

# In-visibility

Reflections upon Visibility  
and Transcendence in Theology,  
Philosophy and the Arts



Academic Studies

18



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## **In-visibility**

Reflections upon Visibility and Transcendence  
in Theology, Philosophy and the Arts

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## Introduction

The relationship between visibility and transcendence in a thematically broad field, embracing more than five centuries and a plurality of methods drawn from theology, philosophy, and history and theory of art, is reconsidered here.

The book is divided into five sub-topics: In the first and more fundamental part, “The phenomenology of in-visibility”, questions underlying the other four themes are broached, defined or narrowed down. Here the modes of appearing/revealing or hiding of phenomena are reflected. In the second section of the book dealing with “Language as a mode of revealing and hiding” the specific role of verbal expression in a very broad sense is at the core: What is the fundamental understanding and use of language, when speaking of the indescribable? The third section on “Human existence between visibility and invisibility” focuses on the features and norms of theological anthropology. The ambiguity of anthropological categories such as faith, rationality, imagination, memory and emotion play a prominent role here. The fourth section concerning “The manifestation of a ‘beyond’ in the arts” investigates transcendence in the arts. What are the theological discourses behind the religious customs of different artistic media (i.e. images, music, liturgical inventory, architecture)? Finally, contributions on the idea of ‘vicarious representation’ can be found in the fifth section, “Visible community and invisible transcendence”.

This œuvre is the result of an interdisciplinary research project entitled *In-visibility. Visibility and Transcendence in Religion, Art and Ethics*, funded by The Danish Council for Independent Research and The Carlsberg Foundation. The project was carried out by a core group of eight scholars at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Copenhagen, in cooperation with a broad group of international researchers.

The aim of the project was to study theological and philosophical thoughts on the relation between what can be seen and what cannot be not seen in religion, art and ethics from the time of the Reformation until the present day. The focus was on the dialectic reflection upon visibility and invisibility found in reformatory theology, and the observation of its influence on texts and religious practice throughout history. The importance of the themes in the five sections, as described

above, was central: Phenomenology, anthropology, language, art/architecture and church. The project aimed at establishing a historically based answer to contemporary interests in seeing and being seen, disregarding and hiding. The project was designed as a comment on ongoing research within literature, language philosophy and phenomenology, and a contribution to theological research into the relationship between faith and reason, faith and love, iconoclasm and representation, church and society.

## **Phenomenology of In-visibility**



Arne Grøn

## Phenomenology of In-visibility

### 1. Between ‘invisibles’

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*. I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. The first begins from the place I occupy in the external world of sense and extends the connection in which I stand into an unbounded magnitude with worlds upon worlds and systems of systems, and moreover into the unbounded times of their periodic motion, their beginning and their duration. The second begins from my invisible self, my personality, and presents me in a world which has true infinity but which can be discovered only by the understanding” (Kant: 2006, 269).

The passage from the end of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* places us as human beings between two forms of ‘invisibles’. Both concern the visible world, albeit in radically different ways. The first begins from the place I occupy and follows the movement of the eye beyond what I see. This movement is unbounded as the horizon is open, and with the help of tools (such as telescopes and microscopes) we are able to see more than we can see with the naked eye. The visible world is not to be captured in vision. Rather, there is a peculiar kind of invisibility to the visible world. We can only see what we see now in that there is something beyond – something which in turn may be seen, but this would take time and require that we move beyond what we have seen. The connection in which I stand “extends into an unbounded magnitude with worlds upon worlds”. Is this something ‘invisible’? The movement of the eye ‘within’ an open horizon means that the visible world cannot be seen. We may only imagine seeing the visible world in which we live. This indicates that vision is not closed upon itself.

The second movement is explicitly about something invisible. It begins “from my invisible self”. We may be tempted to divide the world into the external, vis-

ible world and the inner, invisible. In fact, this seems to be the obvious reading of Kant's text. Yet as the first movement begins from the place I occupy and let my vision move beyond itself, the second concerns me as the one seeing, moving in the visible world. When read along this line, Kant's words situate us between 'invisibles', and, remarkably, they situate us as the subject of vision. It may seem strange to speak of being situated between 'invisibles'. The point, however, is that we are situated between 'invisibles' *in this world* – as *the one seeing*.

In Kant's text, note the remark: "I see them before me". What is implied in this "before me"? In the first movement what is before me is indeed visible, but I can be lost in seeing what is before me and cannot see 'the' visible. In the second movement I only 'see' what is before me, the moral law, because I am the addressee. It is about how I should see myself situated in a moral universe. I am brought before myself as the one seeing and acting. What I see before me determines myself: as the subject seeing.

Following this line of thought, the invisible concerns seeing and the visible. If we seek to comprehend the invisible by the division of the world into external and inner worlds, we cannot account for how we are situated ourselves. When we ask about the relation of the visible and the invisible, what is in between? In a critical sense we are – as the one seeing. If we operate with the visible and the invisible as two worlds, *we move between them* – and we do so *in this world*.

## 2. Visibility

Speaking of the visible and the invisible, what is in question appears to be the invisible. As the *invisible* it is defined against the visible, but does it make sense to speak of 'the invisible'? How does the invisible show itself? If we are looking for that which shows itself, is the visible not all there is? Let us begin with what appears in need of no justification, the visible.

Obviously, the visible is defined through what we actually see or have seen. Yet it is not only what we remember having seen (*memoria*) and what we now see (*contuitus*), but also what there is – still – to be seen. The possibility indicated in the visible is primarily to see what is still to come. But there is more to it: the visible is also what – already now – *could be seen if we saw differently*. This means that we cannot account for the visible without taking what is not seen (and not only: not yet seen) into account. The invisible, then, is not something beyond, added to the visible. Rather, the visible is itself turned into a question of seeing. This is the suggestion I want to probe in this chapter, developing the notion of the in-visible.

Yet does it not go without saying that the visible is a matter of seeing? Maybe we should even claim that what is visible depends not only on what we see but also on what we make visible. Apparently we live in a culture of visibility. The world we

more or less share is not only mediated through images of the world. How we deal with visibility seems to have changed. To put it most briefly: visibility is turned into a matter of *making* visible, and what is to be made visible is not so much what has been ignored or overlooked, e. g. past wrongs or present minorities, but ourselves. Making oneself visible has become a condition of communication, that is, of being someone. If you are not seen, you are out, and whether you are seen or not is a matter of making yourself visible (Grøn 1995).

My aim here is not to offer a diagnosis of the age but to point to *the question* of visibility. The question is twofold: first, even when we seek to turn visibility into a matter of making visible, it remains an open question to us, and second, the question of what is visible brings us – the one seeing – into question. This twofold question of visibility and vision will guide us in the following, through a fourfold motif.

Visibility is a condition that escapes us no matter how much we seek to turn it into a matter of making visible. Thus we do not just appear as we project. Rather, we also appear as the one projecting, seeking to make ourselves visible. Implied in this first motif – visibility escaping us even in seeking to make ourselves visible – is a second one, indicated in the question: what do we see in what is to be seen?

In these two connected motifs – the condition of visibility and the question of seeing – lies a *third* one, complicating the first two: it is possible for us to see without seeing. This goes especially for seeing the other. We may ignore her, but ignoring is still a form of seeing: it is to see the other so as not to see her. We do not just do this: see without seeing. It requires us to do something to ourselves in seeing the other. Thus we may explain our ways of seeing the other so that we can almost let it appear as nothing that we do ourselves. A forceful way of explaining ourselves is to claim that we see her as she is. In doing so we can make ourselves blind to what we do to the other in seeing her. It is possible for us to make her invisible to us.

This short outline may lead us to both a phenomenology and an ethics of in-visibility (Grøn: 2015). If the visible is also what we – *already now* – could see if we saw differently, what we actually see bears witness to us. If we can see the other and yet not see her, what is visible is a question to us that questions us. This is reflected in the fact that we may try to explain ourselves and even come to question ourselves as the one seeing. But are we not here introducing the ethical into the visible world? Is phenomenology not about the visible as the visible?

Phenomenology is a logos about that which shows itself. Why is such an inquiry needed? It concerns that which shows itself *as it shows itself*. Why this redoubling? ‘The visible as the visible’ does not indicate a world of phenomena available to us, just to be observed, but, rather, the question of seeing implies: how do we see what we see? The question opens for a figure of ‘repetition’: to see what we see. The possibility of repetition indicates the temporality of seeing. Thus, the third complicating motif – the possibility of seeing and yet not seeing – opens a *fourth* motif: time and vision. What I aim at here is to hold the three motifs mentioned



above – visibility as a condition escaping us in seeing, the question of seeing, the possibility of seeing and yet not seeing (negativity) – together in the question of repetition (time and vision): coming to see (understand) what we see.

The visible is that which can be seen, but what is implied in ‘can’? Is the visible already a matter of a culture defining what can be seen? If it is, the question still remains, how do we see what can be seen? Is that which can be seen *in fact* seen? Defining what can be seen requires us to see. Our vision is not only what is supposed to be determined in visibility (as cultural limits to the visible). It also harbours the question of what is visible. We only come to understand what ‘can’ be seen in that we see (for) ourselves.

Seeing is not just observing what is there to be seen. It is also recognizing, thereby affirming what one sees. This opens the question: what do we see *in* the visible? Does this bring invisibility into the picture? If it does, it is a critical reminder, especially when identity appears to be at stake in seeing as recognition. Are we as we are seen? Do we actually see the other we see? A culture of visibility easily loses the sense of the invisible – as a question of visibility.

However, if visibility is a question to us, if it is up to us to see what is there to be seen, the weight seems to be placed on the one seeing. When seeing is put into the foreground, vision is divided between the seen and the seer. If the visible is not simply there but a matter of us seeing, the one seeing, the seer, appears to be at a distance from what is seen. The one seeing seems to be behind her seeing. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty seeks, as a countermove to this division, to capture the visibility of the one seeing, describing the world as “universal flesh” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 137). If we take vision seriously we will come to a notion of the intertwining of the visible and the seer, “Visibility” as “flesh”, as an “element’ of Being” (139). When we see others seeing, the “lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled”. We are, through other eyes, “for ourselves fully visible” (ibid., 143).

Focusing on the double question of visibility and vision, my argument moves in a different direction. It seeks to capture both the becoming visible of the one seeing and the distance, even asymmetry, between the one and the other – in seeing and being seen. Ignoring that we ourselves become visible in seeing is ethical in nature.

If we let vision define what is visible, we overlook that there is a peculiar visibility to vision. Others can see us ‘in the eyes’. We can see others seeing us. How we see others manifests itself in how we act. Moreover, we can seek to give words to how we see others and the world. Thus seeing is itself a matter of becoming visible. Yet seeing is not an act in the way that speaking is. We can give words to how we see, but we cannot see as we choose.

The visible is neither something given just to be observed nor to be defined in terms of vision that gives significance to what is seen. Ironically, both conceptions share the notion of visibility as something given – either to be observed or to be

given significance to. In contrast, what I urge is a double claim: that visibility is a condition that escapes us *in seeing*, and it is a question of seeing in the sense that *seeing* itself comes into question. If we let the visible world between us be a matter of what is made visible, we still take our point of departure in the visible world. No matter how much we seek to turn it into what we make out of it, the question remains open: what comes out of what we make out of the visible world? Visibility is the field of vision in which the one seeing is situated and moves. It lies not only before us but is defined by a horizon which moves with us.

What is seen depends on the eyes that see – but do the eyes decide what is to be seen? Visibility as a condition that escapes us in seeing turns our seeing into a question: what we see *in* what we see, and *how* we see what we see. In an important and critical sense it is possible *not* to see what there is to be seen. Humans can be struck by blindness – in seeing. That is in a sense what tragedy is about. This indicates that what we should see is not a matter of choice. Rather, what is visible puts a demand on us that is not of our making.

The visible is that which can be seen. This ‘can’ cannot be taken back into what we do in seeing or making visible. Rather, the limits of seeing implied in visibility are not simply the limits within which we see the world. What we do *not* see may testify to us seeing. It does not simply fall outside of view but may even be a way of seeing. There are forms of seeing that consist in not-seeing, such as ignoring. Arrogance, for example, is to deprive the other of significance in order to tell her how she is to see herself – as inferior to oneself. It only works if she does. This shows that limits of seeing may be limits we draw – in seeing. The question is not only what we see and make visible but also what we, in seeing and making visible, make invisible.

Beginning with the question of visibility we were led to ask, how does invisibility enter the picture? I have suggested that the notion of the invisible can remind us that seeing is also a matter of what we do not see. But do we need a notion of the invisible in order to deal with the question of what we do not see – in seeing?

Before going deeper into the question of the in-visible, let me add a further note on visibility and vision. What I have in mind is not to advocate seeing over, e. g., listening, but to insist on the problems inherent in seeing. These are complex and not to be accounted for without presupposing the interplay of senses, in particular seeing, listening and touching. Senses, remarkably, have metaphorical status in terms of the world of experience. What you see is a matter of ‘seeing’: what you see in that which you see. What do you think in seeing? Senses interplay in a metaphorical ‘seeing’ the world. Thus a glance can caress what is seen – as if it were touching the face or the figure it sees. A look can seek to ‘catch’ the other.

This leads us back to the condition of visibility. What I have in mind is visibility as the opening of the world of experience. It is a world of sounds, light, colours, forms, smells, and all things tangible. The world of visibility is not just defined by

sight – rather vision is formed through what we touch, smell and hear. The body we see can be touched. The face we see speaks (Levinas 1969, 66) – to the point of questioning us seeing it. The face speaks before we see it – so to speak.

When metaphysics seeks to capture the world in terms of vision – to the point of dividing the world into two, the visible and the invisible – this apparent privileging carries along an undercurrent moving in the opposite direction: vision is transformed or transposed. Visibility is both to be taken literally and metaphorically. The world opens itself to us as spaces, landscapes and soundscapes in which we move, seeking to orient ourselves – having the world in view. This is only possible on the condition of the world's being defined by a horizon moving with us. In the metaphorical transposition of visibility, time plays into vision.

Visibility does not show itself as other phenomena or 'things' do. It is not visible as 'visibles' are. Visibility hides in what is seen. We therefore tend to take it for granted, to be used for making ourselves visible. But visibility concerns the opening of the world. There is a world in which we can make ourselves visible and pursue what we have in mind. Can we capture the character of the world in distinguishing between the visible and the invisible?

### 3. In-visible

In orienting ourselves, we often need to make clear to ourselves what we have seen or heard. In doing so we also need to speak of what we have *not* seen or heard. The unseen or unheard may be some definite thing: that which we actually did not see or hear (we were mistaken thinking that we did). But the unseen or unheard may also be less specific. This is the case when we try to comprehend our world of experience. In order to do so we need a notion of what we have not – yet – seen or heard. If this is something others have told us about, what we have not yet seen still belongs to 'our' world of experience. This is defined by what we can (or could) see or hear, but also by what we imagine or think is possible for humans to experience. In so far as this world is opened to us in seeing we can speak of the visible.

Thus in order to speak of what we have seen we need a notion of the unseen, but do we also need a notion of the invisible in order to speak of the visible? If what is unseen is yet to be seen, or could be seen if we saw differently, the unseen seems to be explained in terms of visibility.

To orient ourselves in the world we need a notion of the world. Religious and philosophical traditions offer notions of 'the' visible and 'the' invisible in order to capture what the world is like. We do not see 'the' world and yet we may speak of the visible world. What then about the invisible? It is easily turned into a world as well, but only by way of the visible. This means that the world which we actually do not see – we only see something 'in' the world – is taken as the visible world,

on the one hand, whereas, on the other hand, the invisible is 'seen' as a second world which in turn mirrors, as it were, the first, visible world.

This situation should make us pause and re-think. When we seek to give an account of what we see we may be tempted to use notions of the visible and the invisible as two worlds, but we cannot account for these notions themselves if we go back to what we see. More specifically, given the notions of the visible and the invisible as two worlds, it is difficult to account for the fact that the visible gives rise to questions concerning the visible.

The move from speaking of something as visible or invisible to 'the' visible and 'the' invisible may seem unapparent. Is 'the' visible not just what is visible, and 'the' invisible what is invisible? Yet something happens in this move. It is about what it is to have a world. If the world is open to us as 'the' visible, that which can or could be seen, what is beyond the world appears to be 'the' invisible. But we only have the invisible beyond the visible 'world' by way of the visible. Moving beyond the visible world is a way of being in this world. The invisible is not a world in which we can be situated – as in this world of visibility. Rather 'the invisible' belongs to being in the world in which we seek to orient ourselves. 'The invisible' concerns what it is to be in the world. 'Beyond' belongs to being in the world (Grøn: 2010).

The argument put forward here is dialectical. Separating the invisible from the visible, the invisible world mirrors the visible. That is – what we show is not what we have in mind. Yet we encounter the intertwining of the visible and the invisible. It is only in the world of visibility that we can move beyond 'the' visible. The movement 'beyond' takes the visible world along. But *this* shows something about visibility or the character of the visible world. We only 'have' this world – as the visible world – in and through the movement beyond.

We do not see the visible world – we see something visible, not 'the' visible. The world of visibility it is not just there, visible. Rather it is a matter of seeing what there is – to be seen. Seeing is to see what shows itself to us. In a critical sense, then, the world of visibility is invisible, and 'the' invisible is not a world but belongs to the world of visibility. This is what I would like to indicate in speaking of the in-visible. The visible is a matter of what we see *in* what we see. If we would speak of the visible world, we need a notion of the invisible, but the invisible hides *in* the visible.

What is 'between' the visible and the invisible? We are – we are 'there' ourselves, in seeing, questioning and being questioned as to what we see – in what we see. If the visible and the invisible were two worlds, where would we be situated? We would be in both worlds but also in between in seeing and thinking. We are ourselves visible and invisible: in-visible.

While the argument outlined here is dialectical, the approach taken is *phenomenological*. However, does it not also indicate the limits of phenomenology? If it does, it is – I would claim – still part of phenomenology. This is also indicated by the title: phenomenology of the in-visible.

#### 4. Phenomenology

How is the approach taken here phenomenological? It is so already in dealing with the question of visibility and vision as one question – between what is visible and seeing. That which can be seen corresponds to acts of seeing. In seeing we have something in view. It may be unclear to us what we see. In seeking to determine what it is, we still relate to that thing. We may even be wrong in how we determine what we see. What we have in view is a thing that *shows itself* to us. We may reflect on what we see, asking ourselves whether we have determined it as we see it.

Phenomenology deals with the phenomenon as that which shows itself, but this must be qualified: phenomenological reflection is a second look; it is about that which shows itself *as it shows itself*. We can see things in ways in which we move in ideas, constructions, or theories. Phenomenology as *logos* is a counter-move. Against interpretations in which we think we know what we see, we must make an effort to go back to the things themselves, the phenomena as phenomena. This move back has the form of a question: what we see – how does that show itself to us? Consequently phenomenology is about the visible *as the visible*. It moves beyond the seer to the visible, but it does so in that it deals with the difficulty in seeing what is to be seen.

As a *logos* of the phenomenon as that which shows itself, phenomenology is about *seeing* that which shows itself *as it shows itself* (cf. SuZ § 7A; Heidegger: 1972, 28: “*das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende*”). It begins with the difficulty of seeing which not only comes from what is to be seen but also from how we see: we can see things in ways that do not let what we see appear. How, then, do we let what we see appear?

If phenomenology addresses the question of the visible as such, does it move in the immanence of the visible? Remarkably phenomenological reflection, in dealing with the visible as the visible, encounters the question of the unseen or even the invisible. Thus we only see an object, for example a dice, in taking into view what we do not see: the other sides of the object. In fact, we can take it into view by turning the dice around in order to see what we did not first see. What is in front of us may be an object which we cannot have ‘in our hands’ and turn around. If we stand before the entrance of a building, going to visit a friend who lives there, we take into view something we only see when entering the building or when we, for example, have to walk around the building in order to take the back entrance.

These examples already indicate that time plays into seeing. The finitude of seeing has to do with seeing as such: what it is to see. What we see in front of us is a thing due to the fact that it has sides which we do not – yet – see but nevertheless take into view. If we move we can see other aspects. The fact that we only see in time and in context comes to the fore not only if we change position or if the object itself changes. Also we cannot put ourselves back into the same act of seeing. If we

try to repeat an experience, for example visit Berlin again (Kierkegaard 1983), we only discover that something has changed – including ourselves.

Seeing the thing itself, then, is a matter of taking different positions which we cannot occupy at the same time. It is a matter of how we see. Apparently this can be taken back to acts of seeing, various ways of being directed to that which shows itself to us. Yet if acts of seeing are defined as acts of intending, a phenomenological response must be to ask not only whether the act of intending is fulfilled in seeing, but also if that which shows itself does not escape the act of intending. Is the act of intending not itself at play in seeing, so that it can be changed or even reversed?

The questions originating in seeing are questions that concern the phenomenological approach itself. If phenomenology is the methodical effort to go back to that which shows itself, it must reconsider its own beginning, and the beginning concerns the question of what it means to see.

Still, if a phenomenological approach is about the visible as such, how can it deal with the invisible? From the beginning, seeing is also a matter of the unseen. We only see what we see if we take into view that which we have not – yet – seen. More than that, the field of vision is open in the sense that we get to see something we did not have in view or did not anticipate. Seeing is itself a matter of time. It takes time, and what shows itself *comes to us*. We get to see or come to see. This means that we can only account for what it is to see if we take conditions into account, visibility and time, conditions that escape us in seeing and cannot come into view.

Both conditions – visibility and time – are unseen or invisible. The visible world cannot be seen, time is invisible. In order to account for what it means to see something, we need to speak of the unseen and even the invisible: conditions that escape us in seeing. Does this exhaust the notion of the invisible? Can the invisible be translated into conditions of seeing? What if we take our point of departure in the invisible?

The answer at hand, so to speak, is to place the invisible beyond the visible. If, however, we separate the invisible from the visible, we turn it into a world that mirrors the visible world. This dialectical argument outlined above calls for a phenomenological approach. What does the invisible mean? How does what is invisible show itself to be invisible? Something can be invisible in and through what we see. When we stand in front of a building, we take something into view which – in that moment – is invisible to us. What we do not – yet – see, we may come to see. That may depend on the position we take. But no matter the position we take, there is something we cannot see despite the fact that it plays into our seeing. Visibility and time are in this sense invisible.

Still, is there more to ‘the’ invisible? Does that – the invisible ‘in itself’ – not fall outside of the scope of phenomenology? Yet we must be able to see for ourselves what it means to speak of the invisible. That is – what does it mean for us *in seeing the world*? The implication of the phenomenological approach is that we do

not have two questions: the visible and the invisible. In question is the meaning of the visible – as a question about what it means to see that which can be seen. If we argue that the invisible falls outside of the visible as the domain of phenomenology, we fail to see that we need a notion of the invisible in order to speak of the meaning of the visible. We would also be unable to account for the question of the invisible. The invisible is not a phenomenological issue at the limit of phenomenology. It is not about that which cannot be ‘phenomenalized’. Rather the invisible concerns the question of seeing implied in the visible as the visible.

Consequently my claim here is twofold. First, in a phenomenological approach, the visible and the invisible are to be taken as one issue, and this is not one issue among others but concerns phenomenology itself. Second, phenomenology is not one approach among others but concerns the meaning of the visible and the invisible. When speaking of the visible and the invisible can we see for ourselves what we have in mind? As argued in the opening section, this implies the question: how are we ourselves situated? This question indicates an existential phenomenological approach.

Central to a phenomenological approach is the fact that we are situated in seeing. How are we ‘in seeing’? We relate to what we come to see – yet we also find ourselves (in) seeing. Although we find ourselves relating in seeing, it may be questioned in what sense seeing is a doing. It is not something we do as we, for example, move. We can direct the gaze and move in order to see, but seeing is to get to see or to come to see. If we would speak of an act of seeing, e. g. in looking for someone, it has a different character than for example taking a walk. It draws upon the fact that we *find ourselves seeing*. We may place ourselves in order to see something we intend to see, but we do so while seeing. This has to do with seeing as sensation: we are the subject of seeing only in being ourselves affected. We may seek to come to understand what we see, but seeing is not in the same way as understanding a matter of projecting ourselves.

If phenomenology is about *seeing* that which shows itself *as it shows itself*, what is the relation between this showing itself (that which shows itself) and (us) seeing? Is seeing intending? Can we intend that which shows itself *as it shows itself*? Seeing as sensation implies that we come to see. We are not so much intending as being affected. Being affected, however, it may be difficult to see that which affects us. That seems to require seeing as intending. Yet we only intend that which we experience through our being affected: it comes to us – we do not project it.

What do we do, then, in seeing when we intend that which shows itself? We look for it as it shows itself – but how? Seeing that which shows itself is a matter of letting it be seen. However, this answer also indicates the difficulty. We can see things in ways that do not let what we see appear but rather cover up. Moreover if seeing the other is a matter of letting her be seen, this very act – intending – lets us appear as the subject. Do we then see her as the other?



This leads us back to the condition of visibility. How does the visible (what is visible) show itself? It does not show itself as 'the' visible. Visibility as condition escapes us in seeing. Could we say that it hides itself in that which comes to appear, or even that it lets what is visible appear? That would bring to mind Heidegger's move:

What is it that phenomenology is to 'let us see'? What is it that must be called a 'phenomenon' in a distinctive sense? What is it that by its very essence is *necessarily* the theme whenever we exhibit something *explicitly*? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground (SuZ § 7C; Heidegger: 1962, 59/1972, 35).

This is a key passage in Heidegger's hermeneutical turn of phenomenology. The passage continues: "Yet that which remains *hidden* in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets *covered up* again, or which shows itself only '*in disguise*', is not just this entity or that, but rather the *Being* of entities [*Sein des Seienden*] [...]" (ibid.).

With the key motif of the oblivion of being, there is in Heidegger an appeal to see differently. Yet it is difficult for him to unfold this implied motif of transforming vision. That would require an account of the subjectivity of seeing which is missing in Heidegger. What is the relation between Being that tends to hide itself in beings and our oblivion of being? We are forgetting and covering up, and yet we are not only struck by the oblivion of Being. In Heidegger, it is as if the oblivion of being – and even Being's hiding itself – is inscribed into being the beings we are. But what we do – forgetting – cannot be taken back into Being's hiding. Although we *tend to* overlook in seeing, when we actually fail to see we are to respond. 'If we saw differently', or even 'If we had seen differently' can call us into question in seeing (for) ourselves.

Could we say that what is visible shows itself because visibility hides itself in the visible? There is a critical difference between Being and visibility in that visibility points to the subject of vision. Therefore we should consider two intertwined moves. First a phenomenology of in-visibility asking: how does the visible (that which is visible) show itself? In order to see what shows itself, we must take something unseen into account. We never come to the point where what is visible is simply there to be seen.<sup>1</sup> This means, in turn, that the invisible is not there next to the visible. There is, rather, invisibility to the visible. Second, in seeing, we respond to what is there to be seen. We are to see for ourselves, being called into

1 As already noted, there is infinity to the horizon of vision: it is open in opening. Cf. Derrida (2002, 150): "In phenomenology there is never a constitution of horizons, but horizons of constitution."



question, responsible. This is the move taken in an ethics of in-visibility. If the visible also is what we – already now – could see if we saw differently, the second move is opened in the very question of in-visibility.

The ethical begins with us – not first in evaluating but in seeing. It begins with the fact that we can fail, and we can fail already in seeing. Remarkably, we can see the other in ways in which we do not see her: as the other. It is even possible for us to blind ourselves to what we see and to what we do to the other in how we see her. The invisible is not only that which hides in the visible, letting it appear. It is also what we make invisible.

The four motifs – visibility, seeing, negativity, time – should be seen in a register that until now has been more implicit: interiority and exteriority. The following variations on in-visibility address more directly the question: how we are situated in seeing. In the variations, we shall move between phenomenology of in-visibility and ethics and philosophy of religion.

## 5. Interiority and exteriority: Variations on in-visibility

### 5.1 Existential Phenomena

Sharing a world implies that we can communicate about how we (should) relate to the world. How does relating to the world show itself? Consider phenomena such as concern and courage. These are ways of relating in which the relation to the world is more or less at stake. Yet ways of relating to the world are not simply part of the visible world. They are rather phenomena of interiority: they concern how we see the world. In what sense, then, are they phenomena? It does not suffice to describe them as a thing that ‘shows itself’. Phenomena of concern and courage are ways of relating in which one ‘shows oneself’ – concerned or courageous, for example.

What is the difference in phenomena here – between that which ‘shows itself’ and ‘showing oneself’? Let us call the latter phenomena existential. They are self-related – not in the form of self-observation but of self-manifestation: one shows oneself in relating to others and a world more or less shared with others. However, this must be qualified. We should also speak of self-manifestation in an intensified sense as self-disclosure. One not only appears to others as a self in relating to others and a world in between – one also comes to appear to oneself. Again, this is not to appear to oneself as if one were to observe oneself as we observe others. Rather, it is to come to self-consciousness – and that changes how one is. It is self-disclosure in the sense that we, in experiencing ourselves, *are* the one affected. We are disclosed to ourselves so that we have to bear ourselves. Coming to appear to oneself in this existential sense is to appear *as* oneself, riveted to oneself also in seeking to escape oneself. Self-disclosure goes into selfhood.

Coming to appear to oneself – as a matter of being who one is – is interiority. Is interiority in this sense not visible in a person's showing herself? Is the one coming to appear (in the existential sense indicated) visible? Here, 'showing itself' changes. It is not corresponding to a subject observing what shows itself but, rather, concerns what it means to be a self. This is a point in Kierkegaard's analysis of anxiety, defining anxiety as "freedom's disclosure to itself in possibility" (Kierkegaard: 1980, 111). Anxiety as freedom's self-disclosure is self-experience in the existential sense (Grøn: 2008c).

What does it mean that anxiety is freedom's disclosure to itself *in possibility*? Freedom takes place in relating to the time to come, the future. This requires imagination, but anxiety plays into imagination: we are reflected in 'seeing' possibilities for ourselves. We can capture ourselves in possibilities (this is a possibility accompanying us in having possibilities). Thus phenomena of anxiety are ambiguous. What should be a phenomenon of freedom may turn out to be self-created unfreedom. Still, making oneself unfree lets freedom appear, albeit negatively. This indicates that existential phenomena may be complex precisely as ways of 'showing oneself'. Not only can we hide ourselves in showing ourselves. We may make ourselves unfree in how we relate to others.

Thus 'showing itself' changes in 'showing oneself'. How does one relate to oneself in 'showing oneself'? Existential phenomena may be complex in the sense that seeing – on the part of the one showing herself – may come into view. In anxiety one comes to appear to oneself *in seeing* – so that one can be captured in the possibilities one sees.

However, the interiority implied in 'showing oneself' is also about finding expression. Bringing oneself to words is interiority in communication. This is indicated in the phrase: Speak so that I can see you. Yet interiority remains as a condition for communicating: although we speak we are never 'spoken'. The task of finding words remains. How do we come to appear when showing ourselves? There is something unsaid and 'unshown' in saying and showing. We are not only as we show ourselves – we also come to appear as the one showing oneself. Finding expression means that there is still more to be said and shown. We are only 'in' our expressions in that others can seek to understand what is unsaid or unshown – as if we show us beyond ourselves, in what is still to be said and shown. Yet expressions can be definitive even though there is more to be said and shown. Visibility is a question to us between us – also in seeking to find expression for what we see.

## 5.2 Time and the Art of Seeing

Vision and time are intertwined in the question of visibility. The visible is not only what we remember having seen (*memoria*) and what we now see (*contuitus*). It is