

## Martin Heidegger's Phenomenology of the Inconspicuous

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**Abstract:** This paper is concerned with a fundamental problem of phenomenological research, namely the question *how* phenomena appear. Well-known is Martin Heidegger's talking about truth as "unconcealment," coupling appearing with "concealment" or "saving." Yet besides this important stance the later Heidegger developed a quite different approach regarding the relation between Being and appearing, now centered on what he termed "the inconspicuous" (das Unscheinbare). Recently phenomenology has, based on this idea, inaugurated a new movement termed "phenomenology of the inconspicuous." While referring to the anonymous endeavor of preparing "the other beginning," Heidegger's notion of the inconspicuous also formulates an important critique, with respect to phenomenology. As can be shown, the inconspicuous is at work *within* appearing itself, thus leaving behind the metaphysical opposition between manifestation and concealment. It rather should be seen as a kind of tension which is indispensable for something to appear at all. This tension makes any phenomenal appearance turn from a simple aspect viewed into an "ad-spect" (An-blick), which requests the genuine "passibility" of our gaze and engages our responsiveness.

**Keywords:** Heidegger, the inconspicuous, viewing, passibility

I  
Phenomenology is not only concerned with what appears, the so called phenomena themselves, but with *how* phenomena appear, with how the phenomenal *comes into appearing*, too. Due to this general orientation, Martin Heidegger conceived his early "hermeneutical phenomenology of Dasein" as an inquiry into the essential relation between Being and appearing. For him, any thought has to take intuition of what

appears and gives itself in actual presence, as its starting point. Thus any phenomenal content consists in a twofold structure, firstly referring to our bodily self and our senses, and, second, being endowed with meaning. Within “the How of philosophical experience” (*das Wie der philosophischen Erfahrung*), philosophical explication is intimately connected with motives and tendencies of embodied experience.<sup>1</sup> It is corresponding to this general framework that, soon after publishing *Being and Time*, Heidegger commences unfolding his reflections about “the inconspicuous” (*das Unscheinbare*), which exhibits significant similarities with Edmund Husserl’s “horizons of co-givenness.” However, Heidegger’s discourse also shows marked differences, with respect to the Husserlian concern. Therefore, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at this topic.

Besides examining concrete phenomenal contents and the conditions of its being given, Husserl began early to pay attention to the non-intentional, indeterminate “horizons” surrounding and bearing each phenomenal content, to what he termed “inadequacy” and “co-givenness.”<sup>2</sup> In this respect, he once lucidly states that immanent temporality requires the structure of phenomenal horizons which, as such, do not appear. These horizons encompass “ungrasped” objects, objects that are “noticeable, though not noticed” (*merklich, aber nicht gemerkt*). Such objects of possible consciousness remain on the threshold of appearing and “may be noticed” (*merkbar*), may “pass over into being grasped” (*ins Erfassen übergehen*), at any time.<sup>3</sup>

As to Heidegger’s variously mentioning the inconspicuous, he largely uses the term in a quite ordinary meaning. Often it may just refer to public anonymousness or lack of general recognition.<sup>4</sup> Yet it has to be emphasized, right from the start, that this vein of thought eventually neither remains restricted to lamenting on the public obscurity of the genius, nor do merely methodological questions, regarding phenomenal appearing, represent its main concern. Heidegger rather engages in the quest for an altogether fundamental attitude towards our own existence, the world, and

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 59: *Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks. Theorie der philosophischen Begriffsbildung* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1993), 171.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1983), 94 (Husserliana III/ 1, [§ 44] 91).

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte Über das Zeitbewusstsein* (1917/ 18), ed. by Rudolf Bernet/ Dieter Lohman [Husserliana XXXIII] (Dortrecht: Kluwer, 2001), [Nr. 15, § 2] 284.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 65: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989), p. 19/ 400; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 95: *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2014), 142-145 and 159-161.

innerworldly things, the quest for a “style” that should pave the way for the notorious “other beginning” of thinking.<sup>5</sup>

This major *ethical* connotation seems to be intrinsically connected with the philosophical purport of the notion of the inconspicuous, where Heidegger, for example, jumps from the “atmosphere of the inconspicuous” proper to “hand-craft,” to the inconspicuous as “the unspoken, the silence of language.”<sup>6</sup> The inconspicuous is also characterized as “saying-off” (*Entsagen*).<sup>7</sup> Thinking is called “the most silent dwelling within the inconspicuous of the appropriative event of freedom,”<sup>8</sup> and there is “the inconspicuous of sparing thinking” (*das Unscheinbare des schonenden Denkens*).<sup>9</sup> “The inconspicuousness of another history” relies on a peculiar “force of decision” (*Entscheidungskraft*), as well as on the “ability to wait” (*Warten-können*), for the inconspicuous is equaled to an “appearing in the ‘hints’” (*Erscheinen in den ‘Winken’*).<sup>10</sup> Dismissing more crude instances<sup>11</sup> for the later Heidegger’s engaging in his peculiar way of doing critical phenomenology, here only some of the implications of the notion of the inconspicuous shall be examined in more detail.

## II

At first glance, expressions such as “not looking out” (*Nicht-hervorschauen*), and “not-appearing” (*Nicht-Erscheinen*),<sup>12</sup> seem to suggest that the inconspicuous stands for the concealed or the unapparent. Nonetheless, it cannot be *totally* unappearing. Quite the contrary, the inconspicuous, in fact, is deeply *involved with appearing*. For it is said to “shine from the shining back” (*scheint aus dem Zurückscheinen*) where the “distant arrival of the holding-towards is glowing” (*die ferne Ankunft des Ver-Haltenden leuchtet*).<sup>13</sup> Thus “the not-appearing in the sense of not-stepping-forth-into-the-appearance,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 100: *Vigiliae und Notturmo* (*Schwarze Hefte 1952/53-1957*) (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2020), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 97: *Anmerkungen I-IV* (*Schwarze Hefte 1942-1948*) (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2015), 284.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 100, 163.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 97, 65: *das stillste Wohnen im Unscheinbaren des Ereignisses der Freyheit*.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 98: *Anmerkungen VI-IX* (*Schwarze Hefte 1948/49-1951*) (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2018), 256.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 95, 144.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 97, 68: *das unscheinbare Scheinen des Da, das die Freyheit des Ereignens freyend seint* (the inconspicuous shining of the There which freely be-eth the freedom of the appropriative event).

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 97, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 100, 71.

nonetheless and authentically, is the pure shining as glowing of the clearing of freedom."<sup>14</sup>

As a matter of fact, Heidegger's inconspicuous enhances appearing, although, for sure, it never becomes anything like Husserl's "intentional object." Neither is it mere "co-giveness" or a "horizon" for phenomenal appearing. The inconspicuous reveals to be quite subversive, with respect to phenomenology. Instead of just signifying the opposite to phenomenal appearing, that is "not-appearing," this term rather points to another twofold structure, implied in phenomenal appearing as such, namely the correlation between what appears, and the *ground of its appearing*. What originally had come into focus as the interrelatedness between "truth," understood as ἀλήθεια (*aletheia*) or "unconcealment" (*Entbergen*), and "being concealed" (*Verborgenheit*), by now has turned into the problem of phenomenal appearing as being *founded* in the inconspicuous. This inconspicuous is no more some possible, yet "concealed" appearance. It has nothing to do anymore with the basic phenomenological status of "being given as a phenomenon" or "becoming unconcealed."

According to this changed orientation, the later Heidegger claims that phenomenology has to become a "phenomenology of the inconspicuous."<sup>15</sup> By now, he even may call Being itself the inconspicuous.<sup>16</sup> This conviction has led others to a couple of important methodological endeavors, reaching out far beyond Heidegger.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Dominique Janicaud's program of a phenomenology of the inconspicuous not only opposes to the metaphysical or romanticist idea of a transcendent "ineffable ground" of Being and appearing, it also runs contrary to the Husserlian conception of a "horizon." It rather intends to be a *phenomenology of proximity*, teaching us how to "dwell" (*habiter*) in this world.<sup>18</sup> Françoise Dastur even considers this new orientation to be the fundamental question of philosophy, as she asks: "Thinking to come up in the future: a phenomenology of the

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<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 97, 65: *Das Nicht-Erscheinen im Sinne von Nicht-in-die-Erscheinung-(hervor-) treten ist gleichwohl und eigentlich das reine Scheinen als Leuchten der Lichtung der Freyheit*.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Seminar in Zähringen 1973," in *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 15: *Seminare (1951-1973)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2005), 399.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 54: *Parmenides* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1982), 150.

<sup>17</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung. Phänomenologie, Psychoanalyse, Phänomenotechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002); B. Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene. Modi hyperbolischer Erfahrung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012); Jean-Luc Marion, *De surcroît. Études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris: PUF, 2001); J.-L. Marion, *Le Visible et le révélé* (Paris: Cerf, 2005); J.-L. Marion, *Certitudes négatives* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle), 2010; Günter Figal, *Unscheinbarkeit. Der Raum der Phänomenologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016); Françoise Dastur, *Figures du néant et de la négation entre orient et occident* (Paris: encre marine, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Dominique Janicaud, *La phénoménologie éclatée* (Paris: éditions de l'éclat, 1998), 109.

inconspicuous?"<sup>19</sup> Now the problem can be put like this: if to be essentially means to appear, then how does the inconspicuous contribute to our access to Being?

### III

According to Heidegger's well-known stance, it is due to an "oblivion of Being" that it became possible for metaphysical thought to reduce Being to the sphere of what plainly appears and gives itself. Yet Dasein in its very being "is related to its being," thus always being "concerned about Being."<sup>20</sup> Dasein as such involves an "understanding of Being."<sup>21</sup> By way of this "transcendence" inherent in Dasein, it surpasses its "being in the world" and becomes "being towards the world,"<sup>22</sup> so as to encounter the realm of the phenomenal.<sup>23</sup> It is Dasein's "giving free" which lets beings be, and "be encountered" (*begegnen*) as what appears.<sup>24</sup> As Günter Figal resumes: the phenomenal finds its foundation in Dasein's "leaping over" (*überspringen*), that is its "opening" and "being free for ...."<sup>25</sup>

However, this "positive" description of appearing also has got a "negative" counter-part: Dasein's "being a self" is pervaded by a "groundless ground" (*Ab-grund*).<sup>26</sup> Phenomenal beings and appearing itself both depend on an event of "nihilitating" (*nichten*). With respect to this aspect, Renaud Barbaras states that Dasein's understanding of Being signifies a "desire" for the phenomenal,<sup>27</sup> originating from a "failure of the ontological coincidence" (*échec de la coïncidence ontologique*).<sup>28</sup> Phenomenal appearance just cannot be derived from, or be based on, any such thing as a presumably full possession of essences.

<sup>19</sup> Françoise Dastur, *Heidegger et la pensée à venir* (Paris : Vrin, 2011), 11; cf. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996, 40; Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 16. Aufl. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), (§ 9) 41-42.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 62-67; Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (§15), 66-72.

<sup>22</sup> Especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty attributes this signification to the Heideggerian "être au monde."

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 26: *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, 3., durchges. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2007), 211-213 and 233-236.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 76-81; Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (§85), 83-86.

<sup>25</sup> Günter Figal, *Martin Heidegger: Phänomenologie der Freiheit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); cf. Françoise Dastur, *Heidegger. La question du logos* (Paris: Vrin, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 26, 233-234.

<sup>27</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Le désir de la distance. Introduction à une phénoménologie de la perception*, 2ième éd. revue (Paris: Vrin, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Dynamique de la manifestation* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 128 and 143.

Due to the “nihilating” inherent in the very structure of appearing, the so called phenomenal does not at all consist in simple “appearances” which plainly yield themselves, just as they are. There are no “phenomena,” properly speaking. Appearing or the “clearing” (*Lichtung*) not only results from but is tantamount to, a fundamental “struggle” between “emerging” or “unconcealment,” and “concealment,” considered as “saving” (*Bergung*).<sup>29</sup> Phenomena determined by ontology as “being present” (*anwesend sein*) of what appears, in fact, involve a “twofold concealment” or “denial” (*Versagen*). Firstly, any unconcealed appearance implies other appearances remaining concealed. Second, “concealment” as the source of appearing, though remaining obscure, still may reveal itself, in a way, *together with* what actually appears. For within appearing, the concealed becomes “saved” (*bewahrt*),<sup>30</sup> that means *positively hidden*.

#### IV

In order to overcome the Platonic, and Hegelian, metaphysical doctrine that an “appearance” is no more than a futile envelope of Being, Heidegger’s notion of the inconspicuous may help us understand the paradoxical structure of appearing. The relation between Being and appearing cannot be adequately grasped in the field of “contemplation” (*θεωρία* [*theoria*]), by hierarchically reducing what appears, to an essence which gets manifest through it. The question relates to Dasein’s mode of existence, to its practice of being a self in freedom.<sup>31</sup> The “revealability” (*Enthüllbarkeit*)<sup>32</sup> of Being correlates with Dasein’s “temporizing time.”<sup>33</sup> Thus the problem of the inconspicuous ultimately refers to Dasein’s deploying its existence. Nevertheless, in some way or another, this issue still must relate to

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<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 54; Martin Heidegger, “ALETHEIA (HERAKLIT, FRAGMENT 16),” in *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 7: *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000), 263-288; Martin Heidegger, “Vom Wesen der Wahrheit” and “Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit.” Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 9: *Wegmarken*, 2., durchges. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), 177-202/203-238; Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” in *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 5: *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), 1-74; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 21: *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1995); Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 40: *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), 105-123; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 35: *Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie. Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2012), 22-31 and 185-195; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 78: *Der Spruch des Anaximander* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2010), 76-101.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 5, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 26, 234-236.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 249-252; cf. Françoise Dastur, *Heidegger et la question du temps* (Paris: PUF, 2011).



phenomenal appearing, visibility, and intuition. It concerns the question of Dasein's *being embodied*, and being *endowed with senses*, as well as the status of *images and pictures*.

If concepts of phenomenality have been shaped more or less according to the model of vision, identifying the inconspicuous with the "invisible" might lead to the conviction that the inconspicuous designates something that can be spoken of, yet without falling in the domain of intuition. Heidegger himself sometimes seems to foster this opinion. For instance, he esteems that "what pertains to the image" (*das Bildhafte*) originates from "the without-image" (*das Bildlose*).<sup>34</sup> Thus he clearly tends to subdue "figurative saying" (*bildhaftes Sagen*) to a more fundamental "poetic and thinking saying" (*dichtendes und denkendes Sage*).<sup>35</sup> When "showing" (*zeigen*) becomes merged with "saying" (*sagen*), image and appearance are reduced to the spoken word or the myth.<sup>36</sup> Also, the "thing itself [is] without gaze" (*das selbst blicklose Ding*).<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, while exhibiting a certain predilection for speech,<sup>38</sup> Heidegger does not entirely dismiss the imaginative, for the sake of some more fundamental "poetic and thinking saying."<sup>39</sup> Despite of his rejecting the mistaken ideal of plain "intuitiveness" or "clarity" (*Anschaulichkeit*), he still tries to access the problem of the inconspicuous by none other than the intermediary of vision. He just pleads for the "non-intuitive" (*das Unanschauliche*) which ought not to be confounded with what is altogether "non-beholdable" (*das Unerblickbare*). For by means of our having an "eye for the non-intuitive" (*Blick für das Unanschauliche*) we eventually "have [Being] 'in the eye'" (*'im Auge' haben*).<sup>40</sup>

Besides language, there still must be a place for the gaze, with respect to the "unconcealment" of Being. The reason for this may be sought in Dasein's *being embodied*. Disclosure of the phenomenal ultimately cannot but rely on the *bodily self* which accomplishes Dasein's mode of existence in a "surrounding world." Well-known is Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's everyday understanding of the world: Embodied Dasein stands in close "association with," or is "going by" (*Umgang mit*), "things at hand." Only due to its *being embodied* Dasein is able to move about amidst "useful things"

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 55: *Heraklit. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens: Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos*, 2., durchges. Auflage (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1987), 301: *daß alles Bildhafte und jedes Bild nur erscheint und zum Scheinen kommt aus dem Bildlosen, das nach dem Bild ruft.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, 302.

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 54, 164-165 and 169-171.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>38</sup> This is criticized by Dastur in *Heidegger: La question du logos*, 247.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 55, 302.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

(*Zeug*), so as to “take care of” and “handle” them. Yet it is Dasein’s actually *dealing* with “things at hand” that makes them appear in their proper “relevance” (*Bewandtnis*). This “practical” way of “unconcealing” not only implies a disclosure of meaning. As Dasein’s relation to the world relies on “reference” (*Verweisung*), this in turn requests a specific kind of “sight,” namely “circumspection” (*Umsicht*).<sup>41</sup> Being disclosed has actually to be *looked at*, too. As “appearing,” after all, represents Dasein’s unique access to Being, Heidegger necessarily must conceive of both “looking” (*Blicken*) and “saying” (*Sagen*) as the two “originary ways of appearing” (*Grundweisen des Erscheinen*).<sup>42</sup>

Now, if the inconspicuous is immanent in, and essential to, Dasein’s disclosure of Being, the inconspicuous itself is by no means reducible to the “unapparent.” It can be and has to be *looked at*, too; ultimately it must even relate to Dasein’s being embodied. As thinking has to “be-hold, out of the interstice of its shining, the insight of the inconspicuous,”<sup>43</sup> as it has to “show” (*zeigen*) in a “viewing-listening” (*sehend-hörend*) manner,<sup>44</sup> how could such thinking ever divest itself of the senses, that means of the bodily self of the thinker? <sup>45</sup> Yet, what precisely is assumed by Heidegger’s speaking of showing, viewing, and listening? Can this be explained, as Janicaud thinks, by the phenomenological gaze just “returning to the very emergence of appearing” (*revenir au surgissement même de l’apparaître*)? If this implies that we should “hold ourselves next to ...” (*se tenir auprès de ...*) and “listen, look with a different gaze” (*écouter, regarder d’un autre regard*), which “requires time, patience, endurance” (*réclame temps, patience, endurance*),<sup>46</sup> the question of the inconspicuous actually requests a broader perspective, encompassing ethics. Thus the inconspicuous may eventually, according to Janicaud’s own suggestion, make the phenomenological endeavor itself “break up” (*éclater*).

What makes beings “unconcealedly be present” (*unverborger anwesen*) for us, is their “aspect” or “appearance” (*Aussehen, Anblick, ἰδέα [idea], εἶδος [eidos]*) which becomes grasped by our “gaze” (*Blick, θεά [thea]*). Yet, at the same time, the “appearance” of beings somehow “disturbs” and “doubles” our gaze which, for its part, happens to be seized, too, by the

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<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 62-83; Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (§§ 15-18), 66-88.

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 54, 169.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 101: *Winke I und II (Schwarze Hefte 1957-1959)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2020), 166: *den Einblick des Unscheinbaren aus der Fuge seines Scheinens er-blicken*.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 101, 166.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on “there is” (*il y a*) which is deeply rooted in appearing and viewing: M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 190 footnote.

<sup>46</sup> Janicaud, *La phénoménologie éclatée*, 107-108.



“appearance” of beings.<sup>47</sup> As soon as Dasein’s eye becomes *exposed* to the “opening of Being,” the light of appearing turns into “the manner, by which the human beholds the appearance of beings encountered, as an aspect in which beings unconceal themselves.”<sup>48</sup> Such “beholding” (*erblicken*), in a peculiar way, exceeds mere perception, as it marks the event of beings “catching the eye.”<sup>49</sup>

For this intriguing problem, the Levinassian “visage” of the Other whom I encounter and whose “visage” in turn strikes my eye by *envisaging* me, yields a more adequate paradigm than the metaphysical concept of manifestation. Where I become both *looked at*, and *made looking*, just *by* what appears to my sight, the “aspect” transforms into an “ad-spect” (*An-blick*): appearances *look at me* and, by doing so, *claim my gaze*, first of all; only then may I actually *begin to look*.

This issue can be further elucidated recurring to art and aesthetics. Bernhard Waldenfels considers vision in general to be a “double event” (*Doppelereignis*).<sup>50</sup> What he calls the “event of viewing” (*Sehereignis*)<sup>51</sup> cannot be reduced to mere receptivity. For our looking at appearances is “initiated by the things” (*von den Dingen initiiert*).<sup>52</sup> This pattern is enhanced by art, producing an “arousing image” (*Erregungsbild*)<sup>53</sup> which, through its very “ad-spect,” sets forth “incarnate affects” (*inkarnierte Affekte*).<sup>54</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman equally uncovers this fundamental “convertibility” (*convertibilité*) inherent in our sight. There is always “that which regards us” (*ce qui nous regarde*)—in the twofold sense of “that which looks at us” and “that which concerns us”—at work within “what we view” (*ce que nous voyons*).<sup>55</sup> Dieter Mersch follows Waldenfels in vehemently opposing theories of sense perception and appearing, based on mere “reception.” He claims that aesthetic experience originates in a “befalling” (*Widerfahrnis*) we cannot but experience in a “responsive” way.<sup>56</sup> For prior to “showing something”

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 54, 153-154, 158, and 184.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 217: *die Weise, wie der Mensch das Aussehen des begegnenden Seienden als einen Anblick erblickt, in dem sich Seiendes entbirgt.*

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger uses “erblicken” not just in the sense of “to get sight of,” but rather in the stronger, as well as more passive, connotation of “to receive the sight from what catches the eye,” that is as “er-blicken” or “von...her blicken” (*Ibid.*, 158).

<sup>50</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel: Modi ästhetischer Erfahrung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010), 110.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>55</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1992), 19.

<sup>56</sup> Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura: Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 27 and 185.

(*Etwas-Zeigen*) any appearance performs a “showing itself” (*Sichzeigen*).<sup>57</sup> In every manifestation there is an “exceeding part” (*Überschuß*),<sup>58</sup> with respect to what becomes manifest, marking a peculiar “unavailability” (*Unverfügbarkeit*)<sup>59</sup> inherent in phenomena. Due to a genuine “alterity,”<sup>60</sup> the “ad-spect” appearing not only “gives to view”;<sup>61</sup> it appeals to our responsiveness and thus makes us responsible for appearing.

## V

As to conclude, Heidegger’s inconspicuous should be considered as a sort of *tension* operating *in-between* manifestation and sense perception. Instead of designating some mysterious “hidden” or “ineffable” dimension *behind* the phenomenal, instead of referring to something which essentially must remain “concealed,” the inconspicuous rather points at a *fundamental passivity*—or rather “passibility.”<sup>62</sup> Such passibility means an “opening” which is intrinsic to the double-sided “ad-spect” of appearances. As an “ad-spect,” the appearance of things refers to the temporal inversion of our “being looked at,” occurring *prior to vision*. “Passibility” represents our indispensable *openness towards* the “ad-spect,” our *ability to be appealed to*, by the “ad-spect.” Ultimately it is this “passibility” which seems more adequately to come up for the inconspicuous inherent in appearing. Heidegger’s recognition of the inconspicuous amounts to acknowledging and reevaluating our *gaze*—the gaze of those humans “*Beyng*” (*Seyn*) both “makes use of,” and “is in need for” (*brauchen*).<sup>63</sup> Only due to an originary “passibility” residing at the core of appearing, the “appropriative event” (*Ereignis*) of Being can be called a “catching in the eye” (*Eräugnis*).

As *Beyng* is in need for that very inconspicuous “passibility” which pervades *Dasein*, it can be finally concluded that the inconspicuous may not be reduced to the metaphysical dialectics between concealment and

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<sup>57</sup> Dieter Mersch, *Was sich zeigt: Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis* (München: Fink, 2002), 65 and 277.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 133 and 244-245.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura*, 10, 106, 150, 240, and 295.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>62</sup> This term has been introduced by Paul Ricœur and Jan Patočka and has become decisive for thinkers such as Henri Maldiney (H. M., *Ouvrir le rien: L’art nu* [Paris: Encre Marine, 2000], 72 and 458) and Marc Richir (M. R., *Méditations phénoménologiques. Phénoménologie et phénoménologie du langage* [Grenoble: Millon, 1993], 48-52).

<sup>63</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 5 “Der Spruch des Anaximander,” 367-373; Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik,” in *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 7: *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 33; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 79: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, 2., durchges. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2005), 69-70.

appearing. The issue of the inconspicuous not only sheds considerable doubt on phenomenology, it even should be conceived of as pertaining to an *ethical attitude*. The notion of the inconspicuous in fact relates to what the later Heidegger tried to think through the twofold structure of "*Gelassenheit*."<sup>64</sup> For both, appearing *and* the inconspicuous, originate in Dasein's "being let-in" by Beyng, as well as Dasein's "getting involved with" Being. And only due to its inconspicuous "passibility" Dasein may "let" Being come forth and "let beings be."

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit," Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 13: *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, 2. durchges. Aufl. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2002), 37-74; Martin Heidegger, "Ἀγχιβασιή. Ein Gespräch selbstdritt auf einem Feldweg zwischen einem Gelehrten, einem Forscher und einem Weisen"/ „Abendgespräch in einem Kriegsgefangenenlager in Rußland zwischen einem Jüngeren und einem Älteren," M. Heidegger, in *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 77: *Feldweg-Gespräche* (1944/45), 2. durchges. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2007), 1-159 and 203-245.

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