

A Further Point of View on Points of View

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on what is usually called “point of view” or “viewpoint” (“Standpunkt”, “Gesichtspunkt”, “point de vue”, “punctum visus”, “intuentis situs”, etc.). It explores both questions about the origin of the notion and some of the latter's main developments. But our purpose is not just to make a historical survey. The historical topics addressed in this paper are of such a nature that they can help us identify some of the main features of what “point of view”, “viewpoint”, etc., are all about.

1. Introduction

In one of his so-called *Nachlass-Xenien* Goethe reminds us: “Was ist das Schwerste von allem? Was dir das Leichteste dünket: / Mit den Augen zu sehn, was vor den Augen dir liegt” (“What is hardest of all? That which seems most simple: to see with your eyes what is before your eyes”). This may seem paradoxical, but only at first glance. For there are many reasons why we fail to see what is before our eyes, and to overcome all obstacles preventing us from doing so is by no means the easiest task – even if it is not the hardest of all, and we can assume that Goethe himself would admit to rhetorical exaggeration in this statement. But our concern here is not to discuss this problem in depth, but rather to focus on a related issue. The issue we propose to explore in this paper is perhaps not as hard and difficult as managing to see (really to see) what is before our eyes, but it is certainly not free of difficulty. It is one of those issues that seem much

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¹ Xenien. Aus dem Nachlaß, 45, Goethe (1987a), p. 275.

easier than in fact they are, the result being that the very impression that we are dealing with something familiar, and that there is nothing puzzling about it, makes us fail to see what it is all about. I am talking about what is usually called “point of view” (“points of view”, “viewpoint”, “viewpoints”) and the like. And what I am suggesting is that this notion belongs to one of the most numerous species on earth – namely the species of “false friends” (both in the literal and in the figurative sense). To be sure, “point of view”, “viewpoint” and the like have nothing to do with “false friends” in the usual figurative sense of words or phrases in two different languages that look or sound similar, but differ in meaning. Nevertheless “point of view”, “viewpoint” and the like are “false friends” in that they mislead us into thinking that the meaning of these notions is plain, that the phenomena in question are easy to understand, and that the common understanding of these words hits the mark and covers pretty much all there is to it – whereas in fact what Goethe says in the above mentioned epigram holds true for what we call “point of view”, “viewpoint” and the like: even if what these notions stand for is, as it were, “before our eyes”, it still remains to a great extent “unseen”.

Now, the purpose of the following remarks is to shed some light on what notions like “point of view” or “viewpoint”, etc., stand for, and to focus on some of the main features of the series of phenomena in question – namely on features which tend to remain unnoticed. Having said that, it should be added that the few remarks we are about to make highlight questions about both the origin of the notion and some of its main developments. At first, this may give the impression that our main purpose is to outline a historical survey. But in fact it is not so. The historical topics we are about to explore are of such a nature that they can help us track some main features of what “point of view”, “viewpoint”, etc., are all about. In other words, the historical topics we are going to consider can help us see what tends to remain unnoticed, even if it is, as Goethe says, before our eyes. On the other hand it should also be noted that the remarks that follow are only a very rough sketch. From the historical point of view they cover a small part of a vast subject. And it should be kept in mind that the historical point of view is itself merely a point of view among other possible points of view (that is, among many other angles from which the problem might be approached).

This is why it is appropriate to speak of a *point of view* on points of view. The analysis of the problem we are dealing with is itself affected by the very same complex of phenomena it tries to shed some light on. And this does not only mean that there are some (and indeed many) aspects of the series of phenomena in question that must be left out of consideration. It also means something else, which is part and parcel of the very series of phenomena we are talking about, namely the fact that even supposing that we succeed in shedding some light on points of view, the results of our analysis may make us forget what was left out of consideration – i.e., the results may make us forget that the whole analysis is one-sided, and that what remains out of consideration may be as important as the topics we are about to consider (and indeed so much so that it may reveal the whole problem in a completely new light, etc.). Here again Goethe gets to the heart of the matter: “Das Halbgewußte hindert das Wissen. Weil alles unser Wissen nur halb ist, so hindert unser Wissen immer das Wissen². (The half-known gets in the way of knowledge. Since all our knowledge is only half-knowledge, all our knowledge gets in the way of knowledge”)

2. The Original Model of “Point of View”: “Points /of/View” in the Literal Sense. — “Point of View” and Restriction – the Scattered and Disseminated Nature of Vision.

To plunge *in medias res* at once, let us now consider the very notion of point of view (viewpoint, etc). This notion lends itself to ambiguity and raises difficulties, which it is indispensable to consider, by circumscribing as precisely as possible the sense in which it is used, its basis, etc.

A notion like that of “point of view” seems to us on the one hand characterized by the fact that it is *commonly used* (so that it is not rare to hear, read or produce statements like “from my point of view”, “it’s one point of view”, “that’s your point of view”, etc). This common usage renders the notion comprehensible without difficulty. It has nothing puzzling about it – it is not, on its own, a reason for confusion (this only occurs if it is used in a different way to that consecrated by its usage). The other side of the

² Entstehung unorganischer Formen, Goethe (1987b), p. 76.

coin is the following: the understanding that corresponds to this common usage tends to be *wide-ranging* and *not very precise* – it does not establish in a very definite way what is referred to by the notion. On the other hand, if one considers the formula itself that expresses it and breaks up the *unity*, the “block” in which its components are habitually merged – if one starts to consider it on the basis of these different *components* (: point / of / view) – this consideration can be somewhat puzzling and generate some confusion as regards its meaning. So that it can, for example, seem strange that one talks of *point* of view (and over and over again of *point* of view), when one can clearly see that what is meant is the following: things appearing to us or presenting themselves to us in a certain manner.

In the first place, although in the notion of “point of view” one talks of *point*, what is at stake in it is not something simple (or almost simple) but in fact a *multiplicity* – and even a rather *extensive* and *numerous* multiplicity. The key to the notion is in the *determinative complement* (*point of view*). And that based on which it can be understood is precisely *the “view”* (the view that is somehow connected with the point and makes a “point of view” of it). Now, on closer inspection it turns out that the *view* we are talking about means two different things. It means at the same time a) a situation of *access*, of *having* a view (of seeing something, in the manner in which we usually see) and b) what is presented (what appears to us, what one sees, what is in sight) in this situation. But in both cases the *view* is something characterized precisely by never being simple (through never being just one point) – by always involving a multiplicity (so that, however circumscribed it is, a view is always very far from corresponding to a point). We know no such thing as a simple “view”, neither in the one sense nor in the other. On the one hand, every “view” we have (even the most simple) encompasses a multiplicity – and indeed a very complex multiplicity of components. If we try to focus on a point, what we really see is a *spot*, i. e., a surface (a very complex multiplicity), and even supposing we are able to master this difficulty and to “see” a “real” point, the fact is that there is no such thing as a simple, disconnected, “lonely” point: a point is always something “in the middle” of a surface – and, what is more, there is no such thing as an absolute (disconnected, “lonely”) surface: a surface is always something in the middle of three-dimensional space. And on the other hand, if what we see is always this complex multiplicity, *seeing* it (*having* a

view – a complex view) is itself always complex. In other words, there is no such thing as a simple “glance”: all our “seeing” is a *bundle* of glances (a “society” of glances, as it were, in connection with each other). Or, to put it in Leibniz’ language, in all our “seeing” there is no “sheep” apart from the “flock” – and on closer inspection each “sheep” turns out to be itself a kind of “flock”³.

If this is the case, what sense does the introduction of the notion of “point” in this context have – what is the *link* between this and the *multiplicity* ever present in every and whatever “view”? What is the connection between the two elements of the complex notion “*point / of / view*” and what is it that gets expressed in this group of words? The very common usage of the notion affords some clear indications in this regard. When one talks of “point of view”, the intention one has is, as a rule, to introduce a *restriction* in the view, which is denoted in this way. When one talks of “point of view” (and one says “that’s your point of view”, “from an x or y point of view”, etc.), what one is stressing as regards the “view” (the perspective) at stake in each case is that it is a question of a view *that is not exhaustive*, of a view *subject to some sort of conditioning* or that *in some way makes room for alternatives* – i. e., for other “views” (other perspectives) *different* from it, that see that to which it refers *in another way*, but which nevertheless are *no less legitimate, no less adequate* than the view in question. In other words, independently of the nature and the extension of the restriction that one aims to introduce, “point of view” means a view (a presentation, a perspective) different from an *unrestricted* view, from an *absolute* access (one that does not leave room for any valid alternative). In short, “point of view” denotes a view (a presentation, a perspective) that is not the only one possible about its object – so that the object in question does not necessarily have to be seen *thus*.

But, if this is the case, why is the idea of *restriction* associated with the notion of *point*, why is it *this* (namely the idea of *point*) that expresses it? The answer to this question is not difficult. But it should be noted that the common usage in the majority of cases refers at most to the vague idea of restriction (without other determinations, without any specification of

³ For this comparison, see Leibniz (1971), vol. III, pp. 344, 457, 657, vol. V, p. 133, vol. VI, pp. 516, 627, vol. VII, p. 552.

the characteristics – of the type of restriction at stake, of what it is that produces it, etc.). In other words, the common usage employs the notion of “point of view” in a distracted way, without having any answer to the question we have just asked. But after all what is the answer to this question? First, the notion of “point of view” – viz. a) the link between *point* and *view* and b) the link between *point-of-view* and *restriction* – has to do with basic features of what happens in the field of *vision sensu strictiore*. In fact, in the proper sense (in the sense that gave rise to the notion of “point of view”) the restriction of access in question is not just *any* restriction, but a certain kind of restriction, or rather a certain kind of *organisation of the restrictions to which all views* (namely all views in the *literal sense*: everything we see) *are subject*. More precisely, what is at stake in the original notion of “point of view” is the conditioning by an *overall* factor of determination of the range of our sight and of the form and properties of what we see – so that the characteristics and restrictions of all visual presentations of things depend *on the very same conditioning factor*. And all the multiplicity of what is presented is determined (in what it *includes*, in what it *does not* include and in the *form* in which it includes whatever is presented) by *one overall conditioning principle* which is reflected in all of it. Now the *overall* factor of determination viz. the one overall conditioning principle we are talking about is the *punctum visus*, the *intuentis situs*. An essential feature of the visual presentation, as it occurs in us, is that the characteristics of what is presented vary depending on the point at which an observer is located (the “*place from which*” of the viewing, so to speak). So that each different location is matched, even without any other modification, by an overall modification of what is seen (all considered from another angle, with a different distribution of parts seen and not seen, a different position for each thing in the field of vision, etc.). So that each *observer location* gives rise to a different view, particular to that location, that one can only have *from there*. The result being that for each visual reality (for each three dimensional multiplicity corresponding to each object) there is a very large number of different views, depending on the point from which it is observed (depending on the distance, direction and angle that this point delineates in its relation with the reality in question). The study of the so-called *perspectiva artificialis* (and this also means, of course, the study of the *perspectiva naturalis*) in the Renaissance gave rise to a sharp

awareness of this fundamental property of vision. Given a certain set of objects, what appears in each view we can get of it (N.B.:*everything* appearing in each view) depends on the *punctum visus* or the *intuentis situs*: on the location of the observer – so that, when the point of view is changed, what changes is not only this or that, but rather the *whole* “picture” (i.e., *everything* undergoes some significant change).

Now, this introduces precisely a form of restriction peculiar to visual presentation: all of it, without exception, *is always in some way restricted in the presentation of its object, which is always seen from a given point* and in such a way that it is determined by the multiplicity of conditioning and restriction factors arising from that point. That is, no visual presentation of any object represents the only way of having it presented. None totally provides the reality that corresponds to it (without leaving the possibility of being complemented by others). Inherent to visual presentation is the fact that it is by its very nature *scattered, disseminated*, by a multiplicity of *complementary* perspectives, all of them leaving out something that others pick up, and each of them obtaining something that is not in others. So that it is not possible to have them all simultaneously, but rather only as alternatives.

It is this – this specific feature of vision and the crucial role played by the location of the observer (the *punctum visus*, the *intuentis situs*) – that is at the root of the expression “point of view” and constitutes the particular meaning of the notion. And at the same time this historical origin enables us to understand the link both between *point* and *view* and between *point-of-view* and the idea of *restriction*. Given the conditioning link we have been talking about (this involvement that an observer’s location, the *point from which one sees*, has in the determination of the view that there can be from this point – i. e., given the way the *intuentis situs* determines the characteristics of what is seen and the limitations to which the view corresponding to each location is subject), “point of view” does not only mean the point proper (the place, the position, as such) but also, by extension, the *conditioning* of the view corresponding to it and *the view thus conditioned* (the *relative, finite, conditioned* perspective one can have from it). It is this type of metonymic link that is at the root of the notion of “point of view” as a fixed notion, meaning not a point in space but a certain type of presentation. It is this type of link that is at the root of what we find in

its most common usage. And it is this type of finite presentation, related to a conditioning, permitting alternatives and constituting one way of presenting among various other possible ones (a way of presenting that at the same time as it *shows*, also *hides* and *leaves out* other possible and equally legitimate ways of viewing the same object) that the notion of “point of view” stands for when it is used as a *terminus technicus* in philosophical terminology, etc.

But this is still not all and does not enable us to fully understand the *scattered* and *disseminated* nature of vision the notion of “point of view” is all about. What is at stake here is the fact that the realm of vision and the visible is *split*, as if it had been subject to nothing less than some kind of *extraordinary explosion*, and what remains (i.e., what can be seen) were only its *disjecti membra*⁴. On the one hand, as pointed out above, each point of view “uncovered” something that cannot be seen or uncovered from any other. In other words, for each point of view there is a corresponding part of the visible, which can only gain visibility for or from that point of view: something which can be seen only from the point of view in question and from no other. But on the other hand this also means that each point of view leaves out of sight whatever is uncovered by (or becomes visible to) *all the others*. I. e., each point of view has its own “gain” *at the price of losing sight of the “gain” of all the others*. In other words, each point of view is *blind* to nothing less than what can be discovered from *all the others* – and each *limited* “territory” of points of view (i. e., what results from the fact that we can *change* our point of view and *synthesize* the different views explored in the course of that change, etc.) is blind to what corresponds to all the other points of view beyond its boundaries. The result being *that there is always an overwhelming disproportion between the seen and the unseen* – and that contrary to what may seem, the realm of vision and the visible can only be explored “step by step”, “dropwise”, “in instalments“. Or, put another way, paradoxical as it may seem, the realm of vision and the visible corresponds to something that can only be discovered by *peeping through an extraordinary multitude of “keyholes”*.

Now this may seem exaggerated because one of the features of vision, as we usually experience it, is the fact that it *anticipates*: in each point of

⁴ To quote the well known lines of Horace (*Saturae* 1.4.62).

view we anticipate others (we are already *aware* of them, “*expecting*” them, and so forth) – so that what characterizes all points of view is that they refer or “allude” to other points of view beyond themselves. And at first glance this seems to “solve the problem”. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that this is not so. To be sure, we cannot discuss this topic in depth. But a quick analysis of two examples may prove helpful in understanding the phenomena in question.

Let us first consider what Husserl calls *Abschattungen*, *adumbrations* – the fact that, for instance, any three dimensional visual object appears “in instalments”, as it were: now from this side, now from that side, now from this angle, now from another, etc., so that each time it only shows some parts of its exterior surface and leaves out of sight other parts of its exterior surface, what lies inside the object, etc.⁵. Now, these *Abschattungen* are characterized by the fact that they refer to something *beyond themselves* – and indeed *to the whole three dimensional object*. To be sure, from a given point of view what I see is, for instance, only a tiny part of the exterior surface of a book cover. But I *complete* what I see – I see more than what I really see. I see more than only a tiny surface; in fact, I see more than the whole exterior surface of the book cover: I see *the whole book* (with

⁵ See notably Husserl (1973a), pp. 58f., 105-125, 144f., 209f., Husserl (1973b), pp. 74ff. [84ff.], 81ff. [92ff.], 202ff. [226ff.], 205f. [229ff.], Husserl (1952), pp. 127ff., Husserl (1950), pp. 77ff., Husserl (1985), pp. 60f., Husserl (1968), pp. 154ff., Husserl (1966), pp. 3ff. and 7. Plato’s *Republica* 598a-b provides a first glimpse into the phenomenon. Nicholas of Cusa’s account of it in his *De coniecturis* I, 53 stresses the role played by otherness (*alteritas*) and the link between the phenomenon in question and what he terms a *conjectura* (i. e., a *positiva assertio in alteritate*): “Uides nunc assertiones positivas sapientium esse coniecturas. Nam dum tu, pater, clarissimis tuis oculis faciem pontificis summi, sanctissimi domini nostri Eugenii papae quarti, coram conspicis, de ipsa positivam assertionem concipis, quam praecisam secundum oculum affirmas. Dum autem ad radicem illam, vnde discretio sensus te emanat, te convertis – ad rationem dico – intelligis sensum visus participare vim discretivam in alteritate organice contracta. Ob quam causam defectum casus a praecisione intueris, quoniam faciem ipsam non, vti est, sed in alteritate secundum angulum tui oculi ab omnibus viventium oculis differentem contemplantas. Coniectura igitur est positiva assertio in alteritate veritatem vti est participans, quemadmodum vero sensus in vnitatem rationis suam alteritatem experitur, et assertiones sensibiles a vnitatem precisionis absoluendo coniecturas facit, ita ratio in radicali vnitatem suam in ipso scilicet intelligentiae lumine suam alteritatem et casum a praecisione in coniecturam inuenit.” Cf. Nicholas of Cusa (1972), p. 58.

its printed pages, etc., etc.). In short, even if the point of view at which I happen to be is limited and does not show much of the book in question, it is not blind to other points of view beyond itself. Quite the contrary, it is aware of them, it refers to them – and, what is more, I already see what corresponds to them. But here is where the problem lies. Is there any real anticipation of *all* the other components of the object in question – i. e., of *all* its other possible *Abschattungen*, of all the other points of view in question? The answer is no. To be sure, I see the book as a whole, and this means there is an anticipation of the whole (an anticipation of all its exterior surfaces, of all its pages, of all their content, etc., etc). But in the final analysis it turns out that I am not able to follow this reference to the totality of what makes the book (viz. to the totality of points of view which would be required in order for the totality of what makes the book to appear). I may open the book, turn over its pages, start to read it, etc., etc., but the results *always fall short* – and indeed *far short* – *of what would be required for the totality of what makes the book to appear*. And even if I insist, there is no real success: whatever I do, the results are still *disjecti membra*, and I am unable to correct the *scattered* and *disseminated* nature of vision and to undo the peculiar “explosion” we have spoken of. In other words, there is a world of difference between the *anticipation* of the totality of what makes the book (viz. the *anticipation* of the totality of points of view which would be required in order for the totality of what makes the book to appear) and the *totality* (the “*real*” *totality*) in question. As pointed out above, from the very beginning all *Abschattungen* refer to the totality of what makes the book (viz. to the corresponding totality of points of view). But on closer inspection it turns out that having this anticipation does not give me the slightest clue as to what the totality of what makes the book (viz. the corresponding totality of points of view) really looks like. In the final analysis, the anticipation turns out to be just another point of view (a special kind of “adumbration” – by far not the totality in question) and, what is more, it turns out that precisely the fact that I think I am able to really anticipate the points of view in question and to know what the book (the totality of what makes the book) really looks like, misleads me and makes me turn my back, as it were, on the totality in question. To sum up, our notion of what we may call the “sum” of all adumbrations – a totality integrating and unifying all adumbrations of a given three dimensional

object – is itself merely an adumbration. For, on the one hand, I am unable to picture *all* different points of view, *all* different angles – not only from *without*, but from *within* (from *inside* the object in question). The series of adumbrations I am able to picture (or to experience) corresponds only to a small part of the whole. And on the other hand, I have no idea whatsoever of what corresponds to a real *integration* or *unification* of all these different views. For on closer inspection it turns out that I am used to change from point of view to point of view viz. from adumbration to adumbration, and to picture the whole each time on the basis of a certain adumbration or of a certain point of view – so that the whole is always “presided” over, as it were, by a certain adumbration or a certain point of view, and I have absolutely no experience of really trying to integrate or unify different adumbrations⁶.

Having said that, let us now consider a second example. When one sees, for instance, a printed page it seems one is able to see the *whole* page – i. e., it seems that the presentation one has of it is, in the etymological sense, “synoptic”. But on closer inspection it turns out that this “synoptic” view of the printed page is obtained *at the price of losing sight of what can be seen only if one moves one’s eyes* the way we have to do in order to read the printed text. In other words, the impression of seeing the *whole* page (and *everything* on it) *at once* – the impression of “synoptical” access to it – proves to be misleading. The totality we have access to (the presentation of the whole page) is in fact full of “puncta coeca”. And this is the reason why I can not read all the printed text *at once* (i.e., this is the reason why I have to change from point of view to point of view in order to read the text before me)⁷. In a way I see the whole printed page viz. the text that is printed on

⁶ Said in another way, in my “normal experience” different adumbrations (different “points of view”) are *successive*, they are not *simultaneous* – and they *never* become simultaneous. To be sure, as pointed out above, each point of view viz. each adumbration *refers to others* – and indeed *to the whole*. But the point is that all other adumbrations it refers to are no longer or not yet there: they are not *concrete*, they are not *concretely present*, so I am spared the trouble of having to *integrate* or *unify* two different (or several different) “views” or “pictures” of the same.

⁷ Major features of the phenomenon are already outlined in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De visione dei*, VIII, 29, Nicholas of Cusa (2000), p. 29: “Doce me, domine, quomodo unico intuitu simul et singulariter discernas. Cum aperio librum ad legendum, video confuse totam chartam; et si volo discernere singulas literas, syllabas e dictiones, necesse est,

it. But most of the letters I see when I have a presentation of the whole page are not “a”s or “b”s or “c”s or “d”s, etc. They are just “letters”. – i. e., apart from a few words I am able to read without changing my point of view, what I see when I have a view of the whole text printed on a page is just that: *letters* (something that is neither an “a”, nor a “b”, nor a “c”, etc.: something *indifferent* to what makes the difference between the various components of the alphabet). Incidentally this shows that, contrary to what may seem (and is often asserted as if it were absolutely self-evident), not all our perceptions are perceptions of definite individuals⁸, and that there is such a thing as *perception of so-called “general” contents*. But this is not the point here. The point is that the view I have of the whole page viz. of the whole text printed on it *leaves out* everything corresponding to the difference between the different letters (viz. the different words, etc.). In other words, the view I have from each point of view is, as it were, *shortsighted*. And on the other hand I cannot solve this problem and obtain a real view of the whole page and of everything printed on it by changing from point of view to point of view. To be sure, I can read the text. But there is what can be called an *either/or*: *either* I focus on the parts (on the strings of letters, on the words composed by them, etc.), the result being that I “leave out” the other letters (what makes the difference between them) and also what I see when I focus on the whole; *or* I focus on the whole, in which case I “leave out” what makes the difference between the various letters that compose the whole printed text. In short, I have absolutely no experience of a real synoptic view of the printed page: a synoptic view which is able to see at once all the components of the printed page in the way I can see them only “*by turns*” or *in succession*. So that, even when what is at stake is something as simple and as “open” as a printed page before me, even then what I have access to are *disjecti membra* – the results or “remains” of the above mentioned “fragmentation” or “explosion”.

Now, this enables us – I hope – to understand the *scattered* and *disseminated* nature of vision the notion of “point of view” is all about. Contrary to what may seem, the realm of vision is composed of what can be described

ut me singulariter ad singula seriatim convertam; et non possum nisi successive unam post aliam litteram legere et unam dictionem post aliam et passum post passum. Sed tu, domine, simul totam chartam respicis et legis sine mora temporis (...)."

⁸ And in fact *most* of our perceptions are not at all perceptions of definite individuals.

as a *web of scattered “tunnels” or “galleries”* of vision (“tunnels” or “galleries” of the seen in the middle of a *compact mass of the unseen*). Put another way, it is like an *“archipelago of the seen”* in the middle of unseen and therefore uncharted waters. To be sure, this “archipelago” gives the impression of being much more than an “archipelago” – and indeed of being nothing less than a vast and compact “continent”⁹. But the truth is that it has the structure of an “archipelago”. What is more, on closer inspection it turns out that many of the “islands” (and indeed *all* the “islands”) composing this “archipelago” are themselves an “archipelago”: the “sea” of the unseen, the “uncharted waters” do not only surround the “islands”, but *they also penetrate their interior and are to be found everywhere in them*. In short vision is throughout a realm of limits.

Of course it can be objected that all these limits we have been talking about are something *inherent* to vision – they are part and parcel of it. We cannot think of vision without this kind of limits (without some “explosion” or “fragmentation” of this sort). In short, it seems to be in the nature of vision that it has to do with such a thing as *points of view* (with the whole framework of points of view” in the above mentioned sense). But does this kind of consideration change anything? Let us take a closer look into this question.

First, even supposing that it is so (that the “fragmentation” or “explosion” we have been talking about is part and parcel of vision and must constitute an essential feature of *any* form of vision), this does not belie the fact that vision is indeed characterized by the omnipresence of limitations (i.e., by the *omnipresence of the unseen*). The point is that there are limits everywhere, that the territory of vision is made of narrow, and indeed very narrow “corridors” in the middle of the unseen, and that the “itinerary” of all our views is like the “itinerary” of someone exploring a *gigantic labyrinth* – but one of which *each and every moment is itself a labyrinth* (a “*fractal labyrinth*”, as it were). Regardless of whether this has its origin in the very nature of vision “*überhaupt*” or is rather something contingent, the point is that this is the structure of the point of view phenomenon. This – namely this extraordinary “fragmentation” or “explosion” – is what

⁹ For there is what can be termed a “shortsighted filling of the gaps” viz. of the *puncta coeca* (N. B.: of the *puncta coeca* that are scattered throughout everything we see).

the notion of “point of view” stands for. And on the other hand, what this means is the following: whether we are conscious of it or not, the realm of vision is *full of biatuses* – it is, as it were, *full of “folds” and “trap-doors” where the unseen looms*. Like a labyrinth, it is full of of “*peripeteiai*” and *possibilities of revision*. In other words, because it has the structure the notion of point of view stands for, the realm of vision is through and through the *realm of the possibility of surprise* – the realm of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”. To sum up, the gigantic labyrinth of vision is nothing short of a *gigantic “boîte-à-surprise”* – or rather an *extraordinary multitude of “boîtes-à-surprise”*.

Secondly, the fact that this limitation seems to be inherent to vision and that we cannot think of vision without these kind of limits (without some sort of “explosion” or “fragmentation” of this kind) should not make us forget that we are not in a position to exclude the possibility of other forms of vision, different from the one we are familiar with, and which are not necessarily characterized by the “fragmentation” or “explosion” the notion of point of view stands for. Vision, as we know it, is no doubt an extraordinary thing. Among other reasons, it is an extraordinary thing because it involves that kind of “invention of itself” Jonathan Swift refers to when he writes in one of his *Thoughts on Various Subjects*: “Vision is the Art of seeing Things invisible”¹⁰ But, on the one hand, that vision has to do with this extraordinary “art” and that it is, in a sense, a “miracle”, does not prevent the miracle in question from being the “finite miracle” the notion of “point of view” stands for. And on the other hand, there is nothing to guarantee that the extraordinary “Art of seeing Things invisible” must “überhaupt” take the form we are acquainted with. How on earth do we know that the fact that we cannot think of vision without this kind of limits is more than just a feature of our own finitude¹¹?

And this leads us to a final remark on this topic. This remark concerns what we can call the *amphiboly* of the notion of point of view – I mean of the notion of point of view in the literal sense, we have been talking

¹⁰ J. Swift, *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, in: Swift (1957), p. 252.

¹¹ None other than Husserl claims that “fragmentation” (*Abschattung*, etc.) is absolutely inherent to vision as such, and that even for “God” – as the ideal representative of absolute knowledge – vision would have to be characterized by this kind of fragmentation. See, for instance, Husserl (1973b), pp. 77f. [88f.], 80f. [92]. But the question is: on what basis can such a claim be made?

about. As pointed out above, this notion is something entirely common – and this has to do with the fact that we are all more or less acquainted with the kind of phenomena it stands for. In a way, to speak of point of view in this sense is almost to speak of a *truism* or a *platitudo*. But on the other hand the common notion of point of view does not reflect any awareness of the kind of “fragmentation” and “explosion” we have been talking about. So that even though it is a fact that the notion of point of view, in the literal sense, stands for the “fragmentation” and “explosion” in question, the truth is that in the common understanding it has nothing or only little to do with it. This is another instance of what Goethe speaks of when he stresses how difficult it is to see with our eyes what is before them.

3. The “Emancipation” from the Literal Meaning. — Different Directions in Which the Notion of “Point of View” Can Be Widened. — Different Degrees of Acknowledgement of the Extent to Which What Appears to Us Has the Nature of a Mere “Point of View”.

Having said that, let us now consider another important topic.

In its roots, the notion of “point of view” was thus associated with a series of properties of vision – and specifically with the identification of the way in which the characteristics of vision are dependent on an observer’s situation *in space*. The very expression (point of view) transmits this double connection and the specific character of the phenomenon referred to by it. But, on the other hand, the fact that this was its origin does not prevent the notion from having been *widened*. As a matter of fact, in the course of its history the notion of “point of view” *untied* itself from this specific link, underwent *amplifications* and started to involve other presentations besides vision with *conditioning properties* similar to those that, in the case of vision, are determined by the tie to space¹². In other words, in

¹² This change is vividly illustrated in the transition from chapter 1 to chapter 2 in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De visione Dei*. Chapter 1 focuses on the phenomenon of *visus contractus* – and its opposite: what he terms the *incontractus visus* – in the field of vision *stricto sensu*. Chapter 2 addresses what Nicholas of Cusa terms the *varietas contractionis* (namely the *varietas contractionis visus*) and stresses the fact that there are different modalities of *contractio visus* (N.B: *visus* in a broader sense). Said in another way, chapter 2 leaves the field of vision proper and considers a) other forms of *contractio* or its opposite – and in fact

the course of its history the notion of “point of view” underwent a process of emancipation from its original meaning. On the one hand, this does not mean that it severed all ties to its historical origins. The notion kept the connection with the idea of finite access viz. of a finite presentation, relating to a conditioning factor. It kept the connection with the idea of *restricted* “views” or “perspectives” that in some way *make room for alternatives* – i. e., for other “views” (other perspectives) *different* from them, that see that to which they refer *in another way*, but which nevertheless are *no less legitimate, no less adequate* than the views in question. In short, the notion kept the idea of *fragmentation* – of a multiplicity of complementary perspectives, all of them leaving out something that others pick up. But, on the other hand, “point of view” ceased to designate only the specific phenomenon of vision that was in the origin of the very term, and acquired a *wider meaning, freed from this circumscription, without ties to it*.

This is the second aspect that it is important to emphasise both because it played a key role in the history of the notion of “point of view” and because this *widening* of its meaning can help us understand some main features of what appears to us viz. of the kind of “views” that make our being.

Now, it must be borne in mind that there are *various possible directions* in which the notion of “point of view” can be widened (and there have been various ones developed during its history too). This widening can go *more or less far* and lead to *more or less precise notions*. Furthermore, it can change our understanding of our “views” in different ways, for it can correspond to *different degrees of acknowledgement of the extent to which what appears to us has the nature of a mere “point of view”*. It is, therefore, important to specify *in which directions* the notion of “point of view” can be widened, *how far* this widening can go (how far can it go in the *untying from the original narrow meaning of the notion*) and *what kind of determinations* (viz. of components of what appears to us) it can involve and affect. There are widenings and widenings – and if, for example, the common usage of the notion of “point of view” also corresponds to a widening of its original meaning, it is far from reflecting the whole extent to which what appears to us can have the

other forms of *contractio* or its opposite affecting b) other forms of *visus* (in the broader sense of the word).

nature of a mere point of view.

The widening of the notion and its untying from the field of phenomena that served it at its origin can, in the first place, derive from an emancipation from the literal meaning of both the notion of “point” and the notion of “view”. Let us look into this matter a little further.

On the one hand, in fact, not only in the field of vision do the type of conditioning and finite, conditioning-related presentation, to which the notion of point of view refers, occur. For example, a similar state-of-things occurs in the field of *bearing* too – even if this can be less distinct, in it too the location in space (the *Audientis situs*) conditions the presentation one has, in such a way that this varies in accordance with the location. On the other hand, it is also not only space and an observer’s position in space that condition the presentation one has in such a way that what appears to us is relative to the position in which it gets constituted. For example, an observer’s position *in time*, the position – the “point” – occupied in the multiplicity corresponding to it (and the relation that the point of observation has with other moments of temporal multiplicity and, in particular, with those in which what is observed is situated) also intervenes in the way in which one sees, conditions the presentation one has and in such a way that here too the same reality assumes very different appearances depending on the temporal “angle” from which it is observed, the distance (the time already passed since it or that which still has to pass in order to reach it), the time already passed through before entering into contact with it, etc.

But this is just one aspect. The notion of “point of view” can still be freed from its tie to space (and to the conditioning arising from it) in many other ways – which involve a decrease of similarity with its origin (with the conditioning of vision by way of the *intuentis situs* – of the position in space from which one sees), but correspond to the identification of other forms of conditioning, constituted in a different way, but in spite of everything similar to this one. So that the notion of “point of view” can go quite far in its widening compared to the understanding with which it was associated at its origin. And, as a matter of fact, in the course of its history, it eventually started to have a much more extensive and much less localised sphere of application.

Thus, independently of the conditioning restrictions imposed by the

spatial-temporal localising, we can identify relativity conditionings arising from other factors.

For instance, it is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from the fact that there is such a thing as thresholds in our ability to perceive. It is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from the fact that the type of determinations to which we are sensitive is limited, so that there are determinations “right before our eyes” that remain simply *undreamt of* – in both cases with the result that all our perceptions leave out significant parts of what they are supposed to cover more or less exhaustively (and the wholes we perceive are *incomplete*: i. e., are *but the result of this very incompleteness*). It is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from there not being a total correspondence between the determinations resorted to by our *percipere* (by the presentations we have) and what is supposed to exist independently of our *percipere* (and indeed independently of all *percipere*). So that at least some of the determinations of what appears to us are a mere correlate of our own *percipere*: something “*invented*”, as it were, by it – and, in this sense, “void of all reality”. It is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from there being interventions of interest in the way we see (in such a way that, depending on the orientation of the *interest*, there is also a change in the appearance with which things present themselves). It is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from the fact that *our conceptual apparatuses permit alternatives* – or from the fact that most of our views depend on assumptions, beliefs, etc., that are *commonly upheld within particular social groups viz. in particular cultures* (and prevail with total “evidence” in their framework, *but do not have acceptance and appear everything other than self-evident for other groups and other cultures*, etc. It is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from the fact that each one of us is an “I” for himself and a “You” or a “He” or “She” (viz. “one of Us”, “one of You” – in the plural – or “one of Them”) for the others – the result being something along the lines of the playful form of “irregular conjugation” attributed to Bertrand Russel: “I am firm, You are obstinate, He is a pig-headed fool”¹³ – or of

¹³ Russell is thought to have expounded the concept in 1948, on the BBC radio programme “The Brains Trust”. Cf. Audi (1999), p. 223 and Walton (2005), p. 220. The weekly newspaper *The New Statesman and Nation* ran a competition for further examples of this kind of “irregular conjugation” (or, as it is also called, “emotive conjugation”). Among the

the more complex form of “irregular conjugation” depicted by Kurt Tucholsky in his “Konjugation in deutscher Sprache”: „Ich persönlich liebe / du liebst irgendwie/ er betätigt sich sexuell/ wir sind erotisch eingestellt/ ihr liebt mit am besten/ sie leiten die Abteilung Liebe“¹⁴. It is possible to identify relativity conditionings arising from the fact that, as Pascal puts it, what appears to us almost as a “*point*” can, with equal legitimacy, be seen as constituting nothing less than *a whole world*, while what appears to us as a *whole world* can, with equal legitimacy, be seen as constituting only a *point* in the middle of a vaster world – and so on and so forth in both directions (the “and so on and so forth” being here the crucial point, so that everything appearing to us becomes what Pascal calls “quelque apparence du milieu des choses”)¹⁵.

There are several aspects that should be noted. First, there is something intentionally “*chaotic*” about these examples. They are intended to illustrate the *random* nature of the developments that marked the history of the notion of “point of view” – and at the same time they are also intended to call attention to the fact that our usual view of the phenomenon of point of view is *no less chaotic*.

Secondly, it should be noted that the relation of similarity that these different conditionings have with the relativity conditioning structure pro-

winners picked by the newspaper (*The New Statesman and Nation*, June 5, 1948) were the following: “I am righteously indignant, you are annoyed, he is making a fuss over nothing”, “I have reconsidered the matter, you have changed your mind, he has gone back on his word.”

¹⁴ Tucholsky (2006), p. 768. Incidentally it is worth noting that Tucholsky’s “Konjugation in deutscher Sprache” dates from 1928.

¹⁵ I.e., not something in the “middle” (as if we had any knowledge of the corresponding “extremes” and were able to know where the middle lies), but rather a “middle” characterized by the fact that we simply *have no idea of the “extremes”* (and, what is more, that we do not even know *whether there are any such “extremes”*) – so that the “middle” in question (the “quelque apparence du milieu des choses” we are made of, according to Pascal) has absolutely *no clue where it is, what it corresponds to*, etc. Cf. Pascal (1963), *Pensées*, §199 (Lafuma), 72 (Brunschvig), p. 525f.. See also, for example, Nietzsche (1988), *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr-Herbst 1881*, 11[36], p. 454: “Wir sind irgendwie in der Mitte – nach der Welt zu und nach der Kleinheit der unendlichen Welt zu. Oder ist das Atom uns näher als das Äußerse Ende der Welt? – Ist für uns die Welt nicht nur ein Zusammenfassen von Relationen unter einem Maaße? Sobald dies willkürliche Maaß fehlt, zerfließt unsere Welt!”.

duced by localisation in space (and time) is variable. But there is a fundamental core of *similarity* – which has to do with the fact that, in all these cases, the access conditions (the conditions that affect the very constitution of our access to things viz. the conditions that affect the very constitution of whatever “view” we have) *intervene in the very content of what appears to us*. The result being that the perspective thus constituted is relative to these conditions, has something particular to it that derives from them. At the same time that it *shows* (at the same time that it *opens, exposes, puts “in contact”* with what it shows, that is, with *that which is in conformity with these conditions*), this kind of perspective also *hides (closes, covers up, fences off* – namely, everything that is *not in conformity with them*). So that it permits alternatives: it is not the “absolute” way of “viewing” things – but only *one way among others*, contingent, dependent on circumstances. In other words, in all these cases there is some kind of “fragmentation” of perspective: there are multiple views about the same thing, there is room for what the Greeks called “ἐνδέχασθαι ἄλλως ἕχειν” (the possibility that things are otherwise). In short, in all these cases the fact that we have certain views does not settle the matter. For these views have the nature of a point of view – so that they permit “otherness” and are, as it were, subject to the vertigo of otherness.

Thirdly, the identification of a *plurality of conditioning factors* like these and the corresponding *widening of the meaning of the notion of point of view* does not introduce merely a semantic modification. It corresponds to a modification (of which one can have a more or less keen awareness) of the characteristics with which our access to things (what appears to us) presents itself. For the identification of a *plurality of aspects* like those referred to results in the conditioned, relative trait ceasing to appear as a phenomenon occurring *locally*, affecting only these or those *circumscribed* aspects (a phenomenon, the detection of which leaves all the other moments of our view of things *with a value of non-relativity* – free of any restriction, not affected by any conditioned trait). This is a decisive point. If we take the examples given above – and if, instead of considering them one by one, we join them together in a joint identification, this produces a considerable *revision* of our view of things viz. of what appears to us. It changes the extent to which our view of things viz. what appears to us is exposed to the possibility of being a mere point of view. With the result

that what we said above about the possibility of surprise and the realm of surprise in the field of vision and the visible (about the fact that we move within something like a *labyrinth*, etc.) holds *a fortiori* for these other aspects and becomes more serious, more sharp-edged if they are taken into account.

But what at this moment interests us most is the semantic modification of the notion of “point of view” – the semantic modification that derives from the identification of these other factors concerning the conditioning and relativity of what appears to us, and also from the fact that they are designated on the basis of an *analogy* with the kind of conditioning that the location in space produces with regard to vision. On account of this modification, “point of view” eventually started to mean a *type* of restriction (a *type* of relativity, a *type* of conditioning) of what appears to us (of the presentation to which one has access), independently of the manner in which this relativity and restriction specifically get produced – that is, already without any tie to the particular conditioning structure at stake in the origin of the expression. What is more, “point of view” eventually started to mean this *type* of restriction without any circumscription of the various ways of conditioning that each time get to be identified, rather, in fact, encompassing these and all the others that are still to be detected but correspond to this type of conditioning. In other words, “point of view” became a *formal*, *open* notion, comprising all the forms of conditioning and relativity of this *type* (whatever they may be). So that, to get converted into something concrete, this notion has to be “deformalised”, as it were, into concrete identifications of the conditionings involved on each occasion – i. e., into concrete identifications of the sense in which these and those components of what appears to us (these and those presentations that we have) are mere “points of view” viz. into concrete identifications of what makes them limited (of what they *hide*, of the *alternatives* that they permit, etc).

Thus, independently of the terms in which it is expressed (and while stressing the fact that what he writes amounts to a purely *formal* and *open* concept), one can adopt Johann Martin Chladenius’ statement regarding the notion of point of view – a statement that can be found in his *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünftiger Reden und Schriften*, from 1742: „Diejenigen Umstände unserer Seele, unseres Leibes und unserer gantzen Person,

welche machen, oder Ursache sind, daß wir uns eine Sache so, und nicht anders vorstellen, wollen wir den Sehe-Punkt nennen. Wie nemlich der Ort unseres Augens, und insbesondere die Entfernung von einem Vorwurffe, die Ursache ist, daß wir ein solches Bild, und kein anderes von der Sache bekommen, also giebt es bey allen unsern Vorstellungen einen Grund, warum wir die Sache so und nicht anders erkennen, und dieses ist der Sehe-Punct von derselben Sache“ (“We wish to call point of view those circumstances of our soul, our body, and our whole person, which make us represent a thing in this way and not otherwise, or are the cause of us doing so. As namely the location of our eye, and in particular the distance from an object, is the cause that we receive such an image and no other, of the thing, so in all our representations there is a reason for knowing the thing so, and not otherwise, and that is the point of view regarding the thing in question.”)¹⁶.

It is in this sense (which is *untied from the original context*) – it is in this *widened, analogical, formal, and open* sense – that from now on the notion of “point of view” will be used in this paper.

Given its importance, let us dwell a little longer on the *formal* nature of this notion. The point is that the notion designates all possible instances of the *type* of conditioning and restriction in question, without anticipating them (i. e., without determining how many instances of this type of conditioning and restriction there are, what characterizes each one of them, etc.). To be sure, when one uses this *formal* concept, one is already aware of a certain range of phenomena that correspond to it. But on the other hand one is also aware of the possibility that the phenomena in question

¹⁶ Chladenius (1969), p. 187. See also Chladenius (1752), p. 100: “Da nun der Sehepunct nach den verschiedenen Beschaffenheiten der Objekten [*sic*] und der Zuschauer, in so verschiedener Weitläufigkeit muß genommen werden, so ist dienlich, daß man diese Begriffe sämtlich unter einen allgemeinen Begriff bringe: welcher folgender ist. Der *Sehepunct* ist der innerliche und äusserliche Zustand eines Zuschauers, in so ferne daraus eine gewisse und besondere Art, die vorkommenden Dinge anzuschauen und zu betrachten, flüßet”. Chladenius devotes a whole chapter of the book (namely chapter V: “Vom Zuschauer und Sehepuncte”, pp. 91-115) to a nuanced analysis of the point of view phenomenon, both in the *literal* and in the *widened, analogical* sense. In this analysis, he gives a detailed account of the *widening* (*Erweiterung, Ausdehnung*) of the notion of point of view (its various *steps*, its different *lines of development*, etc.). See in particular §§ 3, 4, and 11, pp. 93-95, 99f.

may be only a part (and indeed a small part) of all those components of what appears to us (viz. of our view of things) that have the nature of a mere point of view. In short, the formal notion of point of view *refers* to something it is unable to *anticipate*. Let us illustrate this with an example. There is a radical difference between the way things present themselves when their presence is marked by a sharp awareness of the fact that they are being seen *for the first* or for the *last time* (as Friedrich Hebbel puts it, “Was man zum letztenmal sieht, das sieht man wieder, als sähe man’s zum erstenmal”¹⁷) and the way they present themselves *as usual, trivial things*, “nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita”. This difference can concern some things, but also the totality of what appears to us, in which case it is most profound. On the other hand, it is not something absolutely dependent on circumstances (as if things could present themselves as seen for the first viz. for the last time only when it is really the first viz. the last time they are seen). It is rather a matter of two different ways in which things can present themselves, regardless of the circumstances. Usually one is not aware of this difference (so that the usual way does not appear as a point of view at all). But when one becomes aware of the difference, it is plain that though it has nothing to do with things changing their colours, their size or any such feature, it nevertheless corresponds to a radical change – so that the “same” thing as seen in the usual way and as seen for the first viz. for the last time is not the same thing at all, but rather something “toto coelo” different from itself (and the “world” as seen in the usual way and as seen for the first viz. for the last time is not the same “world” at all, but rather something “toto coelo” different from itself). In other words, what we are dealing with here is a kind of “either/or” concerning nothing less than a fundamental trait of what appears – a trait that, strangely enough, has the power to change all the others. Now, it goes without saying that the formal notion of point of view we are talking about does not anticipate this specific modality of point of view. But on the other hand, once we become aware of the specific modality in question, it is pretty obvious that this specific kind of *either/or* concerning the way things present themselves corresponds to the formal notion of point of view and constitutes one more example of what this notion is all about. Finally, it should be kept

¹⁷ Hebbel (1908), 2949, p. 495.

in mind that, even if, as pointed out above, the formal notion of point of view does not anticipate how many instances of this type of conditioning and restriction there are (what characterizes each one of them, etc.), it still prompts a question about these matters. In other words, it prompts the following question: *in exactly what ways and to what extent has our view of things* (what we see – using the word in the broadest possible sense) *the nature of a point of view?* This is a question to which we do not know the answer. It also happens to be a question we tend not to ask. What is more, curiously enough it is a question that even those who theorize about “point of view”, “perspective”, “perspectivism” and the like hardly ever ask and do not bother to answer (or at least to try to answer). It goes without saying that this is not the place to tackle this question. It is perhaps not the hardest of all (“das Schwerste von allem” Goethe speaks of), but it is no doubt hard enough, and any attempt to tackle this issue would go far beyond the scope of this paper. But it is important to note that this is the decisive question in this context, and that any serious analysis of the problem of point of view must ask and try to answer this pivotal question.

Having said that, let us return to the history of the notion. As pointed out above, the untying from the original context, the rendering of itself autonomous from the latter, the opening up to other forms of conditioning and the substitution of the “literal” meaning with the “analogical” meaning constitute dominant traits in the history of the notion of point of view. So that, when using it thus in a sense already completely untied from the original context, one does not violate the tradition into which it fits nor is anything new introduced. In fact, a similar untying and rendering autonomous is so associated with the notion of “point of view” and is traditionally so *unlimited* that already in the particular use that Leibniz makes of the term (a “classical” use, which probably constitutes one of the most decisive factors in its dissemination) the notion involves a radical suspension of the spatial model coming from its origin. It is certain that Leibniz resorts frequently to this spatial model (to the location in space, to the *punctum visus*, *intuentis situs*, etc.) as a model providing support for the introduction of the notion of “point of view”¹⁸. It is equally certain that Leibniz expressly de-

¹⁸ Cf. in particular Leibniz (1971) vol. I, pp. 10, 19, 20, 69, 150f., 383, vol. II, pp. 19, 57, 98, 438, vol. III, pp. 357, 623, 636, vol. IV, pp. 434, 438, 477, 484, 530, 553f., vol. V, pp. 50,

velops this model in a series of examples such as that of the various views of one and the same city, etc. It is no less certain that, in this way, the properties of space and its intervention in vision appear as a reference “explaining” the finitude of our access to things (of our *repraesentationes*, of the presentations we have). In other words, it is certain that in many passages of the *corpus leibnitianum* the properties of space and its intervention in vision appear as a reference “explaining” the particular “mixture” of “petites perceptions” viz. *obscure* representations, *clear* representations, *distinct but inadequate* representations (and this means, at the same time, the *lack* of *clear* representations, the *lack* of *distinct* representations, the *lack* of *adequate* representations, and the *lack* of *intuitive* representations) which, according to Leibniz, composes what appears to us and makes a mere *point of view* of all our *status repraesentativi*. But, in fact, it is Leibniz himself who insistently deprives space of the character of *absolute reference* with which it appears in this model (and without which the model simply falls to pieces); it is Leibniz himself that reduces space (and all relations of spatial order) to a mere correlate of a confused representation¹⁹. This is not the place to discuss this topic in depth, but let me give a very rough outline of the change of perspective he proposes. In his view, it is not a certain position in space (a certain *punctum visus* viz. *intuentis situs*) that gives rise to or determines a certain multiplicity of *repraesentationes* (constituted in such a way that, because of the *punctum visus* or the *intuentis situs*, it is characterized by a certain mixture of *repraesentationes obscurae*, of *repraesentationes clarae*, of *repraesentationes distinctae sed non adaequatae*, etc.)²⁰. No, according to Leibniz, it is the other way around. Space itself is nothing other than a complex *repraesentatio*, made of a certain multiplicity – and a certain mixture – of *repraesentationes obscurae*, *repraesentationes clarae sed non distinctae*, *repraesentationes distinctae sed non adaequatae*. And the location in space

65, 378, vol. VI, pp. 197f., 327, 599, 603, 616, vol. VII, 120, 452, 542f., 556, 566s., Leibniz (1948), vol. I, pp. 137f., 266, Leibniz (1961), pp. 10f., 15, 521, Leibniz (1966), p. 304.

¹⁹ Cf., for example, Leibniz (1971), vol. I, p. 392, vol. II, pp. 99, 101, 118f., 169f., 195, 336, 379, 435, 438, 510, vol. III, pp. 595, 612, 622f., 674, vol. IV, pp. 483, 491, 568, vol. V, pp. 205f., vol. VII, pp. 314, 322, all the correspondence with Clarke (and, in particular 375ff., 395s., 400-415), 461, 467f., and Leibniz (1961), pp. 522-523.

²⁰ For Leibniz’s scale of *repraesentationes* or *ideae*, from *ideae obscurae* to *ideae adaequatae et intuitivae*, see notably Leibniz (1971), vol. IV, 422-426, 440f., and Leibniz (1961), pp. 219f.

(the *punctum visus*, the *intuentis situs*) is itself nothing other than a complex *repraesentatio* (a certain mixture of *repraesentationes obscurae*, *repraesentationes clarae*, etc.) in the framework of the still more complex *repraesentatio* of space. I.e., in the final analysis, what constitutes a point of view (N.B.: a point of view in the literal sense) is not a certain location of the observer in space (which is itself nothing other than a *repraesentatio*), but rather a certain mixture of *repraesentationes obscurae*, *repraesentationes clarae sed non distinctae*, and *repraesentationes distinctae sed non adaequatae* – the finitude of a point of view resulting from the fact that the vast majority of its *repraesentationes* are *obscurae*, not *clarae*, that the vast majority of those that are *clarae* are not *distinctae*, and that even those that are *distinctae* are not *adaequatae*, etc. In short, when all is said and done, the point of view in the *literal* sense turns out to result from a point of view in the *widened, figurative* sense. So that, in fact, even as regards vision proper, the understanding of the *point of view* based on the reference to space is itself a *conditioned, relative* way of looking at and understanding the point of view phenomenon – i.e., a mere *point of view* about the *point of view phenomenon* and about the form of conditioning, of relativity corresponding to it. The result being that the notion of point of view frees itself from the “spatial” model from which it derives and renders itself entirely autonomous. Thus, according to Leibniz, the persistence of a “spatial” model in his explanations – and, in particular, in his notion of point of view – does not correspond to other than one more case of what he calls “adaptation to traditional expressions”²¹, of “practicologie”²². In other words, it corresponds to a concession to what Leibniz calls the “common system”²³ – i.e. to something parallel to the subsistence of “Ptolemaic” forms of expression (“movement of the sun”, etc.) in the framework of an already Copernican perspective²⁴. To sum up, for Leibniz any description of the point of view phenomenon as having its origin in a literal *punctum visus* or *intuentis situs* is something acceptable,

²¹ Cf. *Nouveaux Essais* I 1 1, Leibniz (1971), vol. V, p. 67.

²² Cf. *Discours de métaphysique*, XXVII, Leibniz (1971), vol. IV, p. 452.

²³ Cf. *Nouveaux Essais*, I 1 1, Leibniz (1971), vol. V, pp. 66-f.

²⁴ Cf. *Discours de métaphysique*, XXVII, Leibniz (1971), vol. IV, p. 452, *Nouveaux Essais*, I 1 1, Leibniz (1971), vol. V, p. 67, Letter to des Bosses, Leibniz (1971), vol. II, p. 300, *Eclaircissement du nouveaux système de la communication des substances*, Leibniz (1971), vol. IV, p. 493, *Essais de Théodicée*, I 65, Leibniz (1971), vol. VI, p. 138.

yes, but not “prenant les choses à la rigueur”.²⁵

But there is yet one more aspect of untying from the origin and widening in comparison to it that, although in some way involved in what we have already focused on, is not sufficiently emphasised based on what has been said (and which, given that it is not expressly stressed, could pass by unnoticed and not be taken account of – whereas in fact it is of decisive importance). The reference to the way Leibniz changed the notion of point of view – and in particular the reference to the way he changed the notion of space and the connection between space and point of view (N.B.: point of view in the literal sense, the one which has to do with vision *stricto sensu*) – can help us understand this further point.

As pointed out above, in the original model of point of view (the model of the *intuentis situs*) space itself (the properties of space and its intervention in vision) is the reference “explaining” the finitude of our access to things. And insofar it is *not* a point of view: it does not depend on a conditioning factor, it is not relative, it is free from all restriction. It is, as it were, the *irrelative* framework providing the basis for the understanding of relativity. But in Leibniz’s view space itself has the nature of a point of view: it is nothing other than a *repraesentatio*, it depends on conditioning factors, it permits alternatives (i.e., it leaves room for *other* views, no less legitimate, etc.). In other words, according to Leibniz, the whole original understanding of points of view is itself a point of view – it is nothing other than a *repraesentatio*, it depends on conditioning factors, it permits alternatives (i.e., it leaves room for *other* views, no less legitimate, etc.). This is, of course, not the place to discuss this issue. What is important for our discussion is the kind of *change* we are dealing with here.

In the original model space provides the framework for the understanding of the point of view phenomenon, *but it is not itself a point of view* (it is *not perceived as a point of view*). In fact, it is the very opposite, it is marked by absolute validity, etc. But this means that the perspective we have when we acknowledge the scattered and disseminated character of

²⁵ Regarding the particular doubleness at stake here and its meaning, cf. Kaulbach (1973), in particular 339ff., Kaulbach (1979), pp. 69, 78ff., 83ff., Schüßler (1992), pp. 7–17, 191ff., in particular 201–212.; regarding the notions “common system”, “new system” and parallel notions, as well as the opposition between “rigour” and “adaptation”, see the passages listed by Schüßler (1992), note 66, pp. 17–18.

vision proper (and all the problems arising from it: all the “fragmentation” and “explosion” we have spoken of, etc.) is in fact very far from having itself the character of a point of view (of being itself acknowledged as a mere point of view). That is, on closer inspection it turns out that, whether we are conscious of it or not, this very perspective has a *composite* structure: some of its components (namely the whole field of vision) are perceived as having the nature of a point of view (with all the problems arising from it), while others (for instance space) are perceived as *absolutely valid* (i.e., as being the very opposite of a point of view). What is more, whether we are conscious of it or not, those aspects that are perceived as having the nature of a mere point of view are *anchored*, as it were, in the solid ground of *what seems to be free of any relativity*. In other words the latter provides what seems to be a firm basis for the understanding of the former. Now what Leibniz says about space calls our attention to the possibility that this solid ground (i.e., at least some of the views that are perceived as being free from all relativity) turns out to have itself the nature of a point of view. In other words, Leibniz calls our attention to the possibility that the perspective we have when we acknowledge the scattered and disseminated character of vision proper (and all the problems arising from it: all the “fragmentation” and “explosion” we have spoken of, etc.) does not have the composition mentioned above: it does not only comprise elements that have the nature of a point of view and elements that are free of all relativity. For there is a *third possibility*: it can also include components *that seem to be free of all relativity* and yet, on closer inspection, *turn out to have the nature of a mere point of view*, to permit alternatives, etc.

But this is still not all. There are several other aspects that need to be taken into consideration.

First, it must be borne in mind that what appears to us has the nature of what Aristotle calls a συγκεχυμένον (a whole composed of *undifferentiated* elements)²⁶. In other words, each “view”, each “object” (and indeed each “moment”, each “component” of each object) is complex in the sense that it results from a multiplicity of views – it is, as it were, the *resultant force* of a *system of forces* (a whole cluster of determinations, assumptions, beliefs, self-evidences, etc.), constituted in such a way that a) we are not immediately

²⁶ See *Physica*, I, 1, Aristotle (1936), 184a-b.

aware of them (of each different “force”, i.e. of each determination, each assumption, etc.) and b) even if we try to become aware of them, they tend to escape detection²⁷.

Secondly, it must be borne in mind that this means the possibility of what can be called a *multiple point of view* (N.B.: a multiple point of view in the *widened, figurative, analogical sense* we have been talking about). But what does this mean? It means that what appears to us can be constituted in such a way that not only *one* but *several* of the “forces” (i.e., of the determinations, assumptions, self-evidences, etc.) that form the “system of forces” of which it is the *resultant force* turn out to have the nature of a mere point of view. In other words, it means the possibility that what appears to us is the correlate not only of *a* conditioning factor, but of a *multiplicity* of conditioning factors, all of which are relative, permit alternatives and play, as it were, the role of trap-doors through which *otherness* (the possibility of “ἄλλως εἶχθαι”) can make its entrance. We can perhaps express this by saying it is possible that what appears to us has the character of a *multiple anamorphosis* – in the sense that an anamorphosis is something which can only be seen from a specific vantage point of view (in the literal sense)²⁸ – and what we are referring to is the possibility that what appears to us is relative not to a certain point of view, but to a certain *conjunction* or *combination* of analogical points of view (both in the sense that it can only

²⁷ That is, on the one hand, what appears to us would look *otherwise* if the “system of forces” viz. of beliefs, determinations, assumptions, etc., did not include each and every one of the “forces” it is made of; on the other hand, this does not prevent the “forces” in question (Kant called them “*die geheimen Urteile der gemeinen Vernunft*”) from playing their role *a tergo*, as “grey eminences”, in the “dark” – or, as Kant puts it, in what he calls the “*Bathos der Erfahrung*”: in the *depths*, namely in the *depth of experience*. In the *Anthropologie Friedländer*, Kant (1902-), vol. XXV, p. 479, we can read the following: “Die duncklen Vorstellungen *enthalten die* geheime Feder von dem was im Lichten ist“ (emphasis added). On “*geheime Urteile der gemeinen Vernunft*” see *Reflexion* 436, Kant (1902-), vol. XV, p. 180. The notion of “*Bathos der Erfahrung*” appears in the *Prolegomena*, Kant (1902-), vol. IV, p. 380. For a more detailed account of these notions, their historical development and meaning, and the phenomena they are intended to designate, see notably Carvalho (2010).

²⁸ On *anamorphosis*, see notably Baltrusaitis (1955), Leemann, Elffers & Schyu (1976), Baltrusaitis (1984), Damisch (1987), Collins (1992a), Collins (1992b), Pérez-Gómez & Pelletier (1995), Massey (1997), Füsslin & Henze (1999), Topper (2000), Massey (2007), Cha & Rautzenberg (2008), Boyle (2010).

be seen from this particular conjunction of points of view and in the sense that²⁹ it is nothing other than the correlate of this particular conjunction of conditioning factors viz. of points of view in the analogical sense of the word)³⁰.

Thirdly, it is to be noted that, if one tries to find out whether what appears to us has anything to do with this possibility, one faces two main difficulties: on the one hand, as pointed out above, when one tries to identify the components of the “system of forces” of which what appears to us is the “resulting force”, they tend to *escape detection*; on the other hand, it is possible to become aware of them (or at least of some of them) without becoming aware of the fact that they too have the nature of a point of view. For there is no βασιλεία ὁδός in these matters, and it is not easy to discern whether a given determination, assumption, etc., has the nature of a point of view. Because we are not naturally aware of the alternatives, etc., our whole tendency is to uphold the absolute validity of our own perspectives and to leave it at that.

The upshot of all this is that the above mentioned possibility (namely the possibility that our own view of things includes components that seem to be free of all relativity and yet, on closer inspection, turn out to have the nature of a point of view) remains even when we have tried to ascertain to what extent our view of things is a mere point of view. There is what we can term a *lack of transparency*, and any attempt to settle these matters has to struggle against a very difficult kind of *invisible enemy* – to wit, *blind angles*. So that even if one has tried hard, and even if a series of steps has unmasked several components of one’s view of things, there is al-

²⁹ As in ancient “σκιαγραφία” – see, for example, Keuls (1978), in particular pp. 59-87, Rouveret (1989), and Keuls (1997), in particular pp. 107-145.

³⁰ With the result that the realm of *possible otherness* (the “ἐνδέχασθαι ἄλλως ἔχειν”: the *possibility of viewing things in a different way* or the *possibility that things are other than they appear to us*) rises *vertiginously*. *Multiple anamorphosis* in the sense we are talking about means *multiple* “ἐνδέχασθαι ἄλλως ἔχειν”. In other words, if there is such a thing as *multiple anamorphosis* in this sense, then everything appearing to us (i. e., not only each “object”, but indeed each “moment” of each object) permits a *multiplicity of alternatives* – and, what is more, an *open* multiplicity of alternatives – corresponding to the various determinations of each object (viz. of each of its moments) and to the possibility that several of these determinations are nothing other than the correlate of a conditioning factor, i. e., a mere point of view.

ways the possibility that the results thus achieved viz. the *terminus ad quem* of these changes still has a composite structure in the sense that it still includes components (both *bidden* components –“grey eminences”, “geheime Urteile” – and components we are aware of) that *seem* to be free of all relativity and yet, on closer inspection, can turn out to have *the nature of a mere point of view*.

This too is an important point. Any attempt to settle this issue is *like a voyage in uncharted waters or like trying to find the way in a labyrinth: one never knows where one really is and where the voyage goes viz. the path leads*.

4. Point of View, Restriction and Puzzlement. — Multiplication and Subtraction: the Peculiar “Arithmetic of Point of View”.

But there is yet one more aspect of untying from the origin and widening in comparison to it that played a major role in the historical development of the notion of point of view – an aspect no discussion of this issue can rightfully ignore.

In the original meaning of the notion the conditioned and relative character of what is designated point of view does not significantly affect the *natural pretension* of one’s view of things, it does not call it into question as regards its status, it does not *disorient*, it does not create *puzzlement* or *confusion*. It fits perfectly into the natural self-evaluation regime of our access to things without disturbing it and without even slightly “keeping in check” the version in force in it. If the notion of point of view involves a restriction, a note of relativity (the admission of alternatives, etc.), the sphere of incidence with regard to what causes it is a circumscribed one which, as we have said, does not prevent many other aspects of one’s view of things from being completely free of any mark of *relativity* or *restriction* – so that nothing separates them from an “unrestricted validity”. The result being that one’s overall view of things remains marked by a validity of this order. In fact, the very relativity of the visual presentation and the restrictions corresponding to it seem “natural” and are not considered to hamper even slightly its effectiveness or to call into question in any way the status of what one has by having it.

In short, in the original context, the identification of the conditioning at stake in the notion of point of view is, fundamentally, perfectly *innocuous*.

To be sure, we have tried to show that, in the final analysis, there is nothing innocuous about the “fragmentation” and “explosion” the phenomenon of point of view (namely the phenomenon of point of view in the original sense – in the sphere of vision proper) is all about. But, as also pointed out above, both the common awareness of the phenomenon of point of view in this original sense and the common notion of point of view in general are characterized by the fact that they are indeed pretty *innocuous*.

Now, in these circumstances, the untying from the original context and the identification of the different conditioning and relativity factors affecting one’s view of things opens new possibilities, and the discovery of more relativity factors can bring with it an aggravation and reveal how the conditioning and relativity of our access to things have a much more serious and much more disturbing character – that no longer leaves it unaffected, no longer corresponds to just a *detail* without significant consequences (*a detail which does not affect* the “Peace”, security or status of one’s view of things), but rather “puts it in check”, disturbing its status, rendering it problematical. That is, the discovery of other conditioning aspects can make anything innocuous that the notion of point of view has disappear. It can cast the presentation we have into a situation (into a self-evaluation, an evaluation of its *status*) very different from that in which it unwarily supposes itself: into a situation in which it *shows itself to be radically conditioned, radically relative* – and at this point has difficulty perceiving *what it is that it corresponds to, what its own status is*³¹.

³¹ All this has to do with what can be described as a general *ambiguity* of the very notion of point of view – namely an *ambiguity* as to whether it is *innocuous* or not. In the common usage the notion of point of view always means that there are *other* points of view *beyond* the one in question. A *single* point of view viz. a point of view *without alternatives* is a *contradictio in terminis*. But this does not prevent the other points of view one acknowledges from being perceived as *wrong*, as *irrelevant*, etc. Now the point is that when this is the case there is no real acknowledgement of one’s own view *as a mere point of view*. In other words, when this is the case, though we speak of “point of view” and characterize our own view as a “point of view”, there is *no real restriction* (*no real sense of restriction, no real acknowledgement of restriction*) – and therefore there is no real reduction of one’s view to a mere point of view among others. In short, the fact that other points of view are perceived as being *wrong, irrelevant*, etc., renders them completely *innocuous*. But if they are innocuous there is no real *restriction* of one’s own view – and so one’s view is not perceived as a mere point of view among other equally legitimate points of view. This leads us to a further topic. In the strong sense of the word, a point of view (the real

acknowledgement of another point of view viz. the real acknowledgement of one's own view as a mere point of view) cannot be completely innocuous. And this in turn means that, in the final analysis, points of view are *not merely juxtaposed* – they cannot be *merely juxtaposed, as if they simply coexisted and did not interfere with each other*. Real acknowledgement that one's own view is a mere point of view always introduces a certain amount of *strain* – it puts one's view *under some pressure*. In other words, point of view means *tension*: a *quantum minimum* of tension, a *quantum minimum* of *sense of blindness* – a *quantum minimum* of the possibility *that things are not quite the way we see them*. Take, for example, the case of *vision proper* and of the “fragmentation” that is inherent to it. Even supposing it is only a matter of *incompleteness*, this “fragmentation” is all about the fact that in everything we see there is much more than meets the eye. To be sure, one usually feels able to *anticipate* what remains unseen or one disqualifies it as being irrelevant, unnecessary details, etc. – in which case one perceives one's own view as being *more than enough*, with the result that the other points of view one acknowledges do not put one's own view under any pressure. I. e., insofar as it includes the anticipation of the unseen and seems “to have everything under control”, one's own view is not really perceived as a mere point of view among many others. But as soon as one realizes that these anticipations are misleading, and that there is much one is unable to anticipate (as soon as one realizes that there is something *really beyond one's grasp*, and that one does not know *to what extent it may be relevant* and make everything appear in a new light), the acknowledgement of one's own view as a mere point of view becomes *effective* – it ceases to be completely innocuous, it introduces at least some amount of tension, it puts one's own view under some pressure, it puts it in check, etc. Kant expresses this in one passage of his *Träume eines Geisesehers*, Kant (1902-), vol. II, p. 340, where he writes the following: “Das Urtheil desjenigen, der meine Gründe widerlegt, ist mein Urtheil, nachdem ich es vorerst gegen die Schale der Selbstliebe und nachher in derselben gegen meine vermeintliche Gründe abgewogen und in ihm einen größeren Gehalt gefunden habe. Sonst betrachtete ich den allgemeinen menschlichen Verstand bloß aus dem Standpunkte des meinigen: jetzt setze ich mich in die Stelle einer fremden und äußeren Vernunft und beobachte meine Urtheile sammt ihren geheimsten Anlässen aus dem Gesichtspunkte anderer. Die Vergleichung beider Beobachtungen giebt zwar starke Parallaxen, aber sie ist auch das einzige Mittel, den optischen Betrug zu verhüten und die Begriffe an die wahre Stellen zu setzen, darin sie in Ansehung der Erkenntnißvermögen der menschlichen Natur stehen.” In this passage, Kant draws our attention to the fact that, in the final analysis, there is no real acknowledgement of another point of view (and this means: there is no real acknowledgement of our own view *as a mere point of view*) unless the other point of view is perceived as a view I could adopt – as having a claim to become my own view. In other words, if there is to be any real acknowledgement of another point of view (if there is to be any real acknowledgement of our *own view as a mere point of view*), there must be *some challenge* viz. *some tension between different possibilities*. Without this *quantum minimum* of challenge and tension, “otherness” becomes completely “neutralized” – there is no real “otherness” in the crucial sense: *no real ἐνδέχασθαι ἄλλως εἶχειν* (no real possibility that things are *other-*

This too constitutes an important direction of the transformation of the historical notion of point of view: the fact that it ceases to have to do with more or less innocuous details of the access one has, the fact that relativity ceases to be circumscribed to aspects that are more of detail within frameworks (reference systems) themselves in no way affected by any relativisation – the fact that relativity eventually extends to these same frameworks and to more “virulent” aspects, which more profoundly shake up the security of one’s view of things.

In short, if one tends to not spontaneously associate the notion of point of view with any disturbance of this kind (so that in fact it remains distant from the idea of such a disturbance), what is at stake in it, starting from the moment in which it unties itself from the initial framework and starts to correspond to a *type* of conditioning and relativity and embraces all the different factors that correspond to this type, involves the *possibility* of this disturbance – *with everything depending on the extent of the conditioning and relativity, to which one’s view of things in fact gets to show itself to be subjected.*

If we take the notion of point of view to mean something of this sort, then our access to things tends precisely to not see itself as a point of view, in this sense – it tends to steer clear of conceiving these possibilities. And if – as some have done – one talks over and over again of our *whole* access to things as a *point of view*, one is aiming precisely at maintaining a distance vis-à-vis the pretension, that this access naturally has, of being an *access that is effective, “transparent” as regards reality – that shows things exactly as they are.* That is, one is aiming at maintaining a distance vis-à-vis its cognoscitive pretension (vis-à-vis the pretension, which it has, of constituting knowl-

wise). Or, as Kant suggests in the passage just quoted, there is no real acknowledgement of points of view (no real acknowledgement of *other points of view* and no real acknowledgement of *one’s own view as a mere point of view*) without a *quantum minimum* of *parallax*. In other words, where there is no *experience of parallax*, there is no real awareness of points of view. This is not the place to discuss the notion of *parallax*, its history and its meaning. But it should be borne in mind that *parallax* has to do with the fact that viewing objects from different angles makes them appear in *different apparent positions* viz. gives rise to *apparent displacements*. For instance, the objects around me present different views as I close one eye and then the other – they “jump” back and forth as they are viewed from one eye or the other. And that is precisely the point here: where there is no *quantum minimum* of some kind of “jumping back and forth” between different possibilities there is no real acknowledgement of points of view either.

edge, in its proper and strong sense, as already expressed by Plato³²).

Said in another way, because its historical development took this direction and because it has to do with this possibility the notion of *point of view* is intrinsically connected with what is at stake in the philosophical tradition, when – as starting from its origins and passing through Plato, etc. – it considers the possibility that our access to things has a radically *non-cognitive character and is*, as Kant puts it, not “*Erkenntnis*” but a mere “*Vorstellungsart*”.

But it is time to conclude. My final remark concerns a problem of *arithmetic*, namely of a peculiar kind of arithmetic: the *arithmetic of point of view*. In one of the most extraordinary books ever written about these matters, *Uno, nessuno e centomila (One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand)*, L. Pirandello draws our attention to this peculiar arithmetic. In Book V there is a chapter under the heading “Moltiplicazione e sottrazione” (*Multiplication and Subtraction*) in which he sums up some of the issues this book is all about, and spells out the meaning of the title (*One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand*)³³. Pirandello describes a conversation between three persons. One of them, the protagonist, Moscarda, realizes that the conversation does not take place between three but rather between many more than three persons, for each of them is something *different* for himself and for each of his interlocutors. Now, according to “normal” arithmetic the result of this multiplication would be *nine*. Not so in the peculiar arithmetic of points of view Pirandello makes us acquainted with. In this peculiar arithmetic the result is *eight*. But how come? The person who realizes that the conversation does not take place only between three interlocutors knows that he is *something different* viz. *someone different* for each one of his interlocutors, but *for himself* – because he is aware of this, because he is aware of the multiplication in question – he is no longer *the one* he used to be before realizing this. I. e., *he is no longer one at all*. Or, as Pirandello viz. his Moscarda puts it, in the arithmetic of point of view multiplication

³² For example, *Respublica* 477b10: “Οὐκο ὑν ἐπιστήμη μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι πέφυκε, γνῶναι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν;” See also 478a6: “Ἐπιστήμη μὲν γὰρ ποῦ ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι, τὸ ὄν γνῶναι ὡς ἔχει;”). A slightly free translation could be: “By its own nature knowledge is related to that which is, to know it just as it is?,” “Knowledge [is related] to that which is, to know it just as it is?”.

³³ Cf. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno e centomila*, V, vi, in: Pirandello (1993), p. 863.

eventually results in subtraction³⁴. In other words, in the final analysis the kind of multiplication that is inherent to the discovery of points of view

³⁴ Cf. *ibidem*: “E poiché erano due a vedermi entrare, mi venne la tentazione di voltarmi a cercare l'*altro* che entrava con me, pur sapendo bene che il "caro Vitangelo" del mio paterno Quantorzo non solo era anch'esso in me come il Gengè di mia moglie Dida, ma che io tutto quanto, per Quantorzo, altri non ero che il suo caro Vitangelo, proprio come per Dida altri che il suo "Gengè". Due, dunque, non agli occhi loro, ma soltanto per me che mi sapevo per quei due *uno e uno*; il che per me, non faceva un *più* ma un *meno*, in quanto voleva dire che ai loro occhi, io come io, non ero nessuno.

Ai loro occhi soltanto? Anche per me, anche per la solitudine del mio spirito che, in quel momento, fuori d'ogni consistenza apparente, concepiva l'orrore di vedere il proprio corpo per sé come quello di nessuno nella diversa incoercibile realtà che intanto gli davano quei due.

Mia moglie, nel vedermi voltare, domandò.

«Chi cerchi?»

M'affrettai a risponderle, sorridendo:

«Ah, nessuno, cara, nessuno. Eccoci qua!»

Non compresero, naturalmente, che cosa intendessi dire con quel "nessuno" cercato accanto a me; e credettero che con quell'"eccoci" mi riferissi anche a loro due, sicurissimi che lì dentro quel salotto fossimo ora in tre e non in nove; o piuttosto, in otto, visto che io - per me stesso - ormai non contavo più.

Voglio dire:

1. Dida, com'era per sé;
2. Dida, com'era per me;
3. Dida, com'era per Quantorzo;
4. Quantorzo, com'era per sé;
5. Quantorzo, com'era per Dida;
6. Quantorzo, com'era per me;
7. il caro Gengè di Dida;
8. il caro Vitangelo di Quantorzo.

S'apparecchiava in quel salotto, fra quegli otto che si credevano tre, una bella conversazione.”

That *multiplication* is what points of view are all about is pretty obvious. Leibniz expresses this essential feature of the “arithmetic of points of view” when he speaks of a “perspectivistic multiplication” (see his *Monadologie* §57, G. VI, 616: “Et comme une même ville regardée de differens côtés paroist toute autre et est comme multipliée perspective-ment, il arrive de même, que par la multitude infinie des substances simples, il y a comme autant de differens univers, qui ne sont pourtant que les perspectives d'un seul selon les differens points de veue de chaque Monade.”, emphasis added). But the point is that points of view are not just about *multiplication*, and that *subtraction* plays a no less important role in this context – and indeed so much so that *subtraction can be the final product of multiplication*.

as points of view entails a risk of loss (and even of complete loss): the risk of no one (*nessuno* – of becoming no one) and we could also say the risk of nothing (of everything becoming *nothing*).

And this – namely the fact that we are, to an unknown extent, in a labyrinth of points of view, and that this labyrinth entails both the “multiplication” and the “subtraction” (both the possibility of *discovery* and the possibility of *loss*) we have just spoken of – is one of the reasons why P. Valéry is perhaps right when he says: «Un homme n'est qu'un poste d'observation perdu dans l'étrangeté»³⁵.

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³⁵ P. Valéry, *Analecta XLV*, in: Valéry (1996), p. 403.

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