



HAL
open science

”Perspectivism without perspective? The Idea of ’ a Point of View from Nowhere’”

Stéphane Cormier

► **To cite this version:**

Stéphane Cormier. ”Perspectivism without perspective? The Idea of ’ a Point of View from Nowhere’”. Symposium ”View from Nowhere in AI”, UNESCO Chair EVA (Ethics of the Living and the Artificial) held by Vanessa Nurock, CRHI, Université Côte d’Azur.; It is co-organized by Arnaud Regnaud, TransCrit, and Pierre Cassou-Noguès, LLCP, Paris 8 University., May 2023, University Paris 8, France. halshs-04167347v2

HAL Id: halshs-04167347

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04167347v2>

Submitted on 25 Jul 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Hand Out

"Perspectivism without perspective? The Idea of a 'View from Nowhere'."

Stéphane Cormier PhD.

(Associate Researcher UMR 4574 Bordeaux University & UMR 122 Toulouse Jean Jaurès University)

Talk at the International & Interdisciplinary Symposium "View from Nowhere in AI"

UNESCO Chair EVA (Ethics of the Living and the Artificial) held by Vanessa Nurock, CRHI, Université Côté d'Azur. It is co-organized by Arnaud Regnauld, TransCrit, and Pierre Cassou-Noguès, LLCP, Paris 8 University.

INTRODUCTION

Beyond the past, present, future and possible conceptual varieties and variations as well as applications or uses, our purpose is to try to understand what can be concealed and revealed, in terms of residual elements, the various & multiple aspectual dimensions of the idea of "View from Nowhere".

For these reasons, we propose to question the concept of "point of view/ View from" from the following interrogation: to what extent would it be necessary for thought to be able to go beyond the limits inherent to any human and individual perspective, necessarily particular and subjective? Our proposal will question the origins of "perspectivism" in order to circumscribe a certain conceptual indeterminacy which seems to haunt also all or part of its possible contemporary uses. To reflect on the different systems where it can be operative and on the structuring function of the "perspectivity", to determine certain epistemic and historical contexts which bring this last one to the metaphysical agenda, to define the problems and limits of any logic of the "point of view" and the various related conceptual strategies, elaborated by the philosophers when they seize the idea of perspective and its aspectual dimensions, such will be the stake of our subject which will undoubtedly tend, according to the points of view, to claim or not to exceed any perspective... .

To do so, we propose to confront ourselves in a first part with the rich and complex idea of "point of view", and then, in a second part, with what can both conceal and reveal "the idea of View from nowhere." **We also propose to define in general terms the three key notions of our subject in the following way:**

1/ The notion of point of view is defined in relation to a subject to which it is attached and refers to the function played by a situation from which something is apprehended by such and such an observer.

2/ The notion of perspective designates a certain type of structural relation which refers to what is aimed and to the subject of this aim. Any perspective gives to see a thing in its aspectuality, according to a certain profile, a certain way. In this sense, any perspective is a perspective oriented for a subject, whoever it is, and consequently possesses a structure of address. A perspective is not a representation, a certain specular image that would reflect a state of affairs, it is the way in which this state of affairs presents itself. In other words, we have access to a state of affairs through perspectivity, as the fact that things appear to us in the light.

3/ The notion of aspect is defined in relation to an object and determines the modalities by which something gives itself to be seen, under certain forms, guises, planes, etc. .

OF PERSPECTIVITY OR THE IDEA OF "POINT OF VIEW/VIEW FROM"

The multiple avatars of the rich lexical fields of the ideas or notions of "Perspective" and/or "Perspectivism" show that in terms of conceptual definition and historiographic status, a certain instability remains. In the course of the development of European thought, many thinkers and philosophers have thus drawn, more or less, on conceptual and theoretical resources, inventive and technical, typically perspectivist, coming from, among others, astronomy, architecture, cartography, of the optics or still of the painting, of the more or less visual arts, in order to appropriate, in terms and uses properly metaphysical, certain constitutive objects of the ontology said traditional, such the "World", the "Reality", the "Truth".

A certain perspectivist logic makes the idea of "perspectivity" or "point of view/ View from" appear as a fundamental operator structuring the typological variety of philosophical perspectivisms, and this, since the eristic jousts between Plato and Protagoras, among other Sophists, through the speculations of the Neoplatonisms, the cosmology in the Renaissance, the classical rationalism, the German idealism and the hermeneutics, up to the phenomenology, the analytic philosophy and the contemporary metaphysics. This idea of "point of view/ View from" is redoubled by the concept of "multiperspectivity" widely mobilized in certain human and social sciences. To speak like Dewey and Rorty, it is also a certain "*specular image of the thought*", dependent on metaphorical devices opening to a symbolic space which works to deploy a theoretical, analytical and argumentative arsenal in favor of such or such "point of view/ View from", according to a lexical field pertaining to the paradigm of the visual perspective (angle, aspect, geometrical, View from, point of view, etc.) even if these speculations sometimes aim at deconstructing all or part of this same paradigm.

As Quentin Landenne underlines it, "*More generally, on the epistemological, anthropological, historical, ethical and political levels, the philosophical thought is transformed as it reflects the relations of dependence and relativity between the position which conditions the exercise of the knowledge and the aspects of the real which it can apprehend from this position. This relativity becomes even more complex by the pluralization of the subjective points of view and the corresponding objective aspects*". Notwithstanding, this relativity of the reality to the multiple points of view or perspectives from which the aspects take sense, does not lead in any way the whole of the thinkers, said perspectivists, to a self-refuting epistemic relativism or to a radical or generalized skepticism.

Many thinkers thus elaborate various strategies in order to circumscribe certain problems and limits pertaining to any logic of "point of view/ View from ". These last ones can constitute either, a kind of spawning between Charybdis, the dogmatic universalism, and Scylla, the skeptical relativism, or, an enterprise of (re)valorization of the perspectivity in order to deconstruct any universalizing claim.

Even more, some of them make the "point of view/ View from" the nexus of their speculations, considering either universalism as a perspectivism, among other possible ones, or, conversely, perspectivism as a universalism. On the contrary, other thinkers analyze precisely the perceptive and perspectival phenomena in order to make vain any universalist ambition in term of signification, and consider, before any exclusively epistemological and epistemic examination, the "perspectivity", either as constitutive of any structure of the real, or as an irrecusable dimension of the human life, even for the other lives than human.

Thus, the anthropological perspectivism of a Viveiros de Castro can be characterized as a singular conception of nature, because there is a way proper to perspectivism to qualify physical beings, the relations between physical and living realities, the laws of nature and of their development. Such perspectivist thinkers address common criticisms to a "naturalist" conception of nature, conception which crosses modernity and to which they intend to substitute another one. Let us note in this respect,

and from now on, that numerous anthropological (Viveiros de Castro, Latour, post and transhumanism, etc.) and epistemological attempts to dismantle the "naturalist" conception of nature have been made.) and epistemological attempts to shift the thinking from its anthropocentric orbit, to symmetrically invert the perspectives, between human and other than human, between subject and object, as the interobjectivity or the multinaturalism, constitute certainly, interesting speculative fictions on the theoretical level, rather to invalidate by the anthropological and ethnographic investigations, but that in spite of the appearances, they tend to re-inscribe and to confirm paradoxically the fundamental features of any perspectivism, in terms of specifically and strictly human interrogations.

The idea that any perspectivism would be reducible to an anthropocentric or humanistic conception is largely debatable, because for many scientists in the history of science and technology, perspective is above all a mechanical, non-human device.

In order to better understand what the idea of "point of view/ View from" or perspectivism can reveal and detect, we must take into account the singular instantiations that it can take and underline how much any point of view, offers a real or more or less increased visibility to certain states of affairs whereas it withdraws or makes lose some to others.

It is important to differentiate three aspects, dimensions or specific features where the logic of the "perspectivity" operates:

- **The first one**, perhaps the most manifest because the most commonly shared and invested whether we are philosopher or not, is the one of the intentional acts and of the representational consciousness. It deploys a dynamic of perspectivity as a phenomenal and discursive structure of individualized subjects.

- **The second one** refers above all to a dynamic of speculative thought and its movement which sees in "perspectivity" or "the idea of point of view" a fertile operator for any philosophical reflexivity as a whole. The world can thus tolerate multiple true descriptions and the apparent conflict of perspectives or aspectivism gives way to a real operator of meaning production.

- **The third** refers to a fundamentally ontological dimension which makes perspectivity the constitutive structure of reality, of being or even of life (contemporary social anthropology).

These three essential characteristics, which are undoubtedly not the only ones, can, moreover, be articulated in a theorization that combines them. It is also important to remember that "perspectivity" can in no way be reduced to a set of strictly determined or fixed theses or doctrinal corpus, which would constitute over time a sort of "*Philosophia perennis*" of perspectivism, nor in epistemological or methodological terms. "Perspectivity" is, it seems to us, much more a matter of a kind of specific modalities of interrogation, of a kind of methodological exploration, even of a certain characterization in the resolution of problems which can resist any typification or typology.

If, some constants, more or less formal, can be drawn behind the apparent differentiations between the perspectivist thinkers, it appears that when they invest such a logical step, each one generates singularly their own idea of what would be supposedly "a point of view/ a View from", be it natural, artificial, idealized or from nowhere. For their own conceptions and practices of the "point of view/ View from" are relative according to the limits, the necessities proper to the theoretical frameworks and their related interrogations deployed by these same thinkers.

For these reasons, we have to defy, in equal parts, certain perils in the examination of the "idea of point of view/ View from" which are symmetrical, the one of postulating a priori and/or of noting a posteriori a hypothetical substantial transhistorical unity of the "perspectivity". It is also necessary for

us to get rid of any will to want to elaborate abstractly such or such general conception of the "perspectivity" "in order to elucidate as much as possible, the different points of view of a certain logic of the "perspectivity", and this, in order to account for the irreducible plurality of the practices of this one, which testify at the same time to the points of contacts and incompatibilities, between the multiple thinkers said of the "point of view/ View from".

As examples, in order to better (re)question some of our beliefs or presuppositions about the idea of "perspectivity", Emmanuel Alloa warns us that the tradition of *perspectiva communis*, *the one that makes perspective the vector of a common horizon*, has been largely phagocytized when we consider in contemporary terms that the idea of "point of view" would be reducible to individualism or the affirmation of a private and unsurpassable truth, because the point of view is much less what separates us from each other than what we have in common. Indeed, far from a superficial reading that would make of any perspective a vector that relativizes, that would be supposedly the reverse of any idea of "objectivity", any perspective is constantly a "perspective of" something, a point of view on an object, it is about it. Far from a certain critical vulgate incriminating the idea of "point of view/ View from" as the paradigmatic vector of the relativism and the post-truth and consequently, of an ontological demonetarization of the world, the perspectivity is in no way reducible to a matter of relativization, but well of insightful, penetrating realization, where the insight of the perspective can be transformed, from a science of the vision to the one of the figuration, or even the representation.

Similarly, when some commentators question the sources of inspiration of Nietzschean "perspectivism", Lucie Lebreton pertinently points out that "*it was not Leibniz who first introduced this idea of perspective into philosophy, but Pascal. Pascal first contributed, following Desargues, to the mathematical formalization of this pictorial technique by writing a Treatise on Conics, now lost, but of which Leibniz had knowledge. This treatise established that figures as diverse as the ellipse, the parabola and the hyperbola can be considered as perspective deformations of the circle, insofar as they constitute the cuts of a cone by a plane whose inclination is varied. And it was Pascal who was the first to use this pictorial and mathematical paradigm in his philosophical and apologetic.*"

Philosophers as different as Gilles Deleuze and Thompson Clarke remind in their respective examinations, how much the idea of perspective or point of view is not so much a variation of the truth according to a subject as the condition under which appears to a subject the truth of a variation. In other words, if to see or to perceive is always to see or to perceive something, according to a certain modality, any perception always implies already, an alternative, not only perceptive, aspectual, that of having a possibility of seeing otherwise, but also opens to the idea of a "point of view/ View from" for others, other than mine. Even more, to see a state of affairs as this, rather than that, is to recognize the continually present possibility that it could be otherwise. Any personal point of view/ View from only makes sense against the background of other possibilities, a horizon expanded to those of others, contingent and variable, which are constituted on a sharing of perspectives.

Thus, to envisage or to see the complexity and the richness of the expression "View from Nowhere", leads us to take all the measure of what at the same time we can consider and what limits us in this consideration of the expression "View from Nowhere" on which at the same time our perception and our thought are fundamentally dependent. Any perception of the difficulties to understand "The View from Nowhere" occurs only on bottom of co-perception which makes us share this conference. The perspective has a double dimension. It is at the same time intransitive, because it presents us according to certain guides or modalities, an object, real or of the thought, which exceeds ineluctably all the comprehensions or perspectives that we could produce, *hic et nunc* ; and transitive,

because it characterizes fundamentally a process always at work, possibly in becoming, even if it forces us, by a reflexive act, to relativize our own point of view, about the idea of "View from Nowhere" by adopting temporarily or not, all or part of the point of view of others.

To see and to have a perspective or a point of view/ View from on " View from Nowhere" is also to see "in a certain sense", because we really never have a global or totalizing vision of a thing, an event or an object of thought. The project of a meta-perspective is always doubtful. We understand or see "View from Nowhere" only insofar as relatively, this idea or expression gives itself "as a glimpse", as an aspect. Notwithstanding, this expression or idea of "View from Nowhere" is by no means restricted to the only propositional structure of the type "*S is considered as being P*", it is also part of a possible structure of the phenomenal field which is organized according to a logic of contrasts.

In fact, the possibility of varying aspectual differences, the capacity of varying a given, operates as a multiplier of the ways of accessing things and proves to be both a masterly advance in the process of knowledge and the possibility of elaborating a common, objective and shared world. Consequently, "the idea of "point of view/View from." does not only cover a guarantee to the subjective particularism, but constitutes possibly the aggregation and the concatenation of multiple points of view, from alternative options which work to the objectivity. Because, far from being the absence of any perspective, objectivity, whatever it is, supposes an inter-perspectivity, even a trans-perspectivity, a kind of meta-perspectivity which really gives consistency to things, by making them happen, by realizing them. Besides, this convergence of the points of view maintains open any corrective possibility and of revision to come, any possible perspective in becoming, was it distinct or renewed, for what obliges us here, the famous "View from Nowhere".

This is why strong interrogations remain that I deliver to the whole of your speculations and controversies, without answering them: Which sense(s) or meaning(s) can really have a "View from Nowhere"? What phenomenal or experiential field(s) does it ultimately belong to? What can be the "what" our "View from Nowhere" is possibly able to be configured by and possibly able to access a visibility, idealized, conceptualized, even incarnated, represented or symbolized? It is the whole problem of its nature of fictional and functional operator... Let us also notice the fact according to which we know since Aristotle that if the being says itself according to multiple ways, this plurivocity does not lead, neither necessarily to split the ontological unity of this last, nor to put between brackets any constitution of the objectivity, as contemporary philosophy also reminds us in great part. This is why, there are deep and real reasons to question us on the dimensions, onto-logical and semantic of "View from Nowhere" insofar as any perspective, on this so singular perspectivism, that is "View from Nowhere", always exceeds itself towards a real that slips away from its hold.

Conclusion:

As a temporary conclusion, beyond the only challenge that it can represent, we tried to give an account at the same time of an irreducible plurality of aspects and uses mobilized by the idea of " point of view " View From nowhere ", without for all that to divest itself of a questioning about a possible perspective common to any thought of a certain " point of view/View from ", being the one of "Nowhere", up to its apparently paradoxical tensions, as the one to know where could be situated "nowhere", and this, by seeking the least possible to impose a reductionism or a set of convergences to such or such figures or typifications, was it paradigmatic as the one of the representationalist or visual model, without for all that making them illusory. As with Wittgenstein and Travis, we could reaffirm the role of context in determining the meaning of a " View from Nowhere", for language prescribes the measure of what is contextually relevant in order to say what can be said in a given

context. In a sense, every context unfolds the possibility of a certain perspective that may or may not allow words to say what they mean, which in turn explains why every equivocal context introduces equivocality into discourse.

Nevertheless, the possibility of a perspective or a point of view/ View from can in no way be reduced or identified to a context which would take the form of a language game where contextualism and perspectivism would be almost identical, where answering the question: What is the View from Nowhere? with "it depends on such and such a point of view/ View from" would be relatively equivalent to answering with "it depends on such and such a context". We thus have the possibility of making language say what we wish or want to say by the conceptual expression "View from Nowhere" and this, relatively to the singularity of this or that point of view or perspective that we have to distinguish from this or that context.

A certain sensitivity to contextual and language dimensions can thus constitute the place where the generality of the conceptual is articulated to the singularity of any context. This place can give us a glimpse of a "sensitivity to occasion", in the words of the philosopher Charles Travis, in equal measure, which makes us say and allows us to grasp what our interlocutors are saying to us contextually when we summon up, both of us, the idea of "a view from nowhere". To put it in Wittgensteinian terms, this conceptual expression has the capacity to adjust to a situation because our concepts are properly the measure of what they mean, on that occasion or situation.

In other words, there is a practical necessity that makes our concepts and their uses, possible spaces of agreement to formulate this or that judgment on the meaning and the uses that we could give to the "View from nowhere".

This is why, we could thus partly solve the problem of the meaning of the expression "View from Nowhere" which is not reduced at all to the only conception of a matter of solipsistic point of view, that we would have more or less, the others, because the meaning is also a matter of localized or situated common understanding, produced in and by language, to which we may or may not subscribe, through our language practices, including their irreducibly idiosyncratic aspects, and which, for example, have allowed us to respond to the call for papers and still lead us to exchange, all of us, our points of view, our perspectives on this "Famous View from Nowhere".

Because, let us recognize it modestly, the imposing legacy of the multiple conceptions and practices of the perspectivism did not impose us at all by such or such testaments, that they are philosophical or not, that would lead us to pretend to freeze any "point of view" on the perspectivisms that present us, more or less, a certain "Family resemblance/ but too family area", even if undoubtedly, as in any family, there are debates and controversies. Moreover, each member of this "family resemblance/ or too Family area" can be defined as the other or "the expression of a possible world", that is to say as the one who perceives what I do not perceive myself, which tends to propose, as in Deleuze, for example, a redefinition of the other in terms of "disjunction of perspectives" or of "alternative perspective".

Even more, we must recognize that any perspective on the perspectivism of the "point of view of nowhere" fades away as a perspective. It is annihilated in its very partiality, and this insofar as it constitutes only "one point of view/ View from", among other possible ones, and that it must fundamentally concede all its place to the realities of the other perspectives of which it offers only a glimpse. Therefore, to reflect on what can be "the Idea of View from Nowhere", gives an opening to the whole of possible for the thought, for our practices and uses of the things, fertile and creative condition. This also makes us touch with our finger, to speak as Descartes, to the perspective proper to any philosophical enterprise : from which point(s) of view do we pretend to authorize ourselves to

speak in philosophical terms, from a "View from Nowhere", that is to say also to pretend to have a cognitive and linguistic capacity to make a certain use of words beyond their only non-philosophical meanings or be supposed as such?

For all these reasons and finally, dear friends, in order to put things in perspective, whether we are philosophers or not, thinking is, more or less, about overcoming contradictions, and if the contradictions were not everywhere or on every side, thinking would be at home, like the point of view, View from, "Nowhere".

Thank you very much for your attention!

Selective bibliography :

- Alloa Emmanuel, (2020), *Partages de la perspective*, Paris, Collection " Ouvertures ", Fayard.
- Alloa Emmanuel (ed.), (2018), *Choses en soi. Métaphysique du réalisme*. Presses Universitaires de France
- Bimbenet Etienne, " Un motif d'étonnement majeur : le perspectivisme ", *Revue Alter*, 16, 2008, p. 87-108.
- Bourdieu Pierre, " L'espace des points de vue ", in *La Misère du monde*, Paris, Seuil, 1993, p. 10.
- Chamois Camille, (2022), *Un autre monde possible : Gilles Deleuze face aux perspectivismes contemporains*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Chamois Camille, « Le perspectivisme est-il une "théorie de l'esprit locale" » ? in *L'Homme*, avril/juin 2021, No. 238, pp. 35-62
- Chamois Camille. « Perspectivismes. Sur deux usages de la notion de « perspective » dans la philosophie contemporaine », Emmanuel Alloa (éd.), (2018), *Choses en soi. Métaphysique du réalisme*. Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 479-489.
- Clarke, Thompson Morgan, "Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects", *Philosophy in America*, Edited by Max Black, First edition, 1964, pp. 98-114.
- Damisch, Hubert (2012), *L'origine de la perspective*, Paris, Flammarion.
- Deleuze Gilles,(1988), *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*, Paris, éditions de Minuit.
- Gadamer Hans-Georg, [1960], *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, trad. française Édition intégrale établie par Pierre Fruchon, Jean Grondin et Gilbert Merlio. *Vérité et méthode*, Paris, Seuil, 1996.
- de Gaudemar, Martine. « Relativisme et perspectivisme chez Leibniz », *Dix-septième siècle*, vol. 226, no. 1, 2005, pp. 111-134.
- Gibert Mathias (2022), *La subversion de la perspective : recherches philosophiques sur les origines du perspectivisme*, Doctoral Dissertation /Thèse inédite soutenue le 22 octobre 2022, Département de philosophie, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès.

- Landenne Quentin (Dir.), (2020), *Philosopher en points de vue : Histoire des perspectivismes philosophiques*. Bruxelles, Presses de l'Université Saint-Louis.
- Lebreton Lucie, « Généalogie de la pensée perspectiviste :les figures inversées de Pascal et de Leibniz dans l'œuvre de Nietzsche », *Dialogue* 59 (2020), pp.677–700- (p.677) Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Canadian Philosophical Association/l'Association canadienne de philosophie.
- Leibniz Wilhem Gottfried, « Monadologie », dans *Principes de la Nature et de la Grâce – Monadologie et autres textes*, édition, C. Frémont, Flammarion, 1996, § 15.
- Moore W. Adrian, (1997), *Points of View*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Nagel Thomas, (1979), « Subjective and Objective », in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, trad. française, P. Engel et C. Tiercelin, « Le subjectif et l'objectif » in *Questions mortelles*,(1983) Paris, éditions de l'Eclat, p. 227
- Nagel Thomas, (1986), *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford University Press, trad. française Sonia Kronlund, *Le point de vue de nulle part*, Paris, éditions de l'Eclat, 1993, chap. 1.
- Pascal Blaise, *Œuvres complètes*, éd. Michel Le Guern, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, Gallimard, 2 volumes, 1998 et 2000.
- Putnam Hilary, (1990), *Realism with a Human Face*, Harvard University Press.
- Rorty Richard (2017) [1979], *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press; trad. Fr. Olivier Tinland, *La philosophie et le miroir de la nature*, Paris, Seuil.
- Salanskis Jean-Michel,(2019), *La voie idéale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.