsuperscript{15} The original reads as follows: “j’aime avant même que d’être” (ibid.: 19).

\textsuperscript{16} The original reads as follows: “l’être pour autrui” (Levinas, 2009: 337).
Separation is the very act of individuation, the possibility in general for an entity which is posited in being to be posited not by being defined by its references to a whole, by its place within a system, but starting from itself. (ibid.: 299f.)\(^\text{17}\)

The relationship with the Other does not nullify separation,\(^\text{18}\) for any kind of mutual integration would risk turning into totality, which Levinas wants to avoid. To Levinas’ separated being, the Other appears as a gaze in an always unequal face-to-face communication. However, the Other cannot be given in intuition, he reaches me only through his rhetoric – by speaking to me, calling upon me or obeying me: “The distance is untraversable, and at the same time traversed” (ibid.: 62).\(^\text{19}\) In Levinas the access to the Other thus remains more or less closed; at least in terms of direct manifestation, the Other is at all times distanced from me.

What follows from this autonomy or separation when love is in play? Marion argues that, if one follows Levinas, the separation would mean a kind of gap within myself, within interiority, and hence the ego would inevitably end up loving him- or herself (see Marion, 2007: 41f.). Since in the field of the erotic the subject’s (or rather the lover’s) intention is directed to the Other, to exteriority, to transcendence, the “assurance [of love] can by definition only come upon me from an elsewhere that is definitely anterior, other, and foreign to me, an elsewhere that I lack and that defines me by this lack” (ibid.: 42).\(^\text{20}\) Marion thus reverses the Levinasian separation; the assurance of love would estrange me not from the Other but from myself:

> The very one who could assure me must estrange me [...]. [A]ssurance separates me from myself, because it opens within me the separation of an elsewhere. (Ibid.: 41; \textit{the italics are mine})\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^\text{17}\) The original reads as follows: “La séparation est l’acte même de l’individuation, la possibilité, d’une façon générale, pour une entité qui se pose dans l’être, de s’y poser non pas en se définissant par ses références à un tout, par sa place dans un système, mais à partir de soi.” (Ibid.: 334)

\(^\text{18}\) See ibid. 281: “Le rapport avec Autrui n’annule pas la séparation.”

\(^\text{19}\) The original reads as follows: “La distance est infranchissable et, à la fois, franchie” (ibid.: 56).

\(^\text{20}\) The original reads as follows: “cette assurance ne peut par définition m’advenir que d’un ailleurs définitivement antérieur, autre et étranger à moi, qui me manque et me définit par ce manque lui-même” (Marion, 2003: 72).

\(^\text{21}\) The original reads as follows: “Cela même qui pourrait m’assurer devrait m’aliéner […]. [L’assurance m’écarte de moi-même, parce qu’elle ouvre en moi l’écart d’un ailleurs.” (Ibid.: 72)
Marion’s word for this exteriority within me is the gap [l’écart] (ibid.: 41f.). It is grammatically expressed by the Other’s localization in the question posed by the lover: “Does anyone *out there* love me?” (Ibid.: 29) This gap, or distance, is a necessary precondition for entering into the erotic reduction. It makes me search for the assurance of love but does not end up with me loving myself for myself, for love of self is impossible for Marion. Externality as a gap, as a distance within me would lead me astray from myself, “into the insane illusion of imagining myself as my own elsewhere” (ibid.: 47). It would force me to think myself as an Other. The distance Marion speaks about must therefore *not* be understood in terms of transcendence, as in Levinas, but in terms of immanence:

Loving requires an exteriority that is not provisional but effective, an exteriority that remains for long enough that one may cross it seriously. *Loving requires distance and the crossing of distance.* Loving requires more than a feigned distance, or one that is not truly dug out or truly crossed. In the drama of love, actions must be accomplished effectively over distance – disturbing, going, coming, returning. (Ibid.: 46f.; *the italics are mine*)


Crossing a distance in the most direct sense is a crucial moment in the process of phenomenological apparition which Marion describes using the figure of anamorphosis. Anamorphosis in Marion is nothing other than a specific “form of arrival” of the phenomenon (Marion, 2001: 124), which, in order to appear to the gaze of the viewer, passes from a vague form through de- and re-forming itself to the second form – the one that fixes a figure of apparition for it (see ibid.: 123f.). Thus, the given arises from “an invisible to a visible form accord-

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22 The original reads as follows: “M’aime-t-on d’ailleurs?” (Ibid.: 51)
23 See Marion, 2007: 44: “[L]ove of self can indeed be proclaimed, but it cannot be performed.” The original reads as follows: “[L]’amour de soi peut bien se proclamer, mais il ne peut pas se performer.” (Marion, 2003: 76)
24 The original reads as follows: “dans l’illusion démente de m’imaginer mon propre ailleurs” (ibid.: 80).
25 The original reads as follows: “Or aimer exige une extériorité non pas provisoire, mais effective, qui demeure assez pour qu’on puisse la franchir sérieusement. Aimer demande la distance et le parcours de la distance. Aimer demande plus qu’une distance feinte, ni vraiment creusée, ni vraiment franchie. Dans la dramatique de l’amour, les actions doivent s’accomplir effectivement au long de la distance – départir, aller, venir, revenir.” (Ibid.: 79)
ing to a precise axis of visibility” (ibid.: 173). Rising into appearing, the phenomenon “must cross a distance (an ‘elsewhere’) that separates it and therefore must (sur-)render itself there” (ibid.: 123). This crossing of distance and the eventual arrival at the gifted ultimately defines the specific contingency of the given phenomenon.

Marion’s concept of phenomenological contingency differs from the concept of traditional metaphysics in the sense that it is not grounded in the modalities of necessity and causality. This “more original contingency”, or a “new, phenomenologically superior contingency” (ibid.: 132; 138), refers foremost to the manifestation of the phenomenon to the receiver. In other words, it embraces the formal showing of its intrinsic givenness, or the ‘arrival’ of the phenomenon:

[Understanding contingency by simple opposition to necessity is […] erroneous because it hides its essential phenomenological character – that the phenomenon arises and touches me (contingit). (Ibid.: 132)\(^2\)

This particular contingency should be understood here in the literal, nearly tactile sense of its Latin origin, *contingere* [to happen, to touch], as well as of the German word for contingency, *Zufall* [chance, coincidence]: “[C]ontingent says what touches me, what reaches me and therefore arrives to me (according to the Latin) or (according to the German) what ‘falls like that’, therefore ‘falls upon me from above’” (ibid.: 125).\(^2\)

For Marion, contingency, taken in its original, propositional meaning, refers to the contact between the given and the gifted, and thus to the gradual, anamorphotic overcoming of the distance between them by aligning the recipient with the acceptance of the given, or, in short, by forming a contiguity.

In the erotic reduction, the Other must therefore cross a distance in order to appear to me (anamorphotically), to contact me (determined by the original phenomenological contingency), and I, as its receiver, must put myself “at the precise point on the line where the coming forward imposes itself”, that is, “one

\(^{26}\) The original reads as follows: “d’une forme invisible à une forme visible selon un axe précis de visibilité” (Marion, 2013: 287).

\(^{27}\) The original reads as follows: “[L]e phénomène […] pour monter au paraître, il doit traverser une distance (un ‘ailleurs’) qui l’en sépare et donc s’y rendre” (ibid.: 203).

\(^{28}\) The original reads as follows: “Erronée, la compréhension de la contingence par simple opposition à la nécessité […] parce qu’elle en masque le caractère phénoménologique essentiel – que le phénomène surgisse et me touche (contiguit)” (ibid.: 217).

\(^{29}\) The original reads as follows: “[L]e contingent dit ce qui me touche, ce qui m’attent et donc ainsi m’arrive (suivant le latin), ou (suivant l’allemand) ce qui ‘tombe comme ça’, donc ‘me tombe dessus’” (ibid.: 206f.).
must expose oneself to the phenomenon to receive its form – as one receives a blow, a shock, or an emotion” (ibid.: 173), and achieve in this way the status of the gifted.

The narrative structure of Paul Thomas Anderson’s film *Magnolia* links individual stories of at least nine characters and can be defined, using Maggie Dunn’s term, as a composite film (see Dunn/Morris, 1995). In *Magnolia*, there is a certain parallel disconnectedness which determines both the intra-diegetic and extra-diegetic levels. At the beginning, the viewer is not aware whether all the storylines are interlinked or not. The discontinuous storytelling, or lack of narrative connection (extra-diegetic), mirrors the more fundamental disconnectedness of the characters towards each other (intra-diegetic). The latter can be understood psychologically, namely as solitude or lack of communication, but foremost phenomenologically – as an original state of being detached from the Other. One might call this being separated, or distanced; in any case, the access to the Other is definitively blocked or hindered. Some striking examples in the movie are the disturbed or even ruptured parent-child relationships between Earl Partridge and his son Frank Mackey, between Claudia and her father Jimmy Gator, and between Rick and his son, the wunderkind Stanley Spector. There is also the unaccomplished amorous relationship between Donnie and the bartender Brad, as well as between the policeman Jim and his yet unknown lover. Jim is even introduced as someone who is looking for a relationship with the help of an anonymous phone service: “I’m really interested in meeting someone special who likes quiet things. My life is very stressful and I’d hope to have a relationship that is very calm and undemanding and loving” (movie quote).

Yet the course of the story development allows the viewer to experience a kind of consolidation of the narrative; all the storylines and film characters turn out to be connected with one other, albeit in different ways. They are formally unified through the TV-Quiz *What Kids Know*: some characters are the show’s participants, some work for it, the others watch the show on TV. There is also a temporal and spatial unity: the movie depicts one and the same day in one place – Magnolia Boulevard, Los Angeles. Finally, there are all kinds of interpersonal ties between the characters (relatives, friends, co-workers etc.) that become disclosed as the story progresses. Thus, the net of interconnections reveals itself to the viewer according to its anamorphosis, that is to say, it aligns the viewer to a precise phenomenological point and arises to its final visibility (it is perhaps

30 The original reads as follows: “au point précis de la ligne où l’advenance s’impose: il faut s’exposer au phénomène pour en recevoir la forme – comme on reçoit un coup, un choc, une émotion.” (Ibid.: 287).
no accident that there are so many alignment shots in Magnolia). Step by step, the viewer attains a certain holistic perspective that enables him or her to experience a multiple identification with all the characters at the same time. In the end, total disconnectedness proves to be the opposite: a total connectedness which also encompasses the film’s prologue and epilogue, namely the three framing stories told by the narrator. Although not linked to the main narrative, these stories question the very possibility of unbelievable coincidences: “This is not just a matter of chance […]. These strange things happen all the time.” (movie quote)

2.3 Envisaging the Other: Alterity as Icon and Call

In Magnolia, the overcoming of the initial disconnectedness described above causes the plot of the movie to unfold. According to Marion, the access to the Other becomes most direct when the gifted envisages the Other, engages in a face-to-face contact with it, when the gazes of the receiver and the giver cross within the so-called erotic reduction. The special status of the face, the experience of exchanged gazes and counter-intentionality were already essential for Levinas in his analysis of the Other’s epiphany to the separated me. But what is the specific nature of the face’s appearance in the field of love?

While consciously following Levinas’ logic, at a certain point Marion casts doubt on the assumption that the face necessarily belongs to the field of ethics and transcendence (see Marion, 2002b: 81). The Levinasian silent ethical command in which the Other is manifested – “Thou shalt not kill!” (Marion 2007: 125) – implies a universality and establishes the Other in an absolute transcendence beyond phenomenality. Marion’s primary concern, on the contrary, is the possibility “to enter into contact with the other, or rather to allow him to enter into contact with me […] to feel myself touched by his gaze” (ibid.: 63).³³

³¹ The face [visage] is not to be confused with the facet [face]; the latter is only a surface and an object allowing no access to the Other, whereas the face opens up a depth; it addresses me with a gaze, envisages me and allows a direct access to the Other in person (see Marion, 2007: 167; Marion, 2003: 258).
³² The original reads as follows: “Tu ne tueras pas!” (Marion, 2003: 198) In Levinas we read: “Tu ne commettras pas de meurtre” (Levinas, 2009: 217).
³³ The original reads as follows: “d’entrer en contact avec autrui, ou plutôt de le laisser entrer en contact avec moi […], me sentir touché par le sien [son regard]” (Marion, 2003: 104).
As in Levinas, Marion’s Other reveals itself as a face, but – unlike Levinas – he conceives this revelation in the most direct, palpable, tangible and contiguous way: “I no longer dream of elsewhere, I no longer argue about it – I experience it.” (Ibid.)\(^{34}\) The face descends from transcendence (‘an elsewhere’) to its immanence (‘here’) and is experienced as a singular, individualized face – the face of the beloved one that is just like me, the lover, irreplaceable: “I is not just anybody”, or in French “[j]e n’est pas le premier venu”, literally, ‘the first to arrive’ (Marion, 2002b: 83). Within the erotic reduction, the Other is devoid of any universality, and therefore can no longer say to me: “Thou shalt not kill!” above all because

she and I have left the universal, even the ethical universal, in order to strive toward particularity – mine and hers, because it is a question of me and of you, and surely not of a universally obligating neighbor. […] [E]ach only aims at being individualized in individualizing the other, thus exactly piercing and transgressing the universal. (Marion, 2007: 126)\(^{35}\)

The manifestation of the Other’s face, or, as Marion calls it, counter-envisaging, becomes thus possible and even necessary. It occurs in the figure of the icon. Marion develops his notion of icon within his phenomenology of saturated or paradoxical phenomena (see above). As a saturated phenomenon, the icon is characterized by an excess of intuition in relation to signification. Nonetheless, in Marion the problem of visibility remains as ambiguous as in Levinas. In spite of the superabundance of the intuitively given, the epiphany of the face is irreducible to usual, physical vision. Visibility must be understood here in terms of eluding phenomenological intentionality. What do we see when we look into the Other’s face, inquires Marion, and more precisely, what do we see when we look into the very center of the face, the midst of the visible – the eyes? Nothing. We see the black pupils of the eyes. We look at the sole place where precisely nothing can be seen (see Marion, 2002a: 115). Marion speaks about the gaze being invisible \[^{36}\](sic), implying the fundamental inability to see what gives itself as object in accordance with one’s own intentionality.

\(^{34}\) The original reads as follows: “L’ailleurs, désormais, je ne le rêve plus, je ne le discute plus – je l’éprouve.” (Ibid.)

\(^{35}\) The original reads as follows: “[L]ui et moi avons quitté l’universel, même l’universel éthique, pour nous efforcer à la particularité – la mienne et la sienne, puisqu’il s’agit de moi et de toi et sûrement pas d’un prochain universellement obligeant […] […] Chacun ne vise qu’à s’individualiser en individualisant autrui, donc transperce et transgresse précisément l’universel.” (Ibid.: 198)

\(^{36}\) Literally, ‘invisible and untargetable’: see the French viser [to target, to aim at] (see Marion, 2002b: 81).
We may recall that Marion’s goal is to demonstrate how saturated phenomena overcome the four Kantian categories. (i) With respect to quantity, a paradox or saturated phenomenon remains *invisable*, which means that, being given in extensive magnitude, “it could not be measured in terms of its parts” (Marion, 2001: 200).37 (ii) The category of quality is exceeded in the way that the gaze reaches its tolerable maximum and cannot sustain the excess of intuition or of the visible that becomes *unbearable* [unsupportable] for the eye (see ibid.: 202f.). (iii) Being *absolute* [absolu] with respect to relation, a saturated phenomenon attains and blurs, if not exceeds, the limits of the horizon. This way, it evades any analogy of experience (see ibid.: 206f.). (iv) Finally, the Kantian modality is undermined in Marion in the sense that the crucial epistemological dependence of the phenomenon of the (re)constructing power of the transcendental I is broken here for once and for all. This dependence would mean that the phenomena which cannot be thought and do not have the preconditions to be experienced by the ego do not appear at all, and consequently do not have the status of a phenomenon. In Marion, saturated phenomena, on the contrary, do not ‘agree with’ the subjective condition for their experience, and render themselves irregardable [irregardable] (see ibid.: 212f.). This becomes even clearer in the opposition ‘to see/to look at’ [voir/regarder], to which Marion resorts quite often in his explanations. It is the literal meaning of the French word *regarder* that makes this experience of invisibility more comprehensible: *re-garder* [to guard, to keep an eye on]. Like gazing, *regarder* is about being able to keep the visible thus seen under the control of the seer […]. To gaze at the [saturated] phenomenon is therefore equivalent not to seeing it, but indeed to transforming it into an object visible according to an always poor or common phenomenality. (Ibid.: 214)38

A face as icon requires an endless hermeneutics; its signification always remains incomplete. In particular, the gaze of the beloved one is experienced as an excess of signification, since neither a particular meaning nor the sum of all meanings can be assigned to it. Within the erotic reduction, when every act of intentionality is blocked, the ego is rendered stunned and bedazzled by the Other’s gaze, it becomes ‘reduced’ to the state of what can hardly be called a conscious-

37 The original reads as follows: “[i]l ne saurait se mesurer à partir de ses parties” (Marion, 2013: 330).

38 The original reads as follows: “il s’agit de pouvoirgarder le visible ainsi vu sous le contrôle du voyant […]. Regarder le phénomène n’équivaut donc pas à le voir, mais bien à le transformer en un objet visible suivant une phénoménalité toujours pauvre ou commune” (ibid.: 352).
ness anymore. It is rather a mere pre-reflective receptivity, that is, however, open to givenness or that gives itself to the given, to the lover, to the be-loved.

A notable example of this experience of invisibility and of bedazzlement in Magnolia is the first encounter between the policeman Jim Kurring and Claudia.

Fig. 1. Encounter between Claudia and Jim

Jim enters Claudia’s house as a representative of the authority to control and probably punish her, but he leaves as a lover. Their meeting is staged as a counter-gaze: two faces freeze in astonishment. Phenomenologically, strangers immediately become lovers as soon as they engage themselves in the infinite hermeneutics of the face. In this scene, Marion’s concept of the face is intertwined with the notion of another saturated phenomenon, the flesh, that sets off – metaphorically speaking – a farther aspect of this encounter. Claudia opens the door and invites Jim in. The feeling of the Other’s flesh succeeds “where I feel that something puts up no resistance to me, and that […] this something withdraws, effaces itself and makes room for me, in short that this something opens itself” (Marion, 2007: 118).

Claudia puts up no resistance to Jim, in contrast to the previous visitor – her father Jimmy Gator – who is let in by someone else and is thrown out with revulsion by Claudia herself. This parallel is not accidental: both Jim and Jimmy (the choice of names is apparently not a coincidence either) have an erotic connection to Claudia. We learn later that Claudia used to be molested by her father, so that her refusal to welcome him in her house is the only adequate response to his abuse of love. It might be worth mentioning that the scene of the amorous encounter between Claudia and Jim echoes Levinas’

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39 The original reads as follows: “où je sens que cela ne me résiste pas et que […] cela se retire, s’efface et me fait place, bref que cela s’ouvre” (Marion, 2003: 186f.).
spatial metaphoric that pervades his discussion of interiority (see Levinas, 1979: 154). Levinas compares interiority to a house and the subject to a host whose relation to the Other is performed as a “welcome of the face” (see ibid.: 299).40

In spite of the longing for the Other, love in Levinas, Marion argues, leads back to the (separated) me and thus turns into “an optical illusion of my consciousness, which experiences only itself alone” (Marion, 2002b: 75). The Other remains autonomous, and so do I. This “amorous autism” (ibid.) – the main point of Marion’s criticism – derives from that very solipsism which Levinas cannot and does not wish to elude. This is also the pattern according to which the love story between Jim and Claudia seems to develop. This is why it first fails. When asking Jim for absolute sincerity, Claudia herself, however, avoids talking about the most important thing – her childhood trauma, which, as banal as it may sound, is the key to all her failed relationships. Claudia persists in staying separated or disconnected from her beloved one – a perfect example of love after Levinas.

The final change occurs at the very end of the film: The last shot is a close-up of Claudia’s shining face smiling slightly at Jim without saying anything (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Claudia (the final shot)

Again, this is another matching shot with the scene with Claudia and her father Jimmy from the beginning of the movie, in which Claudia turns to her father with a grimace of disgust and revulsion. In both scenes all we are offered is her

40 The original reads as follows: “L’interiorité, accompli concrètement par la maison” (Levinas, 2009: 164), and further: “Le sujet est un hôte”, “accueil du visage” (ibid.: 334).
face, an icon, which never runs out of meanings and exceeds all of them. The viewer is not given a clue about what Claudia might think or decide, alone because he is just also involved in the continuous and never-ending interpretation of the face. The only thing we can suppose is that Claudia opens herself, or better, gives herself to love, and nothing can make this passivity in the very core of activity more explicit than her silent face.

It is apparently not just a coincidence that both the introductory and final shots in *Magnolia* depict two icons, two faces: Frank’s and Claudia’s, who are both children abused by their fathers. Frank’s provocative call in a TV commercial and Claudia’s silent face looking directly into the camera perform the same figure of saturation – the icon imposing a *call* (Figs. 2 and 3). For Marion, as well as for Levinas, the face remains invisible and can therefore appear paradoxically “under the form, not of an object spectacle, but of a *call* […] [I]ts phenomenality is accomplished when it is made heard [understood]” (Marion, 2002a: 118f.; *the italics are mine*).

What does the face say within erotic reduction? Marion suggests: “For in the erotic reduction, the face no longer commands me only with ‘Thou shalt not kill!’ but demands *’Thou shalt love me!’* or more modestly, ‘Love me!’” (Marion, 2007: 167).

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41 Frank addresses himself to the TV-viewers with a promise: “*Seduce and Destroy* [Frank’s show] creates an immediate sexual attraction in any muffin you meet” (movie quote).

42 The original reads as follows: “*sous la figure non d’un spectacle d’objet, mais d’un appel*” (Marion, 2010: 149).

43 The original reads as follows: “Car, en réduction érotique, le visage ne me commande plus seulement ‘Tu ne tueras point!’ [sic], mais demande ‘Tu m’aimeras!’, ou plus modestement ‘Aime-moi!’” (Marion, 2003: 259)
One of Marion’s major assumptions is that love is conceived in a ‘univocal’ way, i.e. that the erotic embraces all its manifestations such as, for example, eros and agape as well as sexual and filial affection:

A serious concept of love distinguishes itself by its unity, or rather by its power to keep together significations that nonerotic thought cuts apart […]. Univocal, love is only told in one way. (Ibid.: 5)

Accordingly, when speaking about the erotic reduction and the erotic call in Magnolia, we must think of all kinds of love and (loving) relationships with the Other, as long as his or her call summons me (in the dative) and defines me as the gifted, as the lover or as the beloved. In the film, this is staged quite literally: Jim is called to Claudia (an emergency call); Frank is called (on the phone, passing through a chain of mediators) to his dying father Earl by the male nurse Phil Parma. This also occurs indirectly in one of the final sequences of the movie, in which the little prodigy Stanley begs his father Rick: “Dad, you have to be nicer to me!” (movie quote) – an appeal that can be reformulated as or rather reduced to the desperate request ‘Love me!’

A call in a purely phenomenological sense manifests itself in the declaration of love made by the homosexual Donnie. The figure of the beloved, the bartender Brad, is of minor importance here, since what Donnie experiences is above all an excess of love in himself: “My name is Donnie Smith and I have lots of love to give!” (movie quote) In other words, in the erotic reduction he finds himself as a giver whose gift of love must be given. In Marion’s terms, it is the ‘givability’ [donabilité] of the gift that – on the basis of itself – practically forces the giver to give it (see Marion, 2004: 31). Donnie does not know where to direct his flow of love: “I really have love to give. I just don’t know where to put it” (movie quote). Nonetheless, the temporary absence of the givee does not hinder the phenomenon of love to ‘show itself’, but on the contrary, determines its excess. In the figure of loving an absentee, the principle ‘so much reduction, so much givenness’ is radicalized once again. The lover transgresses reciprocity (which is one of the important qualities of a genuine erotic reduction), and thereby “contradicts economy’s sufficient reason” (Marion, 2007: 79). By loving without sufficient reason, the lover, having already acquired his erotic

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44 The original reads as follows: “Un concept sérieux de l’amour se signale en principe par son unité, ou plutôt par sa puissance à maintenir ensemble des significations que la pensée non érotique découpe […]. Univoque l’amour ne se dit qu’en un sens unique.” (Ibid.: 14f.)

45 The original reads as follows: “il [l’amant] contredit surtout la raison suffisante de l’économie” (ibid.: 129).
status, can love without seeing or even knowing the Other: “I do not love because I know what I see, but inversely I see and I know in the measure that I, the first to love, love.” (Ibid.: 79f.)

The lover makes the beloved first appear lovable and only then visible within the erotic reduction. In other words, the lover fulfills the anamorphosis, he phenomenalizes the beloved: “I am the first to put it on stage, by loving her. The lover makes appear the one whom she loves, not the reverse.” (Ibid.: 80; the italics are mine)

In the movie, the appearance of the lover is accomplished both visually and rhetorically. In the bar scene, in which Donnie encounters Brad, the camera reproduces Donnie’s point-of-view and moves in an arc across other faces to fix his gaze on one in particular – Brad’s. More precisely, his gaze focuses on Brad’s braces, which ultimately become Donnie’s love-fetish and make him carry out an unreasonable act of mimesis by opting for oral surgery (he becomes obsessed with the idea to get braces, too). In other words, Donnie ‘fixes’ his lover by staring at him; he puts Brad as a lover on stage (Figs. 4 and 5).

Fig. 4. Donnie looking at Brad

46 The original reads as follows: “je n’aime donc pas parce que je connais ce que je vois, mais inversement je vois et je connais à la mesure où j’aime, moi le premier” (ibid.: 130).

47 The original reads as follows: “je le mets le premier en scène en l’aimant. L’amant fait apparaître celui ou celle qu’il aime, non l’inverse.” (Ibid.: 130)
Here, the motif of the braces is connected with searching for an adequate way of speaking to the beloved one. Rhetorically, the lover’s phenomenalization is accomplished in Donnie’s emotional outburst and in his confused declaration of love: “I love you. I love you and I’m sick. I’ll talk to you, I’ll talk to you tomorrow. I’m getting corrective oral surgery tomorrow. For my teeth. For my teeth and for you. For you so we can speak. You have braces. Me too. Me too. I’m getting braces, too. For you. For you, dear Brad. I love you, Brad. Brad the Bartender.” (movie quote)

The lover declares his love as one declares war – without any reason (see Marion, 2007: 79). In this outbreak of love there is no signification, but only an act in which the me ‘fixes’ the Other in a real ‘here’, pointing him out quite literally, even theatrically: by putting the lover on stage. The statement of love becomes simply a deictic sign (see ibid.: 107). Phenomenologically speaking, Donnie individualizes the lover, gives him the status of such. By attracting Brad’s gaze upon himself and inviting him to render the gaze back, he demonstrates that this particular person does not have the rank of an object or of a body, that he is not just any body. Even in his desperate demand “You wanna love me back? Love me back and I’ll be good to you. I’ll be goddamn good for you!” (movie quote) – there is no expectation of reciprocity, since he will be obviously rejected, but rather an acceptance of his own desire of the Other, an erotic injunction ‘Here I am!’ and his willingness to love: “[A] love scorned remains a love perfectly accomplished, just as a gift refused remains a perfectly

See Marion, 2007: 86: “[T]he lover does not ask for reciprocity or anticipate it, but simply postulates that this other does not have the rank of an object.” The original reads as follows: “[L’]amant ne demande pas ici la réciprocité ni ne l’anticipe, mais postule seulement que cet autrui n’a pas rang d’objet” (Marion, 2003: 139).
given gift.” (Ibid.: 71) Thus, Donnie’s question – “Do you want to love me back?” (movie quote) – is possible only because he has already stepped into the erotic reduction, and loves first. This also designates his ultimate ipseity, namely as *ego amans*. A love declaration establishes the radical individuation of the one who utters it:

> [I]n moving from the question “Does anyone out there love me?” to the question “Can I love first?” I do indeed receive an assurance – the assurance that I love decidedly, that I love as a decided lover. This assurance […] above all […] leads me back to myself, in my final ipseity […]. I become myself definitively each time and for as long as I, as lover, can love first. (Ibid.: 75f.)

3. Radicalized Erotic Reduction: Love and Death

As we have seen, the lack of reciprocity does not make experience of love incomplete, but, on the contrary, proves love as such. Whereas the Cartesian subject expects from love only “a more or less honest exchange, a negotiated reciprocity, an acceptable compromise” (Marion, 2007: 69), the lover, on the contrary, “appears [only] when one of the actors in the exchange […] loves without requiring to be loved, and thus, in the figure of the gift, abolishes economy” (ibid.: 78). Marion insists that it is necessary to reject reciprocity in love, not because it seems improper, but because in love reciprocity becomes impossible: Reciprocity has nothing to do with love and befits only the economy and calculation of exchange (see ibid.: 69). Marion thereby applies his reductive method – the logic of givenness – in the field of the erotic.

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49 The original reads as follows: “[U]n amour méprisé reste un amour parfaitement accompli, comme un don refusé reste un don parfaitement donné” (ibid.: 117).

50 The original reads as follows: “[E]n passant de la question ‘m’aime-t-on d’ailleurs?’ à la question ‘puis-je aimer, moi le premier?’, je reçois donc bien une assurance – celle que j’aime décidément, que j’aime en amant décidé. Cette assurance […] me reconduit à moi-même, dans ma dernière ipséité […] : Je deviens définitivement moi-même à chaque fois et aussi longtemps que, comme amant, je peux aimer le premier.” (Ibid.: 123f.)

51 The original reads as follows: “L’ego […] n’attend de l’amour qu’un échange à peu près honnête, une réciprocité négociée, un compromis acceptable.” (Ibid.: 113f.)

52 The original reads as follows: “L’amant apparaît, lorsque l’un des acteurs de l’échange […] aime sans exiger de l’être et abolit ainsi l’économie dans la figure du don.” (Ibid.: 128)
3.1 Transgressing Reciprocity and Figures of Lack in Love

A radical abolishment of reciprocity proves to be a distinguishing feature of many ‘erotic’ relations in Magnolia. Reciprocity becomes irrevocably annulled when the characters are faced with a death experience. In the movie there are two deaths that mirror one another. Both Earl Partridge and Jimmy Gator have terminal cancer. Both of them have abused their children: Earl by leaving his son Frank with his dying mother, and Jimmy by sexually molesting his daughter Claudia. Both Earl and Jimmy make admissions of their infidelity, and both die at the end of the movie. In the following I will focus on the death of Earl Partridge, and more specifically on the way in which this death accomplishes the erotic reduction. Earl Partridge is related to three other characters in the film: his wife Linda, his son Frank Mackey and his male nurse Phil Parma. Earl is connected to them either by family bonds or by the sheer phenomenological fact of being envisaged by them.

Let us first concentrate on the erotic relation between Earl and his much younger wife Linda. Linda experiences a somehow paradoxical love: It is only when Earl is declared terminally ill that she discovers her love for him. The inability to find an adequate way to communicate love, which marks the other amorous relations in Magnolia as well, is sharpened here in the sense that even any verbal contact between Linda and Earl is one-sided – Earl remains for the most part unconscious and can barely recognize his wife (Fig. 6). Feeling overwhelmed and desperate, Linda confesses to the family lawyer:

I don’t want him to die. I didn’t love him when we met, and I’ve done so many bad things to him that he doesn’t know, things I want to confess to him, but now I do: I love him. I love him so much and I can’t stand his going. (movie quote)

Linda decides to refuse Earl’s large inheritance, to which she is the only legal heir, and begs the lawyer to change Earl’s will. In Marion’s terms, Linda performs an act of revoking economy and exchange, thereby confirming the absolute impossibility of reciprocity in love. She experiences that “obsessional givenness” (Marion, 2001: 312) that expresses itself in her emotional breakdowns – “I feel so over the top with everything!” (movie quote) – and ends in her attempted suicide, which is, in fact, the utmost proof of her determination to leave the field of economy and reciprocity.

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53 I am omitting an analysis of the connection between Earl and Phil in order to elaborate more on the other two relations.

54 The original reads as follows: “donation obsessionnelle” (Marion, 2013: 507).
Fig. 6. Linda and Earl

Linda’s love is a perfect illustration of what Marion in *Etant donné* calls the paradoxical case of “a givenness by denegation” (ibid.: 54). He discusses different figures of lack as nothing(ess), possibility, obscurity, void, and finally death, in other words, figures of ‘nongiven’, and inscribes them into the very horizon of givenness (see Marion, 2001: 53f.).

In *Le phénomène érotique* the nongiven is practically substituted by figures of lack, such as love for the absentee, love by loss, etc. Proceeding from the premise that the lover loves first and that only by doing so can make the beloved one appear, Marion draws a further deduction regarding the lover’s “incomparable privilege” to love without even seeing, in other words, to love an absentee: the one being absent in space or in time, the one yet unknown or gone, living or dead (see Marion, 2007: 87ff.). A love for a dying man fits well in with this inverted phenomenology of givenness and the erotic: “In loving the absentee, the lover in no way succumbs to delirium but instead limits herself to accomplishing exactly the radicalized erotic reduction […].” (Ibid.: 88)

The intuitive deficiency that death brings with it makes the ‘object’ of desire even more desirable and ‘given’ – the primacy of givenness towards being cannot be exemplified any better than by this:

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55 The original reads as follows: “une donation par dénégation” (ibid.: 91).
56 The original terminology reads as follows: “le non-donné”, “le rien” or “le néant”, “la possibilité”, “l’obscurité”, “le vide”, “la mort” (ibid.).
57 The original reads as follows: “un privilège incomparable” (Marion, 2003: 141).
58 The original reads as follows: “En aimant l’absent, l’amant ne cède à aucun délire, il se borne à exactement accomplir la réduction érotique radicalisée […]” (ibid.: 141f.).
The lacking remains simply absent for everybody, but for the one who desires it, its intuitive absence still gives it, indeed more intensely. What is lacking shines by its absence — the latter, without intuition, gives itself all the more.

(Marion, 2001: 312)\(^59\)

By dying, and thus by abandoning the very horizon of phenomenality, Earl fulfills the function of a so-called bracketed givee. For Linda, however, who is the giver of love, the ego amans, this changes little. On the contrary, it makes her a lover par excellence since the abandoned remains nonetheless the gifted, the adonné.\(^60\) Loss suspends reciprocity in the most radical manner. Marion’s formula ‘so much reduction, so much givenness’ proves to be absolutely decisive here and can also be reformulated as “the more I love at a loss, the more I simply love” (Marion, 2007: 71).\(^61\)

As Marion maintains, in loving the absentee or loving at a loss, love finds its highest accomplishment, since the erotic reduction is realized in its full potential. Love at a loss also attests the precedence of love over nothing and death, just as it confirms once again the primacy of the phenomenological status of loving over being: “Loving surpasses being with an excess […]. To love without being loved — this defines love without being.” (Ibid.: 71f.)\(^62\)

3.2. Love Is to See the Other Die

From Earl’s deathbed confession to his male nurse Phil we learn that the actual story of his loss began long ago, when he left his wife dying of cancer and their then underage son. His son, who could not forgive Earl this betrayal, decided to change his name, the father’s name, thereby also expressing this break symbolically. Earl’s son turns into a cynical misogynist, the sex guru Frank Mackey, author of the self-help seminar Seduce and Destroy. In a caricatured way, Frank exhorts his adherents and followers to ‘study and watch’ women as mere objects of sexual desire: “They are universal. They are sheep. They are to be studied and watched. They have patterns […]. They are all the same. […] That is what you

\(^59\) The original reads as follows: “[L]e manquant reste certes simplement absent pour tout un chacun, mais, pour qui le désire, son absence intuitive le donne encore, voire plus intensément; ce qui manque brille par son absence — celui-là, sans intuition, se donne d’autant plus.” (Marion, 2013: 507)

\(^60\) One might think of the same root of abandonné [abandoned] and adonné [gifted].

\(^61\) The original reads as follows: “Plus j’aime à perte, plus j’aime tout court.” (Marion, 2003: 117)

\(^62\) The original reads as follows: “Aimer surpasse l’être d’un excès […]. Aimer sans l’être [être aimé] — cela définit l’amour sans l’être.” (Ibid.: 118)
must do, which is punish them many times over.” (movie quote) This explicit objectification of the Other seems to be the absolute opposite of the erotic reduction.

The erotic reduction, however, does come to the fore, namely in Frank’s relation to his father. We may recall from the previous discussion that Marion defines love as being univocal, thereby encompassing a father-child relation as well. Being closely intertwined, givenness and love are certified by the same gesture of denegation. As Marion demonstrates convincingly in his ‘Reason of the Gift’, fatherhood is, from the outset, a gift reduced to givenness (see Marion, 2005: 117). Earl as a father embodies the figure of a ‘bracketed giver’: he is the ever missing father (see ibid.: 119), since the father remains always essentially missing by withdrawing after the moment of procreation: “The father is also missing later because he leaves (must leave), and attracts the child’s attention by – in principle – being lacking to him.” (Ibid.) But it is mainly because Earl abandons the young Frank for the second time – leaving him to take care of his ill mother all by himself – that makes his absence absolute.

As for Frank, he represents the ‘bracketed receiver’ of the gift, not only because a son can never render to his father the gift he gave to him, namely life, but, above all, because Frank chooses to hate his father. The father’s double abandonment corresponds to the son’s double denial. Nevertheless, as we already noted, being missed, lacked, or absent reinforces givenness ex negativo: “the giver would give all the better by disappearing (as unknown or deceased) from the givee’s view” (ibid.: 116). Similarly, hatred does not block but instead facilitates entry into the erotic reduction, since it puts in play the same ‘elsewhere’ that individualizes, summons, and obsesses me (see Marion, 2007: 61). Moreover, in hatred the access to the Other is even more direct than in love, because it assigns to the hated one the status of a person [personne] (see ibid.: 178), of somebody, but at the same time also of nobody, of someone disincarnated, someone who is no one, no body. It is the ambiguity of the French personne that is responsible for this paradox (see Marion, 2003: 235f.). In Marion’s metaphorical usage, the hated Other arrives to me in the figure of Janus, of “the one that I hate and who ought to love me, the one that I would like to love even

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63 The original reads as follows: “Le père manque aussi plus tard, parce qu’il part (doit partir) et se fait remarquer à l’enfant en ce qu’il lui fait défaut et ce, par principe.” (Marion, 2004: 23)

64 The original reads as follows: “le donateur donnerait d’autant mieux qu’il disparaîtrait (inconnu, décédé) aux yeux de ce dernier” (ibid.: 20).
when he hates me” (ibid.: 60f.).\textsuperscript{65} The hated fulfills the same function as the beloved one: to assign me to myself, although, in the extreme, since “in hatred, the other, still sticks out and pierces through”; the Other “still imposes [him]self in the horizon of my phenomenality” (ibid.: 178),\textsuperscript{66} and, therefore, gives himself all the more radically.

In the movie, both hate and love are constructed along the crossing gazes of father and son. This process can be better described with another of Marion’s recurring formulas, namely ‘what gives itself shows itself’. As we already know, givenness in Marion can but must not necessarily appear. However, if it does so then only indirectly by coming forward, by imposing itself as event, which means – however tautological it might sound – giving itself. Marion articulates here the ambiguity of the word givenness [donation]: as a result of givenness (the given, the gift given, the datum) and as a process (giving, happening, arising, and eventually showing itself) (see Marion, 2001: 62). His metaphor for this ambivalence is “the fold of givenness” [le pli de la donation]. The process in which the given [la donnée] unfolds “its irreparable character”, i.e. givenness [donation], or, in which givenness “articulates the gift given […] along the progress of its advent” (ibid.: 64f.),\textsuperscript{67} is called “unfolding the fold of givenness” (ibid.: 70).

In \textit{Magnolia}, givenness, which can be understood as hate/love and also as fatherhood, does unfold into the given: the father’s face. The father’s appearing to the son progresses indirectly and slowly, as Marion would call it, according to its anamorphosis: through numerous mediators Earl still manages to reach Frank. The son receives a call from his now remorseful father and comes to his death bed. Although this call is a quite real phone call, at the same time it clearly achieves the phenomenological status of an appeal [appel] (see Marion, 2013: 460f.) that articulates the Other’s manifestation. Following the logic of givenness, the call cannot be denied, for even as negation it is still a reply that summons me as a receiver (see Marion, 2001: 271). The final face-to-face contact between Earl and Frank remains verbally incomplete. Earl, who is on the edge of life and death, can no longer speak and answer Frank’s swearing and

\textsuperscript{65} The original reads as follows: “autrui m’apparaît sous la figure de Janus – celui que je hais et qui devrait m’aimer, celui que je voudrais aimer alors qu’il me hait” (Marion, 2003: 101).

\textsuperscript{66} The original reads as follows: “dans la haine, autrui pointe et perce toujours […], il s’impose toujours dans l’horizon de ma phénoménalité” (ibid.: 275).

\textsuperscript{67} The original reads as follows: “son caractère irrémédiable”, and further: “La donation se dépliant articule le don donné […] sur son processus d’avènement […].” (Marion, 2013: 108, 110)

\textsuperscript{68} The original reads as follows: “déplier le pli de la donation” (ibid.: 118).
reproaching for not calling before: “Why didn’t you call? I f*** hate you!” (movie quote) All that Earl can give, all that he can expose, is his mute face (Fig. 7), the icon to which no particular meaning can be assigned because it exceeds any meaning. This is a significant change for Frank who, as has been said before, thinks or rather pretends to think of the Other as a mere object for studying and manipulating with the help of a sum of ground rules he preaches.

![Frank and Earl](image-url)

Fig. 7. Frank and Earl

Saturated phenomena such as the icon (the face) and the event (the father’s death) arise from a reduced gift (fatherhood, love-hate); the lack thus unfolds into an excess. As for the agents of this ‘unfolding’, they receive their status as the gifted confirmed both by lack and by excess. By having accepted his father’s call and having arrived to him, Frank asserts both Earl and himself as the gifted, thereby confirming indirectly the gift of fatherhood. Furthermore, he witnesses Earl’s death, and a witness, as mentioned above, is another embodiment of the gifted. He sees the passage, the event, since death as a saturated phenomenon can only be phenomenalized in happening [se passant]. He becomes the one who assists his father’s death, which is the only act of love he could perform as a son, for “the child will render a peaceful death to his father, but will never give back (or render) him life” (Marion, 2005: 120).69

Frank accedes to the Other’s face by experiencing it as event, and thus accedes to “the truth of the face”, or its final signification. The truth of the face consists not in any meaning, but in what happens to it – death, since love consists in staying until the one you love dies:

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69 The original reads as follows: “l’enfant rendra la mort sereine à son père, mais jamais ne lui redonnera ou rendra une vie” (Marion, 2004: 24).
The truth of the face is therefore played in its story – not in what it says, but in what it does […]. To envisage a face requires less to see it than to wait for it, to wait for its accomplishment, the terminal act, the passage to effectivity. […] That is why to love would mean to help the other person to the point of the final instant of his or her death. And to see the other finally, in truth, would mean, in the end, closing his or her eyes. (Marion, 2002a: 122f.)

4. Concluding Remarks

In Marion’s phenomenological project, givenness is essentially conceived of in terms of a positively understood totality, to which all phenomena can be ascribed, including those which ‘are not’, that is to say, those whose beingness is in doubt. Just as Marion insists on the primacy of givenness over being in his principal study Étant donné, in his inquiry into the erotic, he asserts that love likewise precedes being. Marion thus attempts to develop his concept of the erotic without inscribing it into another phenomenological horizon. His main concern is not what or if love is, but various manifestations – by excess or by lack – that love may attain. As paradoxical as it might seem, the givenness of love unfolds most radically in its negation – this idea recurs systematically throughout Marion’s study.

The juxtaposition of Marion’s erotic phenomenology with Paul Thomas Anderson’s movie Magnolia allows us to consider the latter from the standpoint of unity (the very totality of givenness and of the erotic), of wholeness, and of aesthetic closure. This perspective reestablishes the higher interconnectedness of the film’s elements, or its logic of contingency. The more negation Magnolia achieves through its exemplary narrative of separation, absence, lack, rejection, hatred, and death, the more givenness it attests and the more love it sustains. In its purest form, the erotic reduction becomes accomplished in a paradoxical experience of the Other’s (in-)visibility (as icon and call), the abandonment of reciprocity and, ultimately, at a loss – facing up to the Other’s death.

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70 The original reads as follows: “La vérité du visage se joue donc dans son histoire. Non dans ce qu’il dit, mais dans ce qu’il fait […]. Envisager un visage exige moins de le voir que de l’attendre. D’en attendre l’accomplissement, l’acte terminal, le passage à l’effectivité. […] C’est pourquoi aimer voudrait dire assister autrui jusqu’à l’instant terminal de sa mort. Et le voir enfin en vrai, cela reviendrait finalement à lui fermer les yeux.” (Marion, 2010: 154)


