

# Above the Horizon There Is No Sky<sup>1</sup>

DON KUNZE

“Above the horizon there is no sky.”

I stole this title from two French psychoanalysts who used it not so long ago. I knew I would be sure to get away with it. Their article was published ten years ago in an Irish journal that most of you would not be reading. I applaud them for this beautiful turn of phrase, which anyone who appreciates the dawn or sunset must regard as a radical provocation. By the end of my essay, I hope that we will be able to understand the horizon as the place where indeed Phoebus daily drives his four-horse chariot.

Anyway, there is no legal copyright on titles. I could just have easily called my lecture, *Moby Dick* or *Crime and Punishment*. This way however I can focus on two things necessary, in my view, to talk about Concealment. The choice of this word for a conference is completely brilliant. It's the one word you would need to say why there is such a thing as architecture, and the one word that just about tells you everything you need to know about how architecture works.

But, there is a problem. Concealment, for those who do not read Irish journals on psychoanalysis, means tricky concealment of something that is going to be revealed later on. For the readers of psychoanalysis, Irish, French, or otherwise, it means something that is not going to be revealed, ever. The first group will be happy with what they get, that thing that was went missing for a bit. The second group knows that this revelation is an impostor, a fake, and that pretending to be happy when it's revealed just takes us back to square one, as far as theory of architecture is concerned.

Architecture theory has done very nicely without psychoanalysis so far. Phenomenology has made sure there isn't any room for it, that Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur and a few others have been all the French guys we need, thanks very much. This is predominantly a US-Canadian view that goes well with the dominance of cognitive-behavioral psychology over our two cultures. In Europe, South America, and even in some parts of Australia, things are reversed. Psychoanalysis is the norm, other ideas about the human subject are in the minority. You don't even have to ask if someone is doing Lacanian psychoanalysis or some other brand, it's assumed that, even though there are quite a few variations, Lacan and Freud are at the core.

The problem is that psychoanalysis is at the heart of the issue of concealment, but there isn't enough time in the world to say why, if an audience has its heart set on a phenomenological answer. For phenomenology, the sky is right above the horizon, plain as day — literally! For psychoanalysis, the horizon means something else. It is the place where parallel lines meet at a common point. The line and the point are really the same thing. And, all lines pass through a

---

<sup>1</sup> This title has been shamelessly stolen from an essay published in 2010, Jean-Pierre Georjgin and Erik Porge, “Above the Horizon There Is No Sky,” *The Letter: Irish Journal for Lacanian Psychoanalysis* 43 (2010): 53–77. In tribute to the original authors, my essay attempts to extend their acute study of projective geometry by focusing on two aspects: non-orientation and self-intersection, properties of projective surfaces such as the Möbius band and Klein bottle where “origami folding” creates continuous but finite planes where the subject's desire to flee is the very thing that creates the space of its entrapment.

common point as they mark their positions on a projective plane. Yes, all of this is abstract, but then again so is the human subject.

Let's think of an image that gets us over this initial divide. We say that we live in a full world, let's call it Euclidean. We are figures on a ground, and theoretically at least we can travel to any part of that ground to see what's there. We can walk around things to see all the sides, we can open doors and enter interiors. Everything is theoretically visible, just not all at the same time.

Use the compass, all 360° of it, as a way of saying that invisibility is only temporary. Now, add a mirror. It cuts the 360° into two parts. One 180° of space is in front of the mirror, the other 180° looks like it's inside, but it's really just a reflection of the first, not very complicated. But, for a moment we see 360°, not a 180° times 2. It turns out that we don't relate to this pretended 360° the same way animals do, and we have to at least consider that this difference is related to the fact that we have language and they don't. Before you tell me about the dolphins, let me say that many life forms communicate and their systems of sign exchange are actually superior to ours. What they don't have that we have is the duet we play with language's forward motion, its "syntagm," and the way words can take the place of others, the "paradigm." Something is out of order here, in animal terms. The paradigmatic dimension of exchange makes the beginning of the sentence unknowable until the end is reached. Once the sentence has completed, the beginning has to be restructured, retroactively. Meaning does not go straight back from the end to the beginning, there is a slight arch. There is space between going out and coming back that is like a space in the mirror that is more than  $2 \times 180^\circ$ . There is a 360° *plus* element, thanks to the fact that the replacement process could have been used by someone whose intentions have been concealed.

*We have been "made to think."* Thanks to the power to make replacements in the signifying chain, a power called metaphor, we can and frequently do turn over the control over meaningfulness to someone who is working "under the table" so to speak. Animals do not do this. They "tell it like it is," and although they, too, use signs to deceive, their options are different and in some sense superior. Our options lead to the creation of a human world, which may or may not be such a good thing. We don't know. It's our thing, it's the only thing we've got. We are not going to be dolphins, at least not in this lifetime.

Being *made to think* is what hypnotists or mentalists know about. The British mentalist Derren Brown (*New Yorker*, October 7, 2019) demonstrates that, by planting words in the audience's heads, he can have them think that they discover the same words "miraculously" in old newspapers, sealed envelopes, and the like. The rabbit is in the hat in the first place, you only think the hat is empty. Using human awareness as a container rather than as content is for mentalists, hypnotists, pickpockets, and a few clever politicians. It's also essential to novelists and playwrights. I would add architects, except that the few who pick this up must do it on their own. The subjective structure of awareness is not taught in the schools. It's a matter of psychoanalysis, which insists that the 360° of animal awareness cut into two 180° parts means that, in our day-to-day Euclidean idea of panoramic space, we have 360° of nothing above a horizon that tops off a 360° below. We are unfinished in our inventory of Euclid's 360°; we still have a Nothingness to visit. And, to be perfectly fair, Maurice Merleau-Ponty *did* warn us about this.

Above the horizon there is no sky. The sky we see does not meet it. It is a line at infinity, and the sky we do see, the sky that brings weather and announces dawn and sunset, is folded over it.

Euclid banished this infinity because the Greeks were afraid of it. Although it was an idea, and they were very good at ideas, they could not think that geometry and fear had anything to do with each other. Lacanian psychoanalysis knows that geometry and fear have *everything* to do with each other. Everything.

Isn't it strange that the geometry of fear was articulated by an architect in the mid-1600s, Girard Desargues. He hung out with some interesting guys, Blaise Pascal and Abraham Bosse. He knew Descartes. But, his original take on the theorem first discovered by Pappus of Alexandria in 300 a.d. gave projective geometry its flagship theorem, which was not realized for what it was until the 1850s. Then, it fell in with the new theories of Möbius, Plucker, Gauss, Riemann, and others who expanded projective geometry as the basis of all geometry. You could derive Euclidean geometry from projective geometry but not the other way around. Calling projective geometry "non-Euclidean" would be like calling black coffee "non-decaf."

Back to the mirror. Lacan of course made famous the moment that humans have that animals don't have, a moment when we stand in front of a mirror, when we are still very young, and realize that we are a human subject and not the universe we thought we were. This could be called a Copernican moment, moving from being in the center of something to being just one more planet in a solar system beyond our control. For us as pre-subjects, however, our Ptolemaic state was that we were grounds upon which figures could be projected. The toy spaces we projected were a part of us. Our emotional reality was a world reality. Others supplied us with food and shelter and love. These magically appeared when we cried. We only had to contend with our mother's defection, her shortfalls, and the perilous connection between our father and our increasing skill at using language. There were things we couldn't say.

These things weren't a problem as long as we were the ground and everything had to be written and played out on our surface. It only became a problem when the mirror showed us different: that we were not grounds with figures moving across us but we were ourselves a figure on a ground, that this ground was now the surface cutting our world in two, and that the power we had as grounds had now receded into the depths of the mirror *behind* the one shape that everyone told us was us. This shape had a shadow like none of the other shadows in the mirror. It concealed who we were, it concealed something that we, of all subjects, should know.

The horizon at this moment was no longer a divide between earth and sky but a limit where the 360°, of what we did know and could visit if we didn't know, was a seal. Above it the sky couldn't meet it but had to go on elsewhere. The limit was the limit. Beyond it, there was a matching 360° of projectivity. We could theorize about its shapes and actions, but we couldn't visit it using Euclid. In a striking reversal, what was invisible was no longer a range past the visible, but something in its own right. It was a *thing*, and its unreachability was not a beyond but an intimate component of everything, even things we were holding in our hands.

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Purloined Letter," no one ever opens the letter, no one reads it, no one knows what it contains. Yet, it has enormous value, to the point that stealing and concealing and retrieving it become the mental atmosphere. The one who finds it does so on the basis of the locality of the unreachable. The unreachable is reachable, but only on the terms of its inaccessibility. Once the detective Dupin realizes this, he knows where the letter is, and knows the conditions by which he may retrieve it.

Dupin must take another exception to Euclid. He must give the minister who has stolen the letter the power of extromission. This is the power of the eye to generate a force-field, something commonly believed in early cultures and even not-so-early ones. This is the Lacanian gaze, of course, but it's also the way we attribute sight to inanimate objects who are, in this theory, "witnesses" of things that happen around them. We wouldn't have a civic architecture if we didn't imagine that buildings are capable of doing this, of "presiding" over the spaces where they are placed. Sometimes we give them anamorphic faces, piling up their elements like the fruit-paintings of Arcimboldo. We believe lots of things we intellectually discredit and formally deny. Dupin must know the relation of the Minister's extromission to the space above the horizon, and to the mirror, because he specifically distracts the Minister, who is in the room at the time he must retrieve the letter.

The Minister's extromissive gaze is what holds the letter, technically open to the view of anyone who is in the room, into a *latent space* — architects would call it a *poché* — that is the same latency created in the back of the mirror when the young subject realizes it at the Mirror Stage. It is a shadow that uncannily matches the profile of the young subject's reflected image. Its edge matches perfectly, yet it is an independent shadow. It has "nothing to do" with the subject or its reflection. It is the nothing above the horizon. It is the soul. It is a "nothing that is." The Minister's gaze pushes the purloined letter into this corner of invisibility, which is why the Minister's gaze has to be turned away from the card rack. Turning away is the key. If we have read the story closely, and looked at the letters that make up the words that make up the sentences, we may have noticed that CARDRACK is, phonetically, a palindrome, KCARDRAC. The "K" can go further than phonetics allows, and "run around from the front to the back of the word in the same way that clever lads in panoramic photographs taken with cameras whose vertical shutters advanced slowly from left to right, would appear twice in the same picture. The K in this case is the rule, from projective geometry, that the two vanishing points of a line at infinity are really the same point. That *folding* of space on to itself, space's "origami" nature, is the whole idea of projectivity.

One proof of this is that the answer to the Delian Paradox, the oracle's demand that, if Athens were to end the plague, they must find a way to double the size of the altar at Delos, can be solved by folding the *paper* of the geometric demonstration to trisect the angle needed to discover the cube root needed to double the altar's volume. Whether the space being folded seems to be 3d or 2d, folding is the key, and Poe indicates this with the palindrome word, a word that is *folded over on itself*, he uses to indicate the hiding place.

Your possible surprise at the use of the term origami in the same sentence as palindrome and in relation to geometric projectivity, latency, and concealment may depend on your resistance to the idea that Euclid is not primary to experience. Let me argue that the proof of the fact that, "above the horizon there is no sky" — what in my term means that there is a latent 360°, or another world within the apparent world — lies entirely within the scope of this 19c. story. But, I have to add an important point. I believe that Poe understood latency at both a formal and intuitive level. His intuitive connection was grounded in his natural ability to create and decipher encoded messages. He was an absolute genius in this regard. If handed a message using letter replacement, an E for an I, M for a J, so to speak, he could read it out correctly without any delay.

Poe's formal awareness of latency comes from his knowledge of literary structures that have been used since antiquity to embed latency as a structural principle. A Poe scholar, Richard Kopley, has pointed out a device Poe used but which had never been identified, even though, like the purloined letter itself, was clearly displayed in the text. This was the way that key terms were found in two positions, typically in an "open-closed" or "negative-positive" position. If graphically set out, these paired terms create a Lambda,  $\Lambda$ , with the first and last instances on the ends of the legs and more central instances aiming to a central hinge, which in the story is the moment when the police inspector hands over the reward check to Dupin for solving the mystery. This literal exchange point leaves no doubt about Poe's conscious use of the chiasmic structure.

Implicit to the Lambda is the spatial interior that is created inside the otherwise linear progress of the story's words and facts. To relate this to language in general, this is a space of replacement, a *poché* where the possibility of other words, other situations, exists as a kind of virtuality. This is literally a space outside of space, a  $360^\circ$  lying above the horizon, as a kind of "nothing" and "nowhere." Poe understands how a binary, a lambda-structure of chiasmus, can unlock the resources of the distinction between syntagm and paradigm ... Not in so many words, perhaps, but he understood the relation of chirality, the left-right structure of the world that was not — NOT — binary but, rather the two gates opening to a second kind of virtuality, a virtuality of effectiveness. I use this unusual expression because Poe himself talks about it in relation to the game of Morra, played with the hands using guesses of odds and evens, when he says that the only way to win is to know whether your opponent is stupid or smart. Winning is an effectiveness. Your opponent's possession or lack of an imagination is a virtuality. We all have this virtuality, thanks to being human, but we are not obliged to visit it or imagine it. We may use fantasy and ideology to cover over its existence. But, like the space between the two legs of the Lambda, it is space of transaction and distinction. It is a space we could define as a kind of tessera, the token two friends would break when they parted, so that their reunion would be authenticated by the perfect match between the two broken pieces. The tessera is the logic of the Lambda, of chiasmus, of pulling a story together through its paradigmatic replacement parts.

I don't have all day. Replacement is a matter of metaphor, just as *dis*-placement is a matter of metonymy. So saith Roman Jakobson, who went bit far, some say, in dividing things into logic and poetry thanks to displacements' relations to contiguities and, hence, science's methods of proof, and to replacement's relation to semblance and imitation. There are lots of stories to tell there, we don't have the time. But, let me advance a thesis that may make no sense if you are a committed phenomenologist or cognitive-behavioral positivist. This is that metaphor is more than the replacement of one normal word by a usually more poetic or ideologically informative word. Metaphor, for Jacques Lacan, was the means by which the subject discovered it was a subject; a means related to realizing that the mirror was both a revolutionary moment and a portable split of space that kept on happening even when the mirror was no longer in the room.

Poe was aware of this key function of mind in relation to the figure-ground issue. When the external world does not supply stimulus, as when someone is blind or deaf, or when we are sleeping, the brain supplies visual images. Impairment and ability constitute a tipping point. This is real and neurological, but it's also phenomenal. Once the world's stimulus begins to wane, internal stimulus takes over. But — and this is key in ways that Poe recognized — the figure-ground relationship shifts. When the world is providing stimulation, or senses operate

with the idea that our point of view, our bodies, are figures on a ground. When the brain is obliged to fill in the blanks, in cases of blindness or sleep, we are the ground and the brain must supply simulated contents. It must move the ground across the figure.

This reversal is so much like the pre-subject's autoerotic use of its world as a ground on which different figures are framed and set into motion that dreaming in effect connects directly to our pre-subjective mentality. We are young again. The temporality of the dream becomes the once-upon-a-time of childhood. This is key to the effective reduction of hypnosis, of the adult subject to a child immobilized or transfixed by the suggestions of a controlling and protective voice. But, hypnosis tells us something important. The dreamer, like the hypnotic subject, is unaware of the figure-ground reversal. The partially blind subject experiencing, as they often do, phantasmagoric hallucinations