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Orientation, Indexicality, and Comparisons

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Abstract: In his 1786 essay, *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?*, Kant characterizes the business of reasoning by referring to the use of the spatial orientations ‘right’ and ‘left’; he, then, extends his analysis to mathematical and logical ways of orientation. The following paper will start off by analyzing the Kantian standard account of orientation to, eventually, amend that account by deepening and correcting it in three respects: the indexical character of orientation that is due to the particular standpoint of the subject who is oriented by a particular cluster of available reference points; the twofold comparative procedure of orientation in which a situation is assessed by virtue of a practically justified and indexically structured net of orientation; and the receptive modes of orientation, mirroring the ‘existential’ fact that the subject is already oriented to a situation by established institutions. The paper ends in briefly considering the pitfalls and benefits of being disoriented.

Keywords: orientation, Kant, comparison, indexicals, disorientation

1 Introduction: A Philosophy of Orientation?

We all know the familiar scenario: trying to find one’s way in a foreign city, having the map at hand or on display, locating oneself on the map by referring to salient markers, buildings, street names, background knowledge or assumptions in order to tentatively move in one direction while repeatedly comparing the given surroundings to the necessarily reductive topology called a street map. ‘Orientation’ is used here to mean a diverse set of particular actions that remain, for the most part, latent and implicit. The term seems to serve as a wide-ranging concept encompassing several actions, including locating, adjusting, correcting, aligning and, especially, comparing what one encounters as reality to an instrument of orientation that is a sketch of, in one way or another, that very reality. What interests me in the following paper is precisely this relation between a situation as a ‘slice’ of reality, as it were, and our orienting means and tools. In short, I want to explore the

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act of orienting oneself and its connection to the act of comparing that occurs in orientation – a connection that will bring to light additional features of the nature of comparison.

Orientation as a philosophical topic entails intriguing questions of theoretical and practical impact: the necessity of orientation in a given situation under uncertain conditions and confronted with divergent, potentially incompatible alternatives (*plurality*); the instability of orientation given its provisional nature until certain practical requirements are fulfilled by a complicated interplay between a standpoint, references and a particular horizon (*performativity*); the uniqueness of each orientation means that it only has helpful significance *for someone* particular (*indexicality*); and finally, the relativity of our orientation tools entails a comparative procedure between a slice of reality and an oversimplified sketch of reality (*comparability*).

However, what is the point of a general account of orientation? What problem does clarifying the concept solve? Why investing in this concept in the first place? These are fair questions that mirror the seemingly marginal character of the topic. However, the act and ‘institution’ of orientation is a pervasive phenomenon, as alluded to at the outset. And yet, there is a crucial misbalance between the topic’s factual prominence and its philosophical neglect. The paper responds to that problem. But there is more to it, there is a growing interest in what I would like to coin “philosophy of existence”. While (analytic) philosophy does usually show not much interest in problems traditionally dealt with in the existentialist tradition, such as death, love or sense, a new thematic and methodological openness to these topics is developing in recent time.¹ Here, the modes of existence, i.e. the ways in which one exists, come into play. Obviously, orientation is such a mode. This paper makes this existential mode explicit.

I shall deepen our understanding of orientation by drawing our attention to three additional and, somehow, corrective elements. First, we will consider the indexical character of orientation that is due to the standpoint from which an orienting perspective is taken as well as the usage of a local vocabulary to express this very perspective. Second, we will elaborate on the comparative (partly symmetrical, partly hierarchical) relation between a given situation and the means of orientation (a map, rules, policies, etc.). Third, we will examine the idea that orientation occurs not always deliberately, i.e., that we are *already* oriented in a situation before we begin any orientation process – we do not start from ‘point zero’, rather we find ourselves, at least partly, being oriented by external conditions before we deliberate, choose, and make decisions. While suggesting analogies and similarities between very different ways of orienting oneself (or, being already oriented) – spatial, logical, existential –, the focus will be on the latter.

¹ Just one interesting example: Palle Yourgrau, *Death and Nonexistence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, esp. chapter III and IX.

2 Orienting Oneself: A Kantian Theme

Orientation as a philosophical topic is, comparatively, young. Immanuel Kant gave ‘orientation’ some prominence in responding to a debate between Friedrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelsohn on the possibility of *pure* reason against the backdrop of the so-called pantheism controversy.² In his 1786 essay, *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?*, Kant tries to characterize the business of reasoning by referring, initially, to the use of the spatial orientations ‘right’ and ‘left’. Kant notes that this vocabulary of ‘right’, ‘left’ and other relative terms does refer, but it is not determined by reality; neither perception nor thinking are able to draw the difference between ‘right’ and ‘left’ which led Kant to the (provisional) conclusion that this distinction is based on a “feeling”. It is interesting to see how Kant – who did not use ‘orientation’ before this seminal essay or after in any programmatic sense – proceeds from spatial language to mathematical and, then, logical orientation, i.e., from an empirical application to a, one might say, transcendental usage of orientation terminology; what this attribute, ‘transcendental’, precisely means in this context will become clearer in the course of this paper.³ And it is equally interesting to see how Kant – writing the essay between both editions of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87) – prepares, against his presumable intention, the shift from seeing orientation as a supplement to reason towards the acknowledgment that reason is just one instrument among the manifold means of orienting oneself. Hence, orientation is no longer reason’s supporting actor, but conversely, reason serves as an orienting performance.⁴

2 On this background cf. Werner Stegmaier, “‘Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren’: Zur Möglichkeit philosophischer Weltorientierung nach Kant”, in: *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 17:1 (1992), 1–16, 1–3.

3 Cf. also Francesco Totaro, “Orientierung, Perspektive, Wahrheit. Versuch einer Verbindung”, in: *Zur Philosophie der Orientierung*, ed. by Andrea Bertino et al., Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2016, 197–213, 199.

4 See Werner Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Orientierung*, Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2008, xix; hereafter *PO* (there is an English translation available now from De Gruyter 2019; but it is not a complete one, since several chapters are missing in this much shorter English version. Therefore, I will refer to the German original). – Kant’s call for enlightenment as mode of self-thinking belongs to this context as well. In other words, the emphasis on orientation with reason as one of its tools is connected to the imperative to use one’s own thinking to take leave “from his self-imposed nonage” (Immanuel Kant, “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” [1784], transl. by Mary C. Smith, available from Columbia University Press under: <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html#note1>).

Let's have a closer look. Kant begins by stating that the

"extended and more precisely determined concept of *orienting oneself* can be helpful to us in presenting distinctly the maxims healthy reason uses in working on its cognitions of supersensible objects."⁵

Before Kant touches on "supersensible objects" – and he actually does at the end of his essay in talking about faith and / in God – he offers an account of 'right' and 'left'. As noted above, Kant emphasizes the fact that nothing 'outside' settles this binary distinction; however, it is not the business of apriori judgments either. Kant, therefore, concludes that a "feeling" (*Gefühl*) grounds the difference between right and left: "Thus even with all the objective data of the sky, I orient myself *geographically* only through a *subjective* ground of differentiation [...]" (135) The exclusion of "objective data" reflects the fact that 'right' and 'left' are not part of the world's furniture, but are rather to be found *in us*.

While "feeling" is, particularly under Kant's own premises, a fairly unhappy terminological choice,⁶ the "subjective" character articulated by that term is the core element that a philosophy of orientation might take as its starting point. This subjectivity should not be misunderstood as a plea for a merely subjectivistic stance, but it does express the essentially *indexical* character of orientation: it is always an orientation *for* someone who establishes the distinction between 'right' and 'left' in the world by taking up a standpoint. What serves as orientation for x, however, does not have to be one for y; and what is 'right' and 'left' for x, does not have to be 'right' and 'left' for y (for instance, when standing opposite to each other). Moreover, to entertain and apply this distinction is, as Kant holds, a "*need of reason*" (136: "*ein Bedürfnis der Vernunft*");

"But now there enters *the right* of reason's *need*, as a subjective ground for presupposing and assuming something which reason may not presume to know through objective grounds; and

5 Immanuel Kant, *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?* [1786], edited and translated by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 1–18, AA 8:134.

6 Kant repudiated forcefully the philosophical usage of „feeling“ in his *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals* [1785]. *A German-English Edition*, ed. and translated by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 133–135; besides this internal ambiguity in Kant, there is a further reason for why this terminological choice is not a 'happy' one: 'feeling' has a ramified meaning in German and it does so already in Kant's time; one might think of Kant's contemporary Friedrich Schleiermacher and his usage of 'feeling' in his famous *Speeches* (1799); there we have a rather anti-Kantian usage of that term; hence, 'unhappy' refers to that semantic uncertainty between a more cognitive and theoretical sense vs. a more embodied and physical meaning; cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by John Oman, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958, esp. 34 and 39. See also Werner Stegmaier, "Orientierung. Einleitung", in: idem (ed.), *Orientierung. Philosophische Perspektiven*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005, 14–50, 21, note 14.

consequently for *orienting* itself in thinking, solely through reason's own need, in that immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark night." (137)

However, Kant is, of course, not primarily interested in spatial orientation. He moves from mere topology to mathematics, and from there, to logic. In other words, he leaves behind the geometrical space of extension, movement and directions for the 'pure' space of thinking. Here, one might hesitate to accept this metaphorization of space: the contingencies of geographical orientation may not be sufficiently adequate to an abstract notion of space including mathematical and logical necessities. Moreover, space (alongside with time) serves as "pure form of intuition" in Kant's transcendental aesthetics, while orientation is an act *within* that space; thus, in contrast to geometrical orientation, the orienting distinctions and terms of mathematics and logic not only 'belong' to the relevant space but also are constitutive of it. Nevertheless, Kant seems to think that reason has similar "needs" that could be met by establishing certain distinctions as well as stipulating particular entities (136).

However, in Kant's essay, the (abductive) stipulation (i.e., that reason needs orientation) is not worked out by referring to mathematical or logical deliberations, but rather – and not surprisingly, given the pantheistic context of the debate – within a theological and moral framework. Kant rejects the inference of God's existence from observation or from the course of nature; that would open the gate "to all enthusiasm, superstition and even to atheism" (143). Divine existence is, thus, not a matter of insight and knowledge, but is rather a particular "need" of reason. What kind of need is this? Kant sticks to allusions in the essay, but what he has in mind is well known from his moral defense of God's existence in his *Critique of Pure Reason*: God's existence is an entailment of the morally necessary postulate of immortality by virtue of which the fulfillment of duties and the prospects of happiness are, eventually, compatible.⁷ God – or God as an idea – safeguards morality from an existential void in which following duties achieves no satisfaction.

Without this theological supplement, Kant states, reason would "feel" its insufficiencies. Without the affirmation of a divine reality there is a breakdown in the relation between being moral and the "pursuit of happiness". Rationally believing in God is, hence, not rational by reasonable inferences and empirically secured grounds, but because God is an indispensable "*hypothesis*" for human conduct, both individually and collectively (141). In other words, God as topic belongs solely

⁷ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781/87], ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, A 812 / B 840; see also Andrew Chignell, „Rational Hope, Moral Order, and the Revolution of the Will“, in: Eric Watkins (ed.), *Divine Order, Human Order, and the Order of Nature: Historical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 197–218, esp. 212–213.

to the *practical* – and *not* to the pure and theoretical – use of reason. And only this practical and “rational”, while rationalized belief in God can, Kant concludes, serve as a “signpost or compass” for orienting the “speculative thinker” in “the field of supersensible objects”, divine as well as moral ones (142).⁸

I will skip the usual critique of Kant’s optimism concerning the synchronic unity and diachronic stability of reason – an alleged singular, pure and purified reason yielding orientation for our time, rather than being itself in “need” of getting oriented in the era of its fragmentation.⁹ And I will also skip the rather exegetical, context-bound discussion about the precise relation between orientation as a fruitful topic in its own right and the theological and ethical effort to unify morality and happiness by abduction.¹⁰ What we can learn, however, from Kant’s essay is an awareness of the specific traits of the act of orientation: the peculiar status of the orienting vocabulary – with the question of whether its indexicality also applies to non-spatial orientation; the necessarily “subjective” and, one might add, embodied character of orientation – stressing the relative, but not relativistic involvement of the person being oriented; and the non-‘mythological’ given of a situation calling for orientation – negotiating anew the relation between actively responding to the need to be oriented and the receptivity of the person needing orientation who is finding herself already within a cluster of orientation(s). We will consider each of these aspects in the argument to come.

3 Orientation’s Architecture: An Extended Analysis

Orientation is never restricted to mere objects or quasi-atomistic entities; rather, it is contextual or even holistic. As noted above, orientation is both particular and unconfined; sometimes more extended ‘worlds’ do not remain untouched by the act of orientation. The person being oriented is not beyond or outside the given situation, but is part of a concrete arrangement of things whose relevance for the

⁸ Cf. also Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019, Vol. 2: Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen, chapter VIII.3, esp. 306 and 312–13.

⁹ See Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, Cambridge, MA / London: Harvard University Press, 2002, chapter 1 and 3.

¹⁰ Cf. Sven Bernecker, “Kant on Spatial Orientation”, in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 24:4 (2012), 519–533, 524–527; for a phenomenological interpretation see Peter Woelert, “Kant’s hands, spatial orientation, and the Copernican turn”, in: *Continental Philosophical Review* 40:1 (2007), 139–150, esp. 143–145.

orienting act is not yet fully determined.¹¹ Hence, what counts as the given situation is bound to the orienting act referring to that situation – whether limiting or widening its scope for creating a “surveyable representation”¹².

3.1 Defining Orientation

The German philosopher Werner Stegmaier presented the notion of orientation as an “ultimate and basic concept” in philosophy and for human conduct in general.¹³ In several texts, he circumscribes orientation as the “capacity to find one’s way around in changing situations and to exploit in them possibilities of acting”¹⁴. A more formal account of orientation as an act consisting of several components might look like the following formula *F*:

F: Someone (i: the subject of orientation) locates herself (ii: the self-locating act) in something (iii: the space of orientation) by means of something (iv: points of reference) in relation to something (v: the order or arrangement).

Formula *F* takes us nearer to a real definition because it avoids the circular notion of “finding one’s way around”. In place of this imprecise use of language, orientation is here regarded as a particular form of *performative self-location*. Orientation ‘exists’ only in and by the act of orienting oneself and, thereby, it constitutes a twofold self-location, namely in the ‘subjective’ sense of establishing an orienting cluster from the person’s point of view as well as in the ‘objective’ sense of locating oneself within a preexisting order. This brings us back to the five elements in *F*: Ad (i): Orientation presupposes a bearer orienting herself, since orientation as an act is based on a subject performing that act, whether individually or collectively. Thus, one might say that orientation is necessarily agent-centered.¹⁵ Ad (ii): Although orientation is bound to a standpoint, it calls, additionally, for a locating act. Having a standpoint does not mean that an agent knows exactly where it is. Hence, the standpoint has to be determined as a particular location. Ad (iii): This self-

¹¹ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Second and revised edition, transl. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London / New York: Continuum, 2004, 283.

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Part I, 3rd edition, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, transl. by G.E.M. Anscombe, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973, 1–172, § 122.

¹³ Werner Stegmaier, PO, xv.

¹⁴ „Orientierung. Einleitung“, 16.

¹⁵ Speaking here of a “bearer” of the orienting act or that orientation is “necessarily agent-centered” is, by no means, a return to activate the formerly criticized subjectivism, i.e., the depiction of the orienting bearer as sovereign and detached actor. Hence, this phrasing here is compatible with the *receptive* element of orientation; see also section 3.5.

location implies a surrounding because orientation is contextual, not atomistic. A standpoint is such a point only within an environment, while a self-location is the precise relating of that standpoint to the environment. Ad (iv): This relation, however, presupposes points of reference within the environment, salient markers tentatively defining the space of orientation by qualifying it in highlighting particular things and neglecting others. Ad (v): And all this is done by reference to an order or cluster that might be derived from the situation in which one orients oneself but is not identical with it. A map, for example, might serve as such an order, reflecting that situation in reduced form for the sake of orientation.

The elements (i) through (v) are meant to be an analytic differentiation; in reality they are connected to each other and constitute together the act of orientation. However, they are sufficient for characterizing the orienting act: if all five elements are present, an orientation is not only possible but will follow. It might be debatable whether all five elements are also necessary, particularly regarding the last item. Obviously, there are cases in which (v) is not required or entailed by other elements. For instance, an orientation in the geographical sense is possible without a map. Either the map remains implicit (as a ‘mental image’) or is redundant due to the triangle of context, standpoint and references.

3.2 Orientation in its Element

I shall start off by briefly presenting Stegmaier’s traditional (or standard) account of orientation. In the sections following I will attempt to amend that account in three important regards – in keywords: indexicality (section 3.3), comparability (section 3.4), and receptivity (section 3.5).

Trivially, orientation is an act in space and time. It is less trivial that *spatial* orientation – in a literal, hence, geographical sense, and in a metaphorical, for example, moral sense – leads to two concepts of ‘world’. On the one hand, there is the abstract notion of world as a meaningless and container-like space in which orientation takes place. On the other hand, orientation has to do with an extract of that world that is significant for the agent. Therefore, we are dealing with the duality of a presupposed realm in which all human actions have their place as well as a meaningful and therefore already determined world in which our actual dealings have their home. The first one is not much more, Stegmaier claims, than a “marginal condition”¹⁶ for our acting; whereas, human beings are actively (and not just ‘marginally’) involved in the concrete world of conduct. Orientation could be understood as transforming the abstract space into the world as significant

¹⁶ “Weltabkürzungskunst“, 128.

context. However, following that path would lead into an impasse since, as we just stated, orientation does not start at a point of nowhere, but replaces – by correcting, amending, rearranging – already existing orientations. Hence, orientation cannot be the transformation of the merely abstract into the concrete world; rather, the abstract world might serve as the realm in which shifts from one orientation to another one (*diachronic*) or the conflict between divergent orientations (*synchronic*) takes place. The abstract world is, then, not to be found beyond the concrete orientation, but is alluded to by the shifts between plural ways of being oriented.¹⁷

Orientation is always *temporary* in “temporalizing” the world, as Stegmaier holds.¹⁸ As a performative act orientation ‘exists’ only in that very performance and dissolves again as soon as the needs of the orienting subject are satisfied. But there is also a structural aspect to orientation’s temporality insofar as the act of orientation is both a reaction to a situation calling for orientation while constituting that very situation. Usually, this structure is linked to temporal pressure and, often enough, urgency. Therefore, Stegmaier characterizes orientation as a particular mood (*Stimmung*) of alarm and disquiet. Something is at stake when it comes to orientation, namely, achieving what a certain situation demands from us and calls for. The extent of alarm mirrors, Stegmaier adds, the extent of orientation’s relevance; it reflects, rather negatively, the significance of ‘finding one’s way around’ in the face of the possibility of failure. Accordingly, dealing with this persistent uncertainty and the alarming mood that accompanies it requires reacting to with courage and awareness. A situation calls for an orienting reaction and, so it seems, gets intensified by that reaction. This reaction as an immediate response is characterized as mood – in contrast to a feeling, emotion or even knowledge – and leads, as it were, to a second-order-response to that mood with an attitude of courage under uncertain circumstances and increased awareness. Here, orientation as a duality of mood and attitude is already embedded in the psychological setting which comes with the urgency of the situation, the temporalizing orientation and our involvement in that setting somewhere between alarm and coolness.¹⁹

Orientation is, as we have already noted, the attempt to gain a “surveyable representation” of a given situation. In order to do this with success (whatever

¹⁷ This diagnosis resembles Heidegger’s distinction between ‘presence-at-hand’ (*Vorhandenheit*) and ‘readiness-to-hand’ (*Zuhandenheit*); see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, §§ 15, 16 and 18; cf. also Denis McManus, *Heidegger and the Measure of Truth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, chapters 3 and 7.

¹⁸ “Weltabkürzungskunst“, 131.

¹⁹ Cf. PO, 162–164 and 174.

‘success’ might mean in detail here) the orienting act must be *reductive* and, therefore, *selective*. Trying to find one’s way in a foreign city means denoting particular markers while neglecting the rest. There is no orientation without that kind of reduction. The scope of a “situation” might be widened or limited, broadened or focused according to the orienting needs. Hence, we are dealing here with two forms of latitudes: the selective process of marking optional reference points as well as choosing the adequate scope for approaching the situation.²⁰ To orient oneself in a situation is thus both structural and practical, structural because it is a necessary reduction of complexity in uncertain conditions and practical because it occurs under the particular pressure of urgency. In Stegmaier’s formulation: “orientation is an art of abbreviating the world”²¹.

Orientation as an abbreviation of the world is not only structuring the situation but is itself a structure consisting of a standpoint, a horizon, and selected reference points. While a standpoint is already given by the subject – the standpoint as, therefore, a “contingent absolute”²² – and while a horizon is necessarily linked to that standpoint, the reference points are not simply given, but chosen or adopted according to the requirements within the situation. All these expressions are, obviously, spatial metaphors derived from orientation in a spatial arrangement, but are also meant to be relevant for non-spatial ways of orienting oneself. A crucial question will be whether the “language-game of orientation”²³ is still in play if used for acts of moral or political orientation (see section 3.4). In any case, the “sub-metaphors” of orientation – standpoint, horizon, and reference points – make it clear that the pervasiveness of orientation raises also the question of *perspectivism*, an epistemological doctrine that circumvents the extremes of full-blown realism and a helplessly relativistic position. If a “view from nowhere” is not at hand, what is left then is a “view from somewhere”, hence always a particular point from which a perspective is taken. One might claim that every orientation is taking up a particular perspective (among possible alternatives, since talking of one perspective entails that there are more than just one) while being connected to the contextual concern of ‘finding one’s way around’ (what is, apparently, not the case for every perspective). Speaking is the “pervasiveness of orientation” does not imply, however, the claim that everything is a question of orientation; and insofar as orientation leads to perspectivism, it would also be besides the point to declare

²⁰ Cf. Werner Stegmaier, PO, 155; idem, „Spielräume der Moral in Orientierungssituationen“, in: Stefan Berg and Hartmut von Sass (eds.), *Spielzüge. Zur Dialektik des Spiels und seinem metaphorischen Mehrwert*, Freiburg im Br. / München: Karl Alber, 2014, 264–277, 271.

²¹ PO, chapter 8, esp. 282; idem, “‘Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren’“, 13.

²² PO, 200 and 203.

²³ Ibid., 194.

everything as perspectival. There are limits.²⁴ Nevertheless, orientation remains a highly prominent mode of existence, and thus, taking up a perspective inherits that prominence.

On this account, the orienting act is of a greater specificity than the more general task of taking up a perspective. Think, again, of our example: orientation in a foreign city implies two essential tasks: self-location and determining salient markers in relation to one's own standpoint. One orients oneself by means of something (see (iv) in the formula *F*), i.e., reference points that are selected from alternatives and that serve, by this qualification, as footholds. These footholds are conditionally stable assumptions. Accordingly, a reference point that is also a foothold (or hinge) implements a *paradoxical structure* into the act of orientation: it enables orientation while being itself established by that very act of orientation – a ground that is itself grounded by what it is grounding.

3.3 Orientation, Subjectivity, and Indexicality

As we have seen, without an orienting subject there is no act of orientation, i.e., without someone bringing the elements of orientation – a standpoint, horizon and reference points – ‘into the world’, this cluster does not exist in the first place. Orientation is thus not ‘objective’ but an essentially agent-centered act. Just as ‘right’ and ‘left’ are not ‘out there’ but bound to a standpoint for which these indexical demonstratives give precise directions, neither is orientation a part of the objective world. And yet, orientation is objective insofar as its indexical structure provides precise relations for the bearer and the bearer's contingent standpoint. Referring again to the formula, one might say that all further elements given in *F* are dependent on the ‘subjective’ establishment of a certain indexical structure.

Before turning to the indexical element and the problem of comparing the indexical elements of orientation with a particular environment calling for orientation, let us consider the ‘subjective’ character of orientation. It is interesting to see the sense in which the paradoxical structure – of a ground that is itself grounded by what it is grounding – is also pertinent for the way in which Kant characterizes the subject orienting itself. It is not only the case that Kant, rather implicitly, inverts the traditional order between reason and orientation by

²⁴ One might think of the examples discussed by G.E. Moore as “common sense” and, following him, by Ludwig Wittgenstein as “certainties”, such as “this is my hand” (pointing to one's hand), “my name is ...” (first person; self-reflective), etc. Here, taking up a perspective (and not another one) is, obviously, not the issue.

asserting that reason is one orienting tool among others.²⁵ He also disrupts the assumption of the stable subject of orientation. Accordingly, there is no subject independent of its actions – no subject of orientation without the orienting act – but rather the “transcendental subject” is itself only “a form of thinking”.²⁶ The idea that there is a subject for which, secondarily, things appear is confused, states Kant; rather, a subject is constituted by the fact that things appear for that very subject. Insofar as things are “given” to that subject, it exists as “a form”, but without that givenness the idea of an underlying subject remains empty.

In other words: the subject posits itself pragmatically through its actions. For Kant, the subject is a ‘form of thinking’ precisely to the extent that it is *not exhausted in its actions*. Therefore, the transcendental subject is a subject that is *not identical* with its actions (or representations), otherwise it would be a varied and different subject (this danger is apparent in the *Humean* counterposition). However, from this it does *not* follow, that the transcendental subject is fully (or, *de re*) independent of its actions (such as the act of orientation). Take a Kantian parallel case: concepts are different from *Anschaungen*, but without them they, as Kant holds, remain “empty” (AA IV, 48). Hence, concepts have only content in and by their application and together with *Anschaungen*, i.e., with empirical input. The same applies here: the subject and its actions are distinguishable, but not totally separable. This is to say, there is a *categorical difference, but no detachment*, there is a *distinction without separation*.²⁷

Likewise, the subject of orientation is not a substance with additional activities; a ‘subject’ is a subject only in and by these orienting activities. Or one might stress this inversion by claiming the subject of orientation to be orientation itself, as Stegmaier following Kant (and Heidegger) does; see below.²⁸

In this sense there is no *substantial*, only a *formal* difference between the self of orientation and the orienting act. The ‘subjective’ self of orientation takes shape precisely by the act of orientation in which we apply notions such as ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’.²⁹ Or in Stegmaier’s terminology: “In talking of orienting oneself the self as self-reference of orientation is already presupposed and not further to be justified

25 Kant’s heading “To Orient Oneself in Thinking?” has often been taken to propose that orientation is given by the act of thinking. That is mistaken, on the contrary, it is rather meant to be claiming the opposite, namely that we are dealing here with thinking in need of being structured by orientation; see Konrad Ott, “Zum Selbst der Orientierung“, in: *Zur Philosophie der Orientierung*. Herausgegeben von Andrea Bertino et. al., 115–126, 125.

26 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B 411; AA IV, 50.

27 Thanks to a reviewer of this journal for pushing me to this clarification.

28 See PO, 302; cf. Martin Heidegger on the notion of ‘Dasein’ in *Being and Time*, esp. § 25.

29 Cf. PO, 303; see also Ian Hacking, „The Archaeology of Michel Foucault“, in: idem, *Historical Ontology*, 73–86, esp. 82.

within the act of orientation.”³⁰ Hence, this self-reference as *consciousness* is not to be thought of as substance, but consciousness is this act of referring to itself, Stegmaier adds in a Humean fashion. And this self-referential act generates the idea of ‘I am thinking’, an idea that, as Kant once famously stated, has to accompany all other ideas.³¹ This idea of an ‘I’ is, however, devoid of any specific content and only expresses that a particular idea is *my* idea. By means of the idea and the concept of ‘I’ Kant understands the objectivity of objects to be grounded on talking about these objects – *objectivity through communication*.³² The shift from the subjectivity of the ‘I’ to objectivity among a plurality of ‘I’s is given, Stegmaier holds, because the pronoun ‘I’ is individual as well as general: one can only use ‘I’ in reference to oneself, but everyone is able to say ‘I’.³³

What can we learn from this Kantian intermezzo on subjectivity, self-reference and the ‘I’ for the act of orientation and its comparative element, i.e., the comparing of a given situation with a means of orientation? First, the self-orienting subject does not only establish the agent-bound elements of a standpoint, horizon and reference points; it exists only in and by this orienting performance; hence, both the act of orientation and its subject are ‘fluctuant’. Second, this leads us to the problem of indexicality and comparability: the subject of orientation belongs to the world in which it is situated and in which it locates itself while it is, at the same time, part of the indexical structure that the subject employs on a given situation. Therefore, the subject ‘is’ only in this double sense of belonging, on the one hand belonging to the ‘subjectively’ established structure of orientation, on the other hand belonging to a world that is grounded and ordered by that very structure. And insofar as the comparison implied by orientation is the one between a structure for the world and the structured world, and insofar as the subject ‘is’ only in and by orienting itself in this process, becoming a subject involves an indexical as well as a comparative element.

Let us focus for a moment on the indexical element. The basic observation is simple: an orientation for *x*, as we have seen, does not have to be an orientation for *y*; and what is ‘right’ and ‘left’ for *x*, does not have to be ‘right’ and ‘left’ for *y*, when they are standing opposite to each other, for example. Terms like ‘right’ and ‘left’, but also ‘I’, ‘there’, and ‘tomorrow’ are of “context-sensitive character”³⁴. There are

³⁰ PO, 302.

³¹ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B 132.

³² Cf. Werner Stegmaier, PO, 296.

³³ See *ibid.*; cf. also Tyler Burge, “Demonstrative Constructions, Reference, and Truth”, in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 71:7 (1974), 205–223, 209.

³⁴ David Kaplan, “Demonstratives. An Essay on Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and other Indexicals”, in: Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, 481–563, 506 and 531.

several differences however among this class of terms. One might, for instance, distinguish between indexicals that are linked to a demonstrative act (*true demonstratives*) and indexicals that do not need such an act (*pure indexicals*).

Our vocabulary for spatial orientation includes terms of both kinds; think of ‘up there’ or ‘over there’ for the first group and ‘right’ or ‘left’ for the second group (although there is often enough no strict line of demarcation).³⁵ Now, what both groups, true demonstratives and pure indexicals, semantically capture, is the simple fact that all these terms mean the same for each person – we do not have to interpret what ‘left’ and ‘right’ mean here – and yet, all these terms are essentially bound to a standpoint – without which ‘left’ and ‘right’ provide no direction.

There are several attempts to give an account of this difference between sense and reference.³⁶ One way of putting the matter, suggested by David Kaplan, distinguishes between the “character” and the “content” of true demonstratives and pure indexicals. Take, for example, the sentence “I am a football player”. This sentence has a single character, but different contents with respect to different speakers. There is a stable element in this sentence that is independent of who articulates the sentence; and there is a context-bound element to this sentence in relation to a particular context. If Jules says, “I am a football player,” and Jim does too, they say different things by the same sentence; if Jules says, “I am a football player,” and Jim says (pointing to Jules), “You are a football player,” they say the same thing, Kaplan states.³⁷

Obviously, the language of spatial orientation also includes true demonstratives and pure indexicals and thereby the difference between character and content is also at play.³⁸ As we have seen, the person being oriented has a cluster of reference points based on a particular standpoint. Now, this standpoint, belonging as it does to a particular bearer, entails that these reference points are referred to by indexicals, since it is always an orientation *for and by someone* without being relativistic or merely ‘subjectivistic’. Someone else might apply a similar orienting net of references (hence, of the *same character*), but there is still the difference between the two speakers (hence, of *different contents*). Consequently, orientation is based on the

³⁵ On this distinction cf. *ibid.*, 490–491. – I won’t enter the debate about essential indexicals, i.e., indexicals that are not translatable into non-indexical (or non-demonstrative) descriptions; see John Perry, “The Problem of the Essential Indexical”, in: *Noûs* 13:1 (1979), 3–21; for a critique of essential indexicals (that are, for Perry, supposed to entail only ‘I’ and ‘now’) see Ruth Millikan, “The Myth of the Essential Indexical”, in: *Noûs* 24:5 (1990), 723–734, 724 and 727.

³⁶ This is a difference that mirrors Gottlob Frege’s classical distinction between ‘sense’ and ‘reference’ (*Sinn* and *Bedeutung*); see his seminal paper “On Sinn and Bedeutung”, in: Michael Bearney (ed.), *The Frege Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997.

³⁷ See David Kaplan, “Demonstratives”, 505–506; cf. also Robert Stalnaker, “Indexical Belief”, in: *Synthese* 49:1 (1981), 129–151, 134.

³⁸ Cf. Sven Bernecker, “Kant on Spatial Orientation”, 525 and 527.

duality between a situation calling for an orienting response on the one side and, on the other, an orienting cluster of reference points that entails several indexicals: the subject of orientation ('I'), the self-locating act ('here') and points of references within a space of orientation ('left', 'right', 'there', etc.).³⁹ We can conclude, then, that the entire formula *F* is not only pervaded by indexicals but also the structure it represents is itself of indexical character (and content).

3.4 Orientation as Twofold Comparison

Our philosophical orientation using the language of spatial orientation looks like this now: orientation as a practice is a reaction to a need to be oriented in a particular situation. In such a scenario, someone is already taking up a certain standpoint such that that context of reality is no longer abstract or distant, since the orienting subject is involved in that situation in 'not knowing her way around'. In order to illuminate the situation, a cluster of reference points has to be established. The 'subjective' standpoint, along with these salient markers, creates an orienting cluster of elements. In this sense, reality is only given through the lens of this indexical, subject-bound construction. However, this is insufficient for a successful orientation since one needs an idea of the topographical relations between the several orienting references. In other words, one needs a map that objectively represents the scenario in question. Using the terminology of indexicals one might paraphrase this duality, between the 'subjectively' constructed cluster and the 'objective' representation of a situation, by describing the relevant distinction as the one between different contents and one shared character.

And here, the element of comparison is brought to light in two ways. In a consideration of philosophy as orientation we are not directly comparing 'reality' to tools of orientation such as a city map. Reality as such is not plainly given as it is when the subject is oriented. What is, however, relevant for the comparison is the order of reference points entailed by the orienting subject. This order is a construction, not wholly given or forced upon the subject, at least in terms of what counts as the situation in question (what the subject needs orientation to) and in regard to the particular references used in the course of orientation. Both elements, the 'situation' and the reference points, are variable: what counts as the 'situation' could be widened or narrowed, and alternative markers could replace the

³⁹ Sometimes a distinction is drawn between indexicals (like 'here' and 'there') and terms anchored to or being dependent on indexicals, as one reviewer of this journal suggested. And 'left / right' may belong only to that second group. I am not sure whether this distinction is apt or helpful, but will only state that even in the case of accepting the sketched difference, one does not have to modify anything said concerning the indexical element of 'left / right'.

reference points. Insofar as orientation is a response to a situation in which ‘one does not know one’s way around’ the orienting construction as a tentative attempt to dissolve this frustration has to be chosen and determined in relation to alternative constructions using other reference points. Once this construction is established – despite its uncertain status – it has to be put in relation to the tools of orientation, either an ideal representation of the situation or a city map. This is the other element of comparison in orientation: trying to correlate the information given by the orienting tool, the map, with the real situation while, conversely, correlating that particular situation with what the map shows. We are thus considering three layers and two comparisons in:

$$A \leftarrow \text{compare} \rightarrow B \leftarrow \text{compare} \rightarrow C$$

A: Reality in the form of a situation calling for orientation;

B: Indexical constructions (hence, $B_1, B_2, B_3, \dots, B_n$) of that reality consisting of the subject’s standpoint and reference points;

C: Tools of orientation (hence, $C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots, C_n$) representing ideally (a mental image or picture) or materially (city map) the situational reality in a reductive and selective way.

Spatial orientation implies – that is the crucial point here – the twofold act of comparing both A to B and B to C – without a direct comparison between A and C . First, a situation calls for orientation. One is not oriented to reality itself or as a whole, but in view of a particular setting. ‘Reality’ is a concrete situation in which the orienting subject finds herself. Second, the situation does not itself determine the salient markers of orientation – again, buildings, street names, background knowledge or assumptions – rather, the subject chooses or adopts these markers as tentative and practical stipulations that reduce and make more manageable the scene by highlighting situational bits. That means that there are different possible clusters of stipulating markers ($B_1, B_2, B_3, \dots$), which can be internally compared to one another, and then give rise to the question of which cluster meets the need of orientation best (or most efficiently). These various and potential clusters of markers also lead to an *external* comparison between a particular cluster B_n and the situation A concerning whether B_n is a helpful response to A . Third, the internal comparison does not, at least initially, give priority to any particular cluster: $B_1, B_2, B_3, \dots$ are compared to one another and the comparative question is answered according to which cluster provides the best (or most efficient) orientation. In contrast, the external comparison is temporally hierarchical: a particular orienting cluster ($B_1, B_2, B_3, \dots$) is adjusted to the situation or one presupposes the cluster B_n and considers the situation accordingly – this is the *hierarchical* element. Usually, we observe an oscillating back and forth between the priority of A and then the

priority of B_n and back again – this is the *temporal* aspect. Fourth, this duality of internally and externally comparing is repeated between B_n and an orienting tool C . Once again, the internal comparison is non-hierarchical in the sense that no priority is initially given to any particular cluster: $B_1, B_2, B_3, \dots$ are compared in relation to C , a map, for instance, by finding out which B_n best fits the topographical reduction. The external comparison between a particular B_n to the map C_n , however, is hierarchical because the map, as an established geographical tool, is authoritative in a way that construction B_n is not. The oscillation here is a kind of probing whether a stipulated cluster B fits what the map shows. This being said, sometimes this hierarchical order between B and C is reversed as when the map does not match the orienting needs by being either too imprecise or too fine-grained.⁴⁰

Fifth, there is, as already stated, no direct comparison between A and C . The reason: there is no orientation without having a stipulated cluster B derived from (but not identical with) the situation calling for an orienting act. This cluster thus stands between the situation (A) and the tools (C) to find orientation in it, sometimes nearer to A , at other times closer to C . Sixth, going from A to B and to C also increases the dependence upon the reductive features of orientation. Orientation is not possible unless there is a reduction of one's situation.⁴¹ And this reduction is performed first by *selecting* reference points and by neglecting others (that are, then, situated outside the stipulated order)⁴² (the move *from A to B*); and then by determining how the selected cluster is represented on the map (*from B to C*). Seventh and finally, our philosophical orientation to geographical orientation has an analytic and temporal status: *analytic* insofar as all elements considered here constitute the single act of getting oriented; *temporal* insofar as we are dealing here with a single practice consisting of different steps, or phases, that are neither always simultaneous nor always sequential, but are reductive and selectively sequential depending upon the particular need.

Now, are these considerations also applicable to non-spatial forms of orientation, including those called “existential” at the outset? Instead of responding directly, I shall briefly consider how the double comparison between three layers within the act of orienting oneself takes shape in a moral setting. Think of David Lurie, the protagonist in J.M. Coetzee's 1999 novel *Disgrace*. Lurie lost his university position after being convicted of sexual harassment. He moved in with his adult daughter Lucy who lives on a farm far from Cape Town. Lurie, the urban professor, is now exposed to a rural life dominated by agriculture and animals.

⁴⁰ Stegmaier holds that there is no hierarchical relation between the orienting act and the situation; the passage above is meant to correct this claim; see his “Orientierung. Einleitung“, 16; “Weltabkürzungskunst“, 134, PO, 42.

⁴¹ On the necessarily reductive element of orienting tools see Werner Stegmaier, PO, 652.

⁴² Cf. Stefan Berg, *Spielwerk. Orientierungshermeneutische Studien zum Verhältnis von Musik und Religion (RPT 60)*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011, 45.

Things change considerably after a severe attack by three men in which Lucy is raped, most of the animals are killed, and nearly everything of value is taken from the farm. The catastrophe destroys their form of existence, rendering them victims in need of a new orientation to existence. The novel narrates, among many other things, how Lurie gradually changes his attitude to animals, partly because of being exposed to the farm's dogs that survived the assault. Lucy withdraws herself, becoming much less active, and thus David must take care of the animals – and, eventually, becomes the “dog-man”, as Coetzee expresses this shift.⁴³

Obviously, the narrative is built around an existential rupture calling for a new orientation. This call does not remain merely abstract and hazy, but is highly concrete and detailed insofar as Coetzee focuses on particular elements of this search for, and eventual discovery of, a new orientation. One of these elements is Lurie's gradually shifting attitude to dogs – one of Coetzee's major interests, particularly in his later work: the life of animals and our relation to them. Lurie is, thrown into a new situation, trying to find new reference points as he struggles to make sense of his new responsibility for the dogs. In the course of events, his growing and deepening relation to the dogs challenges his complete degradation of animals. His old ethical stance – based on a categorical distinction between humans and animals, between conscious rationality and inferior animal instincts – no longer fits his experience of human crime and the nearness he feels to ‘his’ dogs.

It is not difficult to identify the situational element *A* in the story, given the need to reorient oneself after such an attack. It is less easy to find a new ethical framework – in particular with regard to animals – that fits Lurie's behavior. His initial ethical framework (*C*₁) remains latent for a long time, but is brought to a serious revision (*C*₂), and even substitution, by what happens to him and his daughter. One might assume that the novel's second part, narrating the events and developments after the catastrophe, is about this transformation from a moral view that leaves animals “outside ethics” to one that integrates them into our most important moral concerns (from *C*₁ to *C*₂).⁴⁴ This shift, however, also includes new reference points that take the form of emotional encounters with dogs, a deeper awareness of the human crimes committed against animals, and the growing sense of the animal instincts of humans against the backdrop of South Africa's post-Apartheid society (*B* – as, also, a shift from *B*₁ to *B*₂). In sum: the situation (*A*) has changed, but allows for divergent

⁴³ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Disgrace*, New York: Penguin Books, 1999, 64, 88, 146; see also the slightly controversial, but illuminating paper by Adriaan van Heerden, “Disgrace, Desire, and the Dark Side of the New South Africa”, in: Anton Leist and Peter Singer (eds.), *Coetzee and Philosophy. Philosophical Perspectives on Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 43–63, esp. 54–59.

⁴⁴ See, for the phrase “inside / outside” ethics, Alice Crary, *Inside Ethics. On the Demands of Moral Thought*, Cambridge, MA / London: Harvard University Press, 2016, esp. 11–12 and *passim*.

reactions; the protagonist is almost forced into changing fundamental assumptions (C) that touch on inter-personal relations as well as relations to animals. And this framework of assumptions develops, in detail, through confrontations with new reference points (B) within a particular setting. The situation (A) calls for a new orientation to existence but it does not directly initiate a revised or reformed ethical framework; the framework emerges by virtue of new (or potentially new) reference points within the scenario of disorientation, informing a deepened awareness of one's surrounding, including human and non-human animals.

Admittedly, the example does not serve as a strict argument for the general applicability of the A-B-C-structure. The example serves only to allude to that possibility by inviting us to consider non-spatial forms of orientation in a manner that is derived from the language of spatial orientation. We live in the spaces of acting, speaking, feeling, and thinking, all of which attest to traces of lost, eroded, regained, and newly established orientations. These ways of being oriented are replaceable but the person being oriented, the subject, is not.

3.5 On Being Already Oriented

Orientation is, as noted, an act bound to an individual or collective subject seeking orientation in a particular setting. This phrasing emphasizes the active and, to some extent, sovereign role that the orienting person plays. And this is the standard analysis, presented by the post-Kantian Stegmaier, which characterizes orientation as a *basically active practice*. This picture however needs some correction through an elaboration of the *passive modes* in which the non-sovereign, and not yet oriented, person finds himself. He might be thrown into a particular situation (A) after having lost the confidence of 'knowing his way around' (that is precisely David Lurie's position). The latently valid and, suddenly, challenged routines of being oriented, personally, morally, and socially, may get disrupted by external incidents that are not chosen. The loss of a set of convictions and the acquisition of a new set – after an interim of, hopefully, productive disorientation – is not simply a matter of active "picking and choosing"⁴⁵. Often enough, we resist a new set of orienting background assumptions (C) before accepting them as possibilities and, eventually, integrating them into our own self-understanding (Coetzee's novel narrates that ramified process). And, further, this uncertain dynamic is linked to eroding reference points and to finding or being exposed to new salient markers (B), derived from and given in a particular situation (recall again, Lurie's experiences of crime and the non-romanticized presence of animals).

⁴⁵ See Edna Ullmann-Margalit and Sidney Morgenbesser, "Picking and Choosing", in: *Social Research* 44:4 (1977), 757–785.

All these instances are, often enough, beyond our control. Being disoriented is, by definition, an unsettled stance that is not easily dissolvable by action and decision. However, these are not cases of mere passivity, either. The possibility of relating oneself to one's own disorientation on new grounds might be a first step, despite being involuntarily exposed to a situation in which one does 'not know one's way around'. In order to capture this space in between – between actively creating a new orientation and being passively thrown into it – one might speak of *receptivity*.

Three observations illustrate this case for receptivity. For one, finding a new orientation is always an act of *reorientation*. Hence, a new orientation comes from an old one. In order to orient oneself in a new way, one has to be already oriented – somehow. There is no neutral point devoid of every bit of orientation, no complete and all-encompassing disorientation, since we are necessarily (Heideggerians might reserve the term 'existentially') living in a "world of orientation"⁴⁶ by dwelling in this world. The receptive element lies in the fact that there is an orientation precedent that informs the new orientation, which replaces, amends, and rearranges that "world well lost". There are also deliberately adopted or latently accepted routines, orders and structures by which we orient ourselves. Examples are legion: the orientation by customs, conventions and experiences in our everyday life; the orientation by grammar and style in the way we communicate; the orientation by logic and rationality in thinking and, more rarely, debating; the orientation by law in the legal sphere; moral norms in our sense of duty and the allegiance to certain values; a set of rules in games or for traffic; rituals, confession and prayer as forms of religious orientation⁴⁷ – and so on. All of these different and differently authoritative ways of being oriented are commonly shared, but not independently chosen structures. And finally, the orienting routines may be so thoroughly engraved onto our ways of living that the order of action is inverted: it is not we who orient ourselves, but rather, we are being oriented within the dynamics of orientation. Eventually, one might experience a telling *inversion* from being the subject of orientation to being oriented in the course of the act of orienting oneself.⁴⁸

46 Werner Stegmaier, PO, 312: "Orientierungswelten".

47 Cf. Max Black, "Rules and Routines", in: idem, *Margins of Precision. Essay in Logic and Language*, Ithaca, NY / London: Cornell University Press, 1970, 41–56.

48 See Konrad Ott, "Zum Selbst der Orientierung", 125. – This kind of reversal might be familiar from other while relative debates in philosophy: think of what Heidegger and Gadamer (for instance, *Truth and Method*, 367) said about language, namely that we are in fact speaking languages, but that there is also a potential *inversion* in the sense that we are spoken by that language (in poems or prayers, or within more ordinary routines of speaking). Even if one takes that to be a merely 'metaphorical' way of putting the matter, there is this experience of passivity possible. The same point applies to the *receptive* aspect in being oriented.

There can be a sense of relief in having pre-established orientations so that one is not constantly forced to create them or to choose between them. And often enough we react with a *conservative* posture towards alternative orientations, persisting with known options and showing preference for what seems to be trustworthy and reliable. Orientation has its own memory.⁴⁹

4 Coda: The Perils and Treasures of Disorientation

It is time to reconsider the formula *F* and integrate our findings in this extended analysis of orientation. For this purpose I will focus on the three essential observations that take us beyond the standard account of orientation: the *indexical character* of orientation that is due to the particular standpoint of the subject who is oriented by a particular cluster of available reference points; the twofold *comparative procedure* of orientation in which a situation is assessed by virtue of a practically justified and indexically structured net of orientation; and the *receptive modes* of orientation, mirroring the ‘existential’ fact that the subject is already oriented to a situation by established institutions. These three observations alter our formula:

*F**: Someone (i: the individual or collective subject of orientation) locates herself or is already located (ii: the act or fact of locating the self) in a situation (iii: the qualified space of orientation) by an indexical cluster (iv: the standpoint plus points of reference) that is in a twofold comparative relation to the situation as well as to the means of orientation (v: tools reflecting the situation).

All basic differences between *F* and *F** are consequences of paying attention to the role that indexicality, comparability, and receptivity play in the act of orientation or the fact that one is already oriented. The double comparison of situational need to points of reference and points of reference to an orientation tool, as an essential element of orientation, entails both the indexical cluster of one’s own standpoint and reference points in relation to the situation *and* the tools that replicate that very situation. This indexical cluster may be either actively selected or receptively adopted. The comparative element seems to stress, again, the active character, but it may remain implicit or presupposed in those cases in which the receptive element dominates orientation. Therefore, indexicality, comparability, and receptivity are not only compatible with, but are essentially connected to each other.

⁴⁹ Cf. Werner Stegmaier, PO, 304–308.

Orientation, however, is an issue only if something significant is at stake. Its relevance is thus derived from situational need, its disoriented counterpart. Further, the relation between orientation and disorientation is not merely complementary. The relations are often complex. Fragments of orientation exist even within disorientation. Multiple and potentially incommensurable offers of orientation may contribute to disorientation. The fact that there is no general orientation available to meet all disorientations may further contribute to our disorientation. Further sources of disorientation include failures, disturbances, or even disruptions within the act of orientation. This leads us to consider again formula F^* since several (not all) of its elements may create a lack of orientation or actual disorientation (which does not have to come to the same thing): the impossibility of locating the self (ii), an insufficient cluster of indexical references for a twofold comparative act (iv), and inadequate tools of orientation (v). Insofar as there is no ‘true’ or ‘false’ orientation, there can only be more or less successful acts of orientation.

The predicate of success in orientation then, in contrast to the claims of some authors, is not necessarily a virtue.⁵⁰ Should we assume that disorientation is a vice? Even if it is, it might sometimes be a fruitful one that encompasses its own set of ‘virtues’: an openness to new voices, the stamina to endure periods of uncertainty, the ability to suspend familiar ways of being oriented in order to reflect on established routines, and even the value of creating disorientation in order to provoke responses in the face of severe irritations. This paper has attempted to provide an orientation to orientation. Consequently, all that has been presented here must be applicable to itself.

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⁵⁰ Cf. Paul van Tongeren, „Der ‚Pflock des Augenblickes‘. Über die Situation und die Tugenden der Orientierung“, in: *Zur Philosophie der Orientierung*, ed. by Andrea Bertino et al., 233–245, 243–244.

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