Poe's Gothic Stereography:
Spectator, Surface, Periphery

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Abstract

This essay begins by positing a model, derived from the basic architectural design of Medieval Gothic cathedrals, which balances the inner vertical axis (high vaulted ceilings and towers) against the outer horizontal axis (incongruous supports and decorations, surrounding and concealing the sacred vertical). If the horizontal gives the vertical an illusory sense of rising, the vertical can also be collapsed down onto the horizontal, a movement that may be seen as a "projection" of the 3-dimensional figure onto the 2-dimensional surface. This stereographic model, in which rising (or reverse-projection) and collapse can be taken as virtually reversible or "*Gestalt*-switched" modes, is then used as a framework for interpreting Poe's lesser-known essay-story "The Domain of Arnheim," his Gothic horror tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," and his two detective stories, "The Purloined Letter" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." If in "Arnheim" and "Usher" we are dealing with the problematic "structure" of a three-dimensional figure and an external observer's perception of this structure as a form of rising and/or collapse, in the detective stories we are beginning with the abstracted (and indefinitely extended) horizontal surface itself, which may represent to the observer pure logical self-evidence ("Purloined Letter") and/or the possibility of a partially-concealed periphery ("Rue Morgue").

Keywords

The cathedrals built originally by the Goths, that crude and barbarian tribe from the North, seemed grotesquely incongruous to 15th- and 16th-century Italians. Their refined Renaissance sensibility was shocked by these structures that had spread rapidly across the landscape of Europe, like an invading horde or a plague.

> The word "Gothic" was first used as a rather negative term. In 1440 Laurenzo Valla (1406-1457) distinguished between Gothic and Roman letters . . . , whereby for him all things Gothic were bad and all bad things were Gothic. The same forms were mentioned by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), as well as a "*maniera tedesca*" [Germanic manner], notably a "*maniera dei Goti*" [Gothic manner] . . . . He used this term to express his contempt for the art of the north, of the Goths. He described their architecture "as something monstrous and barbaric, far removed from any harmony, and at best to be described as chaos and disorder. Many buildings of this type are now infecting the world. Their portals show relatively slim columns, which are also twisted in a screw-like fashion and are never formed strongly enough to be able [credibly] to carry a weight, no matter how small. This accursed style of design is accompanied by lots of confusing, small objects [*tabernacolini*], which are to be found on all sides of the building, covering it almost completely, aligned one above the other and each decorated with a number of obelisks [*piramidi*], peaks and leaves. Such fragile-looking structures become even less stable when bundled together in this way; and they seem rather to be made of paper than of stone or marble. It was the Goths, too, who introduced pointed arches and filled the whole of Italy with their accursed designs." In 1669 Moliere in *La Gloire du Val-de-Grace* spoke of the insipid taste for Gothic decoration and monstrous horrors. In 1681 Filippo Baldinucci in his *Vocabulario toscano dell'Arte del Disegno* . . . listed the "*Ordine Gottico*" [Gothic Order] in addition to the classical orders. (Binding, 29)

Here of course the question immediately arises as to who is finally deciding or defining what is "ugly" (or for that matter "barbarian") and what is "beautiful" ("cultured," "civilized"). The classical Greek definition, picked up by the Renaissance humanists, correlates the beautiful with harmony, proportion, and balance–thus too (Pythagoras and Plato) with rationality and the transcendent

divine–and the ugly with an earthy incongruity and disproportion. The word "grotesque" (from the Italian *grotto*, "cave") derives from those monstrous Medieval paintings found in caves, in which totally different shapes and forms (plant and animal, human and nonhuman) were mixed together. And if Kant's late-18th-century mathematical sublime, which as infinity transcends the rational form or limit of the beautiful, seems mainly a mathematical conception, his dynamic sublime is tied to those feelings of *awe* and *terror* which, aroused by the perception of a sublime object, surpass the calm, peaceful serenity of a perceived beauty. While the shock of this Romantic sublime may not be precisely that of the Gothic incongruity, Poe in "Ligeia" goes back to Francis Bacon (16th century) in order to put the notion of "beauty" more radically in question. The narrator here observes that his beloved Ligeia's "features were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship. . . . There is no exquisite beauty . . . without some *strangeness* in the proportion" (Thompson 160-61).

In Binding's passage above, it is clear that custom (habituation, what we are used to) and thus cultural prejudice plays a key role: the new Gothic design which "descended" from the barbarian North was shocking to the southern Europeans. As far as static form is concerned, we seem to have a disparity between classical wholeness, unity, purity of the "inner surface" and a Gothic multiplicity of parts which disrupt this surface but also cover it, conceal it: "lots of confusing, small objects . . . which are to be found on all sides of the building, covering it almost completely, . . ." These are either themselves decorations or covered with them, "decorated with a number of obelisks . . . , peaks and leaves." But here we also have *dynamic* form, for force and balance are important: the perceived disproportion (thus incongruity) of Gothic structures was really the disproportionate appearance of (the relations between) objects of greatly varying mass and weight. For instance, we have those "relatively slim columns, which are also twisted in a screw-like fashion and are never formed strongly enough to be able [credibly] to carry a weight, no matter how small." And the decorations, those "fragile-looking structures . . . seem rather to be made of paper than of stone or marble" because they "become even less stable when bundled together in this way": here the problem of stability suggests the dynamics of weight and balance as well as the formal issue of unity versus multiplicity on a flat surface.

That we are concerned here with a *perceived* disproportion, the *appearance* of disproportion, is clear from the term "credibly" (parenthetically inserted here by Binding into his translation of Vasari's Italian). That is, while it may seem to the observer that these "twisted columns" are "never formed strongly enough as to be

able to carry a weight, no matter how small," in fact they *do* carry great weights because of their adjacent supports. An essential structural element that distinguishes Gothic cathedrals from the earlier Romanesque ones, with their thick and opaque, fortress-like walls, is the Gothic use of flying buttresses supporting from outside the relatively thin walls, largely filled with stained glass windows to let in the light. The extended system of "weights and balances" includes numerous support-structures surrounding the highest arched ceilings and spires in the center. What struck the Renaissance humanists as barbaric and incongruous was then, in the first place, the fact that the "laws of physics" (or before Newton, the laws of God) were apparently being overthrown here (thin columns impossibly supporting massive weights)–even though this "impossibility" was clearly really happening (or could it have been the "work of Satan"?). In the second place it was the fact that this array of unwieldy, ugly external support structures as well as the grotesque multiplicity of stonework ornaments, "fragile-looking . . . obelisks, peaks and leaves"—the best-known examples being the gargoyles perched on roofs—tended to barbarously, distastefully cover and conceal the pure "inner surfaces," the inner "sacred zone." We see the congruity between the two cases here: a static-spatial reversal (inner/outer) and a dynamic-force "inversion" (gravity overthrown or turned upside down).

The problem then for those who were shocked by Gothic cathedrals was that the "barbarous" supporting and/or decorative elements–here I shall combine these two functions for the sake of simplicity–tend to be more visible than the beautiful inner "cathedral" which they decorate and support, that sacred center or axis with its upward-soaring arched ceilings and towers. And perhaps too, in a sort of implied reversal or inversion, that the sacred vertical axis seems to have become the hidden "support" which impossibly bears the weight of the vast exterior: "relatively slim columns, . . . twisted . . . and . . . never formed strongly enough to be able . . . to carry a weight . . . no matter how small." (The weight they carry, on this reading, is that of their own divinity, simultaneously infinite and infinitesimal.) Yet even the "classically educated Blondel," who "disapproved primarily of the barbaric decoration of Gothic buildings," saw that they 'are nevertheless built in accordance with the rules of art and beneath the monstrous heap of their decoration there is yet a certain attractive symmetry'" (Binding 29-30). The "discovery" of this hidden symmetry at the center by the observer is an important part of the building's spiritual meaning and purpose. Once we "see" the truer beauty within, which indeed makes clearer the hitherto inconceivable geometrical form and intention of the

whole, we will be spiritually uplifted, raised above the barbarous and incongruous material world.

Or perhaps the "truer" view of the building—the truer path to "enlightenment"—does not discard the outer supports/ornaments once it has seen the inner beauty. Although classical (Platonic and Aristotelian) thinking naturally places (divine) form in the center (Aristotle) or "above" and (earthly) matter on the outside or down below (on or within the earth), Focillon reminds us that "forms are not their own pattern, their own mere naked representation. Their life develops in a space that is not the abstract space of geometry; . . . at the hands of men it assumes substance in a given material. It is there . . . that forms exist. . . . *A form without support is not form, and the support itself is form*" (62; emphasis added). That is, it may be hard finally to distinguish outer *support* from the inner *form* supported or "grounded" by it; or at any rate, we need to consider above all the relation between the two rather than either in isolation. This relation can point in both directions at the same time and is closely tied to the impossible impression, the *illusion* that the inner, sacred domes and towers are soaring toward heaven. That "the support itself is form" could now be taken to mean that the encircling supports create this illusion (which is what we would most likely think) but also that the "soaring" towers create the illusion that they are being supported or *grounded*. In Binding's description this ambiguity remains intact: "The visual negation of the structural reality with the loading forces led to an impression of floating and a sense of striving upwards. The visible architecture of the cathedrals is an illusion when one considers the actual technical construction" (225-26).

Thinking of the above ideas, one might try to construct a model consisting of horizontal and vertical axes. In this model the horizontal is the flat axis (surface) of outer supports-and-decorations (again I no doubt over-simplify matters by combining these two categories); the vertical is the soaring, concealed center. [1] From the brief sketch of Gothic architecture offered above it is clear that everything depends on how we read the relation between these two axes. Probably we tend to

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[1] Strangely enough, if we think of pointed (as opposed to rounded) arches as being male-phallic and of a transcendent God as often being also (in Derridean terms) phallogocentric, then the massive, weighty (or weight-supporting) horizontal gets correlated with the feminine. However, I was not intending to pursue any gender correlations here, and perhaps there are various reasons why we also wouldn't want to correlate the horizontal with the feminine. On the other hand, in many mythic traditions Earth (thus Ground), with its deep-opening "womb," is feminine. On the third hand, in Hesiod's *Theogony* first there arose a gender-neutral Chaos (disorder, mixture), out of which emerged Mother Earth; out of the womb of Mother Earth emerged Father Sky, who "covered her" and whose rain impregnated her; from her earthy womb then came all the gods.

see the horizontal's support of the vertical as also its concealment of it, and also to see both these functions as ways in which the vertical is impossibly, invisibly lifted up *out of the horizontal* (within which it is concealed) toward heaven. Or possibly we see the horizontal as first pressing the vertical down into the horizontal, into earth, into death (already represented by the ugly earthiness of the massive supports themselves), before resurrecting it, raising it up to heaven–or first raising it and then collapsing it. (Or these two movements also be seen as simultaneous.) By thus correlating the horizontal with earth and with the body (which covers and "supports" the soul), with physical materiality, time and death, and the vertical with sky (heaven), the inner soul or form, the divine, we would perhaps be viewing more abstractly—or just in more properly Medieval Christian terms?–the rather recent, popular sense of the "Gothic" mode or style. This is of course tied to the horrors of monsters, of flesh and death, as well as the possibility of a certain spiritual transcendence beyond the limits of death (witches, ghosts, and vampires, Dracula films, the Phantom of the Opera singing the "Music of the Night" in the darkest depths of the opera house)–or rather, perhaps (inversion again), of an earthly or material transcendence beyond the limits of life.

Inasmuch as Edgar Allan Poe is a "popular" or "sensational" Gothic writer of the mid-19th century who is also very interested in logical and philosophical abstraction, I thought this sort of abstract horizontal-vertical model based on the structure of Gothic Cathedrals might be a suitable way of approaching his texts. Thus I now want to turn to four short stories (one really an essay-story) of Edgar Allan Poe and attempt a reading of them *via* this Gothic downward movement or "collapse" of the vertical axis into the horizontal surface. While such a dynamic of collapse inevitably presupposes the possibility of its polar opposite, a prior or subsequent "rising," Poe is of course famous above all for his tendency to "foreground" collapse, death, decay, and decomposition. In effect then I will be giving more standard readings of the author a certain kind of Gothic "angle" or "twist." Or perhaps giving the Medieval Gothic model a Poeian twist. For with Poe we will be tempted to view the reversible (and perhaps simultaneous) movements of collapse and rising as a stereographic "projection" of the vertical onto a flat surface (or "screen) and a "reverse projection" (the move from two back to three dimensions), respectively; the "projection" model also fits the two-dimensional "virtual" nature of reversibility and thereby also fits Poe.[2]

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[2] "Stereography": "of, relating to, or delineating the form of a solid body (as the earth) on a plane ('stereographic projection')." From Greek *stereos*, "solid": "a solid body; having or dealing

I will mainly be exploring in Poe the same formal issues mentioned above: on the one hand the problem of the structure of (outer, supporting) "walls" themselves in terms of static form, that is, of unity/multiplicity and order/incongruity (disorder), and on the other hand the problem of the relations among dynamic forces, "weights and balances." Obviously in either the rising of vertical from horizontal or the collapse (which I take to be emphasized in Poe) of vertical onto horizontal these two (static and dynamic forms) are closely related: thus (or so I am assuming here) an "orderly" wall-structure will tend to have the force to "raise" the vertical, a "disorderly" wall-structure to allow the vertical to collapse. (And it is precisely the ambiguities and possible reversals/inversions here which fascinate Poe.) But above we also noted that the "ugliness" or "barbaric incongruity" of Gothic architecture, it's "disproportionate" forms and forces, is only *apparent*, "in the eyes of the beholder," in this sense deceptive. This brings us back to the virtuality of the projection model, with its inevitable order-disorder or beauty-ugliness reversals/ inversions. The Kantian and Romantic-aesthetic notion of a "subject" (or individual "imagination") which "forms" reality perhaps reinforces or makes all the more likely the ambivalence (or paradoxical reversibility) inherent in the original (Medieval) Gothic design.

Therefore in what follows I will look first at the issue of the static and dynamic structure of forms, the "collapse" and the problem of the spectator's "construction" (with its implications of order/disorder or beauty/ugliness reversal) in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) and "The Domain of Arnheim" (1847). Then, in what may seem an unorthodox move but one which I think can extend the possible meaning(s) of the "Gothic"—a virtually indefinable term in any case—I will take the "collapse" of vertical onto/into horizontal as having already occurred in my reading of the "blank surface" in two detective stories, "The Purloined Letter" (1844) and "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) Here the spectator (Dupin) is looking not at a three-dimensional structure but at an indefinitely-wide blank surface, and the power of his "peripheral vision" thus comes to the fore. Taking Dupin as spectator viewing the mere surface also has the advantage of making more clear that even with more "three-dimensional" stories like "Usher" and "Arnheim," the collapse could also be seen as a stereographic projection of the vertical onto the horizontal (as "screen"); the possible reverse-move (the vertical's rising from the horizontal) then becomes illusory (like the collapse itself) in the way of a "*Gestalt*-switch" on a two-dimensional surface.

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with three dimensions of space" plus "graph" from Greek *graphein*, "to write" (*Merriam-Webster's* 1153, 508).

Landscape Architecture
in "The Domain of Arnheim"

As for that eerie, other-worldly, deceptive Gothic "rising" that precedes and/or follows the "collapse," flying buttresses emerging unexpectedly out of a peaceful meadow, in order to support incredibly thin walls filled with breathtakingly beautiful stained-glass windows, may have at first seemed shockingly incongruous to human observers. There is something quite "unnatural" (and thus also "inhuman") about these gigantic buttresses, and while the windows catching sunlight would be more beautiful than the massive external supports, the whole "apparatus" might almost look like an other-worldly spaceship that has just landed or perhaps just sprung out of the earth.[3] This notion of man-made structures growing out of the ground seems to fit Poe's late essay-story "The Domain of Arnheim," where he suggests that none of the visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture) can equal the beauty of nature itself except for one: landscape gardening.[4] No painting of a woman's face, mountain or tree, he says, could be as beautiful as the original, just as no building could equal, for sheer beauty, any "self-enclosed" (think of trees and mountains) natural landscape where we might find ourselves. Only landscape gardening is able to actually improve on nature precisely because it *works directly with* nature, that is, it *recreates* nature. In terms of the stereographic model this may be an art, not of flattening-down-to or building-up-from the surface but of "reworking" an already slightly-rough surface.[5]

Yet we are really still looking at (or projecting) this uneven earth-surface as a flat one, a two-dimensional "picture" which in its original, purely natural state is not yet as "beautiful" as it might be. Thus all the artist needs to do is "rearrange the pieces":

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[3] Or like the pre-buried Mars-machines coming up out of the earth in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*.

[4] Focillon: "Exactly as mankind modifies the face of the earth and creates a sort of geography that is his alone, by means of agriculture . . . , so does the architect engender new conditions. . . . No one can predict what environments architecture will create. It invents a world all its own" (149).

[5] Near the story's end, in the "domain" created by the narrator's friend Ellison, it starts to become difficult to distinguish landscape gardening from "landscape architecture" or even from "architecture."

> In the most enchanting of natural landscapes there will always be
> found a defect or an excess. . . . While the component parts may defy,
> *individually*, the highest skill of the artist, the *arrangement of these*
> *parts* will always be susceptible of improvement. In short, no position
> can be attained on the wide surface of the natural earth, from which
> an artistical eye, looking steadily, will not find matter of offence in
> what is termed the "composition" of the landscape. . . . He not only
> believes, but positively knows, that such and such *arbitrary*
> *arrangements of matter* . . . alone constitute the true beauty.
> (*Complete Tales* 607-08; emphasis added)

This may seem to combine the exuberant, Romantic "glorying" of the artist in his
own divine power—it is as if this disembodied "artistical eye" were looking down,
Godlike, from above the earth's surface—with a certain dark, perhaps "Gothic"
cynicism. The narrator is claiming that a true work of landscape-art depends upon
the true artist's purely *intuitive*, thus purely *arbitrary* arrangement of parts: and yet
if purely arbitrary then we must wonder what standard could possibly be used, by
other observers of the work (the painting) but even, in one sense, by the artist
himself, in "judging" (a Kantian term) this to be "true beauty."[6] Poe says the artist
has "*felt* its [his new design's] truth here; for the feeling is no affectation or
chimera" (*Tales* 608). But how can we trust this artist's "intuition" which guides
him to "improve" or "beautify" nature, not even by "recreating" but merely by
"rearranging" it on a two-dimensional surface? Moreover, we suspect that Poe (in
his cynical-ironic mode) may be implying that this human artist's "divine
perspective" could also be that of God; that God has also created the world in a
totally arbitrary, random, contingent way.[7]

In the following, very strange and complex passage Poe gives us a clearer
picture of this "beautifying of nature," one which will bring the third dimension–
height, distance from the surface, perspective in the more proper sense—more fully

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[6] Perhaps then we could also approach *via* the notion of "arbitrariness" the *strangeness* of the
Gothic cathedral's horizontal system of incongruous supports and grotesque decorations. But we
also wonder: Has the proto-postmodern Poe thrown us into the 20th century here? We think not
only of various sorts of abstract symbolist (Baudelaire translated Poe; Mallarmé wrote an elegy
about him), surrealist, and modernist poetry, but also of postmodernism: Warhol's paintings of
Campbell soup cans, Roland Barthes' "death of the author"—the author can only *rearrange old*
texts, not create new ones—or the "Library of Babel" (where all meanings are arbitrary and
contingent) of Borges, who also loved Poe.
[7] This fits G. R. Thompson's Schlegelian reading of Poe in *Romantic Irony*; see notes 10-12.

into play."[8] The narrator is asking the same question the reader has been asking: *Why* is it that, not in painting and other visual arts but "in landscape arrangements alone [nature is] susceptible of exaltation [improvement] . . ."? This is for him "a mystery I had been unable to solve." He speculates that originally God created nature, that is, the actual topographic or stereographic (surface-projected) "shapes" of nature, in the form which humans would think "most beautiful"—thus it would not have been necessary or even possible to "improve on" this form—but that this original divine intention had been "frustrated" (interrupted, reversed), at a later stage of earth's evolution, by surface-rupturing "geological disturbances."[9] Yet again, since these hypothetical disturbances seemed "abnormal and unadapted to any purpose," why did they occur?

> It was [my friend] Ellison who suggested that they were prognostic of *death*. He thus explained:—admit the earthly immortality of man to have been the first intention. We have then the primitive arrangement of the earth's surface adapted to his blissful estate, as not existent but designed. The disturbances were the preparation for his subsequently conceived deathful condition. "Now, said my friend, "what we regard as exaltation of the landscape may be really such, as respects only the moral or human *point of view*. Each alteration of the natural scenery may possibly effect a blemish in the picture, if we can suppose this picture viewed at large—in mass—from some point distant from the earth's surface, although not beyond the limits of its atmosphere. It is easily understood that what might improve a closely scrutinized detail, may at the same time injure a general or more distantly observed effect. There *may* be a class of beings, human once, but now invisible to humanity, to whom, from afar, our disorder may seem order—our unpicturesqueness picturesque; in a word, the earth-angels, for whose scrutiny more especially than our own, and for whose death-refined appreciation of the beautiful, may have been set in array by God the wide landscape-gardens of the hemispheres." (*Tales* 608-09)

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[8] As if perhaps we readers, now midway through the essay-story, were really "taking off" into space.

[9] These surface-rupturing events may again remind us of the "shock" of huge, ungainly structures that spring or seem to have sprung from the earth. (Thus too of Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*; see note 4.)

Ellison/Poe is then saying that these "geological disturbances" of the earth's surface were not a "frustration" of God's divine intention, were not "abnormal and unadapted to any purpose," but rather *were* his intention, were caused by Him. The "wide landscape-gardens of the hemispheres," which in effect *are* this ruptured surface, were "set in array by God." According to Ellison's explanation or narrative account, God first created a perfectly-ordered, a beautiful natural world for humans, thinking they would (like Adam and Eve) remain immortal while maintaining their human sense of the beautiful; He later decided (because mankind had become "evil"?) that humans must be mortal after all, and thus must be "prepared" for their "deathful state" by being given a newly-ruptured (disturbed, perturbed, disordered) earthly surface. Ironically, Poe does not go on to say, as we might expect, that these "fallen" humans would then redeem themselves by transforming this ugly world– through their landscape-gardening art—back into its initially ("primitively") beautiful condition. Rather, instead of any notion of moral redemption there is only death (a reversal of ontological state) and with it a reversal or inversion of aesthetic perspective: after death humans become earth-angels and now, gazing down from above, they see the same earth-surface that had appeared (and still appears) disordered and ugly to living humans as being ordered/beautiful, just as they see human attempts to "improve" the surface by restoring its beauty as in fact "injuring" it, making it ugly.

Of course, this "serious" 18th- and/or 19th-century metaphysical discourse may seem slightly out of joint, a bit distorted or even mad. Poe is clearly parodying, subverting or disrupting *Genesis* here, his "story of man" loosely based on the Garden of Eden myth and/or on the Flood myth—with the geological disturbances standing in for the flood. But going still further, this counter-narrative of human-divine history seems to put the artist's aesthetic quest for beauty above the ethical man's pursuit of moral goodness, thus replacing religion in the old sense with a religion of art. Furthermore, though we probably interpret it (as I did above) to mean that God caused the disturbances, the passage is sufficiently ambiguous that we might think they happened naturally and that He then "made use" of them. In this case we would have an unexpected discordance (disruption, incongruity), a nature/God or science/religion rift. And even on the more likely reading presented above we are getting a slightly shocking picture of God: to destroy the entire surface of the earth with countless earthquakes seems a bit more violent than merely drowning its surface with a flood.

On the lighter side, even if the "earth-angels" still dwell *within the earth's atmosphere* because they are our dead ancestors' spirits, this image is obviously

rather absurd. (Or perhaps what seems incongruous to humans seems rational to the earth-angels? Poe is hardly above playing such self-reflexive "games."[10]) In a certain sense it is also absurd that now, being not really artists at all but merely "spectators" (perhaps art critics, or gods), the earth-angels need do nothing but *look*, gaze down at humans' paltry and ultimately vain attempt to make ugliness (back) into beauty. For those "flourishes" of human landscape-gardeners that "might improve a closely scrutinized detail may at the same time injure a general or more distantly observed effect"; our order (beauty) is the earth-angels' disorder (incongruity) and *vice-versa*.[11] The object never changes; only the "subjective interpretation" changes. And where we initially had thought landscape architecture was to be the one art by means of which humans could still complete and perfect nature's beauty, we finally have people simply dying and then gazing down at man's increasing "uglification" of the earth.[12]

However, clearly Poe is giving a positive value to this human uglification since from the (much wider) divine perspective it is a beautification. Or rather, we suspect that what he is really doing is "mixing" beauty and ugliness by going beyond beauty into a (perhaps very slight) ugliness and suggesting that the latter is ultimately the higher form of beauty; it will be easier to see this if we think of

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[10] G. R. Thompson (*Romantic Irony*) interprets much in Poe as being ultimately ironic, self-parodying, absurd, comical—and grounded in a dark, cynical nihilism. Poe has "angels" in several essays and is of course interested in "atmosphere" in all its senses. (The House of Usher's physical atmosphere also becomes the story's.) Surely Poe, an avid reader of the latest books on cosmology, must have known, in the 1830s, that outer space is a vacuum, and yet he has Hans Pfaall traveling from the earth to the moon in a balloon. (It is filled with a gas, its "density 37.4 times *less than that of hydrogen*," made from "a *particular metallic substance, or semi-metal*" and "*a very common acid*" [*Tales* 8-9; emphasis original].) "Hans Pfaall" (whose protagonist's balloon "turns upside down" midway between earth and moon so that he can begin "falling toward the moon") is easiest read as a form of surrealist and absurdist "sci-fi-comedy," as in films like *The 5th Element*, to mention just one. (See the following notes.)

[11] On the "self-reflexive" reading (see notes 10 and 12) the "more distantly observed effect" might be the ironic one. For Leibniz, if only we could see the "whole picture" we could understand the purpose of many of our (myopically-viewed) sufferings, since (as Voltaire's *Candide* says, mocking Leibniz's optimism) "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds." Poe *may* be giving an absurdly "cosmological" as well as pseudo-theological twist here to a familiar idea from 18th-century aesthetics.

[12] The Schlegelian cynical-ironic-absurd reading of Poe again suggests itself. (The late-Romantic Schlegel speaks of the "absolute transcendence of irony.") Arguably Poe's ultimate "philosophy" or "religion" was that life is a meaningless joke, since after we die there is only nothingness; he may have pretended to entertain more positive metaphysical beliefs on the first level of his essays/stories, in order to more easily sell them to horror- and sensation- hungry, credulous, "stupid" readers. (Poe wrote at least in part to pay his drinking and gambling debts.)

"ugliness" as something more like "strangeness" or "incongruity," though here again we get the (Hegelian) self-reflexive movement inasmuch as the larger incongruity is that between what humans (or angels) call "beauty" and "ugliness." Hence the narrator of "Ligeia" quotes Sir Francis Bacon: "There is no exquisite beauty . . . without some *strangeness* in the proportion."[13] This could be taken as purely passive—we see beauty with "strangeness" in it as being the most beautiful sort of beauty—but also as active: we make something more beautiful but making it a little bit strange.

Thus we may be reminded of the grotesque incongruity of those Gothic-cathedral decorations which are naturalistic (animal) forms that have become distorted, exaggerated, sur-natural or hyper-natural—as with the demonic gargoyles decorating roofs. Perhaps Bacon's "strangeness in the proportion," now seen also as the earth-angels' perspective on human "ugliness," can be somehow correlated with the "Gothic excess" of these superfluous decorations. More generally, we now come back to the paradoxical interplay of opposites in my "Gothic cathedral" model: light/dark, order/disorder, beauty/incongruity (ugliness). At the outset I suggested that while these dualities all seem to correlate with vertical/horizontal, the latter opposition is itself finally ambivalent or paradoxical: the beautiful and sacred vertical (essence, truth) is hidden within/beneath the horizontal taken as incongruous external decorations-supports and thus (in its sacred "lightness") also rises above it; yet this soaring of the vertical is also an illusion made possible by the "loading forces" of its horizontal support-structure, which in another sense is itself the "concealed" element. Or as Focillon says: "A form without support is not form, and the support itself is form" (62).

We might at first assume the earth-angels in "heaven" correlate with the peak of the vertical-sacred axis, fully spiritual yet perhaps also illusory, a vertical "projection" from the horizontal human surface beneath them. But if we collapse this "structure" or project the angels onto the horizontal surface, do we necessarily see the "angelic" perspective as encompassed by/disappearing into the human one? If we think of the angels as merely a "human projection" (human fantasy) then we

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[13] This quotation follows the narrator's observation that "her features were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship," and is itself followed by his further reflections: "Yet, although I . . . perceived that her loveliness was indeed 'exquisite,' and felt that there was much of 'strangeness' pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of the 'strange.' [All the features of her face seemed perfect.] And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia. For eyes we have no model in the classically antique. . . . They were, I believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race" (Thompson 160-61).

may see it like this. But we could also think of it the other way: once projected onto the surface, the angelic perspective dominates and encompasses the human. For the angels' temporal as well as visual-spatial range or perspective is much wider than the human one. As for the past, living humans would have no "form" without the pre-existing "support" of their ancestors, or (put another way) "beauty" (from the angels' perspective) *pre-existed* the human attempts to (re)create it. As for the future, the angels see human beauty as ugliness because they *already see it as what it will become*, an "excessive beauty" and thus a (Gothic, grotesque) strangeness. In any event this "strangeness" itself seems tied to the notions of both "incongruity" and "excess."

The Order of Disorder in "The Fall of the House of Usher"

I opened the discussion with "Arnheim" by pointing out that the first Gothic cathedrals might have looked like bizarre structures which somehow "came out of the earth"—themselves then a sort of "surface disruption" or rather reverse-stereographic "projection" of solid out of surface. In a way we might even look at the earth's atmosphere (inhabited by its earth-angels) as a vast "solid" projected out of the earth's surface. Though this may well seem a perverse way of looking at things (especially since air is itself precisely what is "not solid"), perhaps on one reading we could say the earth-angels' *perspective* on the human *surface-art* is a kind of stereographic projection of their own more-solid state down into/onto that surface. At least we can say that the earth-surface in "Arnheim," having been "disrupted," is a very "rough" one, suggesting the sort of raised-surface art that stands between the purely two-dimensional and the purely three-dimensional; we then have the option of extending this to a fully three-dimensional space (figure, art-form) by including within the art-form or "figure" its own observers or "spectators" high up in the sky.

With "Usher" the play of projection and reverse-projection is much clearer since the primary focus is on a three-dimensional solid, the decaying House of Usher. The title and final "event" of the story is of course the "fall" or "collapse" of this house. At the outset I suggested that such a physical collapse of a building can also be seen as the projection of a horizontal/vertical solid onto a horizontal surface. But here again we could begin from the "reverse projection": we could begin by seeing the house as itself have risen, sprung or grown, like some sort of monstrous creature, *out* of the ground or earth-surface. Such a reading seems to fit "Usher"

well since Poe emphasizes that the fragility of this structure's stone walls is tied to their great age ("excessive antiquity"), and to the consequent fact that they have been fatally cracked from within by the parasitical organic matter that has been "eating away" at them for centuries and indeed become virtually indistinguishable from them: "Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves" (Thompson 201). In other words, we could easily think of this house as having originally risen from the ground (or "risen from the dead"), covered with dirt and decaying "organic matter": then its final collapse would be merely a sort of "return"—echoed by that of the (already "decaying") Usher twins, Roderick and Madeleine, to the company of their long-dead, long-buried ancestors.

Indeed, this organic matter within the walls has been itself decaying and even begun to "exhale" its own immediate "atmosphere"—symbolizing the supernatural force of evil, associated with dissolution by Poe—into the larger surrounding atmosphere: "the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor [the clouds, which 'hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house'], as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the *unnatural light* of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion" (Thompson 213).[14] For the mad Roderick this suggests that the house is "alive," possessed by a kind of "sentience" predetermined by his ancestors who had built it—the curse of the Ushers, their fate and doom—which is closely tied to its own inevitable decay and "death" (Thompson 209). Perhaps this conventionally Gothic picture of a house that is "alive" (haunted by ghosts or whatever "supernatural" forces) and thus "doomed" is only slightly extended by my picturing it as originally a "natural" and indeed "living" structure *beneath* the earth, now dead and decaying but soon to re-enter the realm of the super-living or super-natural *above* (perhaps far above) the earth.[15] Thinking of this in Gothic-cathedral terms, we might take the still-standing house as a "gargoyle," as possessing a strange, incongruous, excessive, even ugly "beauty." That is, we could correlate the *still-standing-on-surface* house with the cathedral's horizontal axis of obtrusive and superfluous decorations/supports, now seen as hiding the "sacred vertical" of the house, its earlier living form beneath the ground/surface and future supernatural form far above. This interpretive model at least fits the opposition between the immanent collapse, thus mundane temporality, and transience of the standing house and a vertical eternal time. Thus here in effect we are equating the "horizontal"

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[14] And here the physical "atmosphere" is in a certain way indistinguishable from that of the story.

[15] Deleuze speaks of the "sense of the affinity of matter with life and organisms. . . . [T]he world is infinitely cavernous . . . because everywhere there can be found 'a spirit in matter.' . . . The matter-fold is a matter-time . . . [W]e can imagine the affinity of matter for life insofar as a muscular conception of matter inspires force in all things. . . . Organic matter is not . . . different from inorganic matter" (6-7).

standing-house with its own immanent collapse-onto-the-horizontal; its whole meaning *is* its immanent collapse.

However, Poe opens the story not with a reflection on the standing house's immanent collapse but with a consideration of its mere appearance as projected on the artist's two-dimensional surface, in a passage echoing the one in "Arnheim" about the pure artist's "art" as a mere matter of *arbitrarily rearranging* surface-elements. We might then say we begin with a view of the already-collapsed or already-projected-onto-surface house, before moving on to the three-dimensional, "solid" house. And yet at the opening of "Usher" the narrator's "speculative problem" is not, ostensibly, the ambivalence (or *Gestalt*-switch reversibility) of beauty/ugliness but rather that of calmness/fear (calm state of mind/shocked state of mind).[16] While "passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country" on a "dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year" (Thompson 199), he suddenly comes upon an old house whose mere appearance terrifies him.[17] Like the narrator of "Arnheim," wondering why "in landscape arrangements alone [nature is] susceptible of exaltation" and finding this "a mystery I had been unable to solve," this narrator is an 18th- or 19th-century philosopher, speculating on what it is about the *image* of this house before him that so frightens him and, by extension, so "frightens" the reader:[18]

> What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble. . . . [I tentatively concluded that] while, beyond doubt,

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[16] Though Poe does not put "fear" and "terror" overtly into "Arnheim," we feel their subtle presence in earth-surface-destroying disturbances ("collapses") and the cold fact of human death. But the German poet Rilke says that "The beautiful is nothing but the beginning of the terrible," perhaps echoing Kant's move in his Third Critique from the problem of beauty (limited within "rational form") to that of the sublime, itself a kind of excessive beauty that can inspire awe, wonder and, closely tied to these, terror.

[17] We think of classic horror-film houses; I tend to think first of the one up on the hill in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Freud's notion of the "uncanny" as *unheimlich*, that with which (as in the recovery of repressed memories) we are both "at home" (familiar) and "not at home," is much to the point here.

[18] The narrator is in effect already a "reader" here, standing back from the immediate scene as he does. We can only imagine the de-horrifying and, beyond this, comic effect of a movie character reflecting on his own fear at great length. Yet the "comic effect" of this *self-reflection* is quite different from that engendered by repetition (redundancy) of the same tired old horror-flick clichés: the woman alone at home, opening the refrigerator door as the "horror music" commences to play in the background; chairs moved by ghosts; feet seen or heard coming up the stairs; Jason (in Episode 17, *Friday the 13th*) walking through woods in a white hockey mask, machete in hand, relentless, silent, an idiot or perhaps a robot.

there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene . . . would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps, to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay . . . by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows. (Thompson 199)

The narrator, in other words, performs an experiment. Having just been shocked by the house "at first sight," he now sees whether looking at its inverted image in the tarn (pond) that lies before it may not diminish this initial horrifying effect. Yet this "mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene" in fact sends through him "a shudder even more thrilling than before," that is, horrifies him even more.[19] But I take the point here to be that from whichever perspective he looks at this image, its effect on him (fear) is essentially the same. Perhaps this is because Poe thinks that the narrator has not actually "rearranged" the pieces—he has not "ruptured" the whole "surface"—but rather has simply inverted it so that the whole form, the inter-relation of the parts/pieces, remains intact. That is, perhaps we are to take his "rearrangement of the particulars" as a rearrangement only of the whole.[20]

If the two-dimensional image which the narrator is dealing with here is actually a "pre-collapsing" or "pre-projection-onto-surface" of the three-dimensional house—a point underscored by the inverted reflection of (the inversion of his

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[19] Ironically, if his self-reflexive pause to wonder why this image frightens him is taken as an actual narrative event then the narrator cannot really be very frightened. By extension, this "interruption" will have a (perhaps comic) horror-diminishing or horror-debunking effect upon the reader, and even more obviously upon a hypothetical movie-spectator—now twice-removed from the initial "scene" and watching it projected on a screen. And the narrator's further pursuit of his question through an experiment would only seem to further intensify (or further project) this effect. See the previous note.

[20] This passage is of course echoed by the "Arnheim" passage regarding the pure artist's "arbitrary (re)arrangement" of parts to create a greater beauty of over-all form; here, we recall, the narrator also said that it was impossible to "improve" the individual parts themselves. The latter point also is relevant to the following passage from "Usher" above, with its "totality" and "individual stones."

retinal image of) the actual house in the waters of the tarn—then in a slightly later passage the narrator, standing now closer to the house, is concerned with its three-dimensional structure. And yet he still sees it (perhaps like a mathematician or scientist) as if it had already been stereographically projected, as if it were an abstract, two-dimensional "model":

> It's principal feature seemed to be that of an *excessive antiquity*. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be *a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of individual stones*. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. (Thompson 201; emphasis added)

In this second, more physical model we have individual parts which are themselves decaying or "crumbling," while the "adaptation of the parts"—we assume it means "pattern of inter-relationship" or "harmony" of the parts—is "perfect." On the one hand, to take this perfection or integrity of the whole seriously would reinforce the above interpretation of the "experiment" passage: from whichever angle or perspective we look at a picture it is still the same picture for us (thus having the same effect on us) since the integrity of the whole remains unchanged. On the other hand, Poe has already told us this is a "specious totality," a false and deceptive wholeness. For if the individual parts, stones, particles, atoms are themselves "crumbling," then the "totality" (total form, appearance of the whole) must indeed be "specious" due to the *temporal* factor of steady, invisible decay. The walls of the house are ticking like a time-bomb; they may *look* intact (integrated) now, and in some sense they *are* intact now, but who knows when the house will collapse?

In fact the "excessive antiquity" grounds or signifies a "specious totality" that is itself ambivalent or paradoxical: it is still a totality and simultaneously it is a specious, false or imminently doomed ("mortal") totality.[21] After all, if we were to take it only in the second sense (imminent collapse) we might think the form itself

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[21] Non-linear dynamics or chaos theory (e.g. Serres) catches just this ambivalence or paradox, inasmuch as it takes every order as fundamentally a disorder and *vice versa*. (See notes 30, 40.)

was "already crumbling": then the form would itself be like a "large part" and there would be no "inconsistency" between the whole and the individual stones. Perhaps the "wildness" of this inconsistency captures just such paradoxes or incongruities as these. Another aspect of this "wildness" is the fact that the house's "excessive antiquity" may itself be a kind of deceptive or pseudo-antiquity, as if the house were virtually frozen in some other, far distant temporal space—one that exceeds normal time or history, perhaps the temporal space of myth and epic poetry.[22] Indeed it might be just this aspect of its "antiquity" which makes *real* the "perfect adaptation of parts." We get this sense of the house's being "frozen in past time" in Roderick's song which comes at the heart of the story—epitomizing it in a sort of self-reflexive *mise-en-abîme*. In stanza V of the impromptu "Haunted Palace" we have: "But evil things, in robes of sorrow, / Assailed the monarch's high estate; / . . . And, round about his home, the glory / . . . Is but a dim-remembered story / Of the old time entombed" (206).[23]

Thus we are returned to my earlier correlation of still-standing-house (about to collapse) with the cathedral's horizontal axis. For here again, and perhaps more obviously than before, it seems that the opposition between passing-time (time-of-decay) and a frozen "time-of-the-past" can be correlated with that between an obtrusive horizontal plane of mundane supports-and-decorations (walls taken on the horizontal) and the concealed vertical axis of the "sacred" and "transcendent" (walls seen on the vertical). The reason for correlating frozen-past (and/or frozen-future), immemorial, "eternal" time with the vertical is the idea of the sacred and transcendent as being something "beyond," that is, "far above" us, while the immanence of passing-time suggests the mundane, self-evident world of the present (with its extensions into past and future through memory and anticipation).[24] Yet in fact one might also think that passing-time in its dynamic forward thrust is "vertical" and that frozen-time, being detached from us and out there on "another level," is horizontal. Moreover, the actual *event* of the house's collapse, which in the earlier discussion I equated with the standing-house itself as the being-already-

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[22] In epic poetry time is circular: the present-time narrative often jumps "back" to the frozen, immemorial-yet-commemorated past and "forward" to a frozen future already determined by fate.

[23] Perhaps "The Haunted Palace" song/poem is also the "suspended heart" of the story's epigraph: "*Son coeur est un luth suspendu; / Sitôt qu'on le touché il résonne*," "His heart is like a suspended [hanging or taut] lute; as soon as it is touched it resonates" (Thompson 199; Thompson's translation). Such "suspension" (as from an arched roof) somehow suggests the style of Gothic architecture to me. "The Pit and the Pendulum" give us another variation on "suspension" from a (here dome-shaped) roof.

[24] See note 22 on the circularity of epic time, the sense of a "frozen future" as well as "frozen past."

projected-onto-horizontal- surface of the solid figure or form, could also (in the actual state-of-change brought about by the event) be taken as vertical. In this case, through the thrust of this vertical, we could more easily see the Ushers' "return" to a frozen, mythic, long-entombed past as implying the horizontality of that past. But again, like those other Gothic dualities, this one too may be paradoxical, an "insoluble mystery."[25]

It was suggested above that, in the "wild inconsistency" passage from "Usher," we could see the narrator as performing his "analysis" upon a projection of the solid house onto a plane surface in the manner of a mathematician or physicist. But then we might also further "project" the dissolving individual stones as dissolving points on a geometric plane, points which connected together form lines and figures and give us the integrated form of the two-dimensional whole (the "figure"). On the other hand, while lines and figures might seem reasonable, "dissolving points"—even more than dissolving or decaying atoms, which can still actually be "seen" with the right instruments, even if at a great remove from the human eye—would seem to be an impossible (or purely speculative) abstraction. And in fact this is a mathematical "extension" of the reason why the "Arnheim" narrator could not "improve" or "beautify" individual parts of the landscape, but only the "form of the whole": how could we make more beautiful individual particles or dirt, or individual atoms? The purely mathematical "decay" of points, on the other hand, suggests that of integers on the number scale, between any two of which (between 0 and 1 for instance, or between 1 and 2) there lies the whole range, abstract and theoretically infinite, of irrational numbers, a kind of "discordance" or "discordant melody" (Roderick's phrase in his "Haunted Palace" song) that plays against the rational harmony, the beautiful music of the integers—or, on the cosmological scale, of the "spheres."

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[25] Kristeva in "Woman's Time" distinguishes a male "chronological" time (from the father-god Kronos) from two "woman's" times: a cyclical time of nature's (and the body's) rhythms, and a kind of frozen "commemorative" time. Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* distinguishes *Aion* ("eternity" in Greek) as the "flat surface of time"—which he ties to Nietzsche's eternal return and Freud's *thanatos*, death-drive—from *Kronos* as the deep penetrations into this surface. Deleuze is looking at the whole picture as a kind of "mathematical" projection of time onto the spatial surface.

The Middle-Distance View as Not-Looking
in "The Purloined Letter"

If the earth-angels were looking down upon the surface of the earth only from the upper atmosphere, like modern-day test-pilots, they would see it neither as a totally flat, map-like projection nor as a sphere (we can never "see spheres" in a single view), but as something in-between. We are mainly dealing with this in-betweenness of the "middle perspective" in "Arnheim" and "Usher" and also, I would suggest, when we enter the domain of Poe's classic detective stories. For the latter also combine real physical space—though arguably time is less important here—with the purely mental, logical-mathematical, speculative space of a philosopher-scientist "narrator" whose role is now played by the detective (not himself technically the narrator). In the last of the three "tales of ratiocination," "The Purloined Letter," Dupin famously figures out that the Minister D. would have "hidden the letter by not hiding it"—that is, would have left it clearly on display in the most "normal" place, a letter-rack. [26] He does this by combining, like his adversary, the narrow, mathematical-mechanical thinking of the police (who have looked in vain in every possible concealed-space of the villain's apartment) with the pure intuition or "big-seeing" of the poet. And this "big-seeing" is a perspective which sees the whole surface from a kind of middle distance.

There may be two ways of looking at what the police are doing. It would be easiest to say that they are seeing the Minister D's apartment in the normal way, as a three-dimensional object; furthermore, they are looking at (opening up and searching) all the parts of it without seeing the whole form (the inter-relation of all the parts). But we can also say that, using what Dupin calls "mathematical" thinking, they have partly "abstracted" it, projected it onto a plane surface as a sort of model; perhaps they are examining a "rough" or "disrupted" surface–disrupted by the concealment within it of an alien object. Dupin, on the other hand, is clearly looking at a two-dimensional projection and focusing on it (on its meaning) purely *as projection*, that is, *as surface* and thus, in a sense, as blankness, as a blank surface. He is looking at the total form of this surface from a middle distance and thus can see all of it, including its periphery, "at once." Dupin explains the process of his deductions (and/or his inductions) to his friend (the narrator) *via* several examples,

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[26] Poe's "Rue Morgue" (1841) was quickly followed by "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842).

some of which may seem at bit "excessive."[27] And then he speaks of a "game of puzzles . . . played upon a map":

> One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town, river, state or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, *escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious*, and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are *too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. . . .* [The] Prefect . . . never once thought it . . . possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it. (Thompson 379; emphasis added)

It is true in a mundane, quotidian sense that we sometimes don't see things that are "right under our nose," perhaps mainly as we simply don't think they will be there, but rather somewhere further out on the margins or "periphery."[28] If a mystical view might be the widest perspective, one that sees the "biggest words" on the map, the Prefect and his police seem to go to the other extreme, for they are looking too "minutely" (too "mathematically") at the surface. Thus it seems we might resort to a "*middle-distance*" interpretation: Dupin sees what is right in front

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[27] And in this sense "Gothic," like so many gargoyles concealing the central meaning, but here also comic. Poe's most obvious excesses can easily be seen, once again, as being intentionally absurd.

[28] The story could also have a more "mystical" interpretation—which perhaps means, in the context of the map-game, the "biggest seeing." For example, we can't "see" (or objectively, rationally "know") the Dao precisely because it is too close to us, perhaps it *is* us. We can't see it because *we are* it, just as we can't see our own eyes except in a mirror, or even our own nose except very peripherally. Zhuangzi often uses expressions translatable as "big seeing" and "big saying." For instance, when Huizi tells Zhuangzi in *Zhuangzi* 26 that "your words are useless because too big" (likely meaning "too abstract and metaphysical"), the Daoist sage replies that, in effect, we think the ground that holds up the ground immediately beneath our feet is "useless"— but if that deeper ground is taken away we will see the "use of the useless."

of him in the most ordinary, everyday sense, without then actually having to "look" at all—without "trying to find something hidden."[29]

But this really means he is just seeing the "blank surface" itself as a fully revealed or self-revealing surface, a completely *self-evident* surface, rather than as a context or container for "things," for something other than itself. This *self-evidence* could be that of ordinary perception ("X is right under your nose" but because "too self-evident" you don't see it) though it also fits Poe's perhaps not-serious (i.e. absurdly excessive, irrelevant, self-parodying) context here of formal logic and mathematics: A = A, 1 + 1 = 2, etc. as self-evident truths in any of various senses including the Platonic one; Kant's *a priori* analytic judgments ("Blue is a color") as opposed to *a priori* synthetic ones (which actually tell us something about the world yet hold for every possible case, "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points," "Things tend to fall when they are dropped"). Whether taken as logical-analytic surface or (more obviously) as the surface of everyday middle-distance, this sort of seeing requires in fact "no thinking," a point that underscores the absurd irrelevance of Dupin's "excessive" mathematical-poetic explanation of how he figured out that the Minister D would hide the letter by not hiding it.[30]

Poe/Dupin then correlates the perspective of the Prefect and police as being "too close" in the way that "mathematics" (at least in its mechanical sense as pure calculation) seems too close or too "narrow"; yet he also does not stand very far from the wall—in a "too-far" seeing which could suggest abstract-logical or metaphysical thinking or indeed, as Poe/Dupin also suggests here, a purely "poetic" thinking *not combined with mathematical thinking*—in order to see the letter in the

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[29] The "suchness" of Chan Buddhism and (perhaps the same thing) Daoist *wu-wei*, inaction, "doing by not doing" come to mind here.

[30] See note 27. The Platonic presumed self-evidence of "A=A' etc. is for Derrida the logocentric prejudice, since even in this case (for Derrida) the truth or meaning is delayed/deferred, not immediately self-present, and even (logocentric) speech is a form of "writing." The Lacanian reading of the story in *Écrits* (and Derrida's response) is still generally "poststructuralist" (i.e. still "semiotic") in this sense. But I would like to suggest that the "Purloined Letter" may be better served by a Serresian reading which takes self-evident logical tautologies as a form of *meaningless nonsense*, *absurd excess*, the "blank chaos" of hyper-order which may revert to "dark chaos" (or remain suspended in entropic terminal equilibrium). (See note 6.) This might even allow us to *equate* the common-sense "seeing what is right in front of you" with "seeing [logically-mathematically-intuitively] the hyper-ordered logical-mathematical truth [surface]," in which case we could say Dupin, like Minister D a small-seeing mathematician *and* big-seeing poet, "sees the truth" (sees the unhidden letter) by accepting the chaos or disorder of the "redundancy." This "redundant surface" interpretation also suggests, *via* a Serresian reading of chaos theory, a *Gestalt*-switched order/disorder and thus a position *between* order/disorder, one which may be congruent with the notion of viewing the surface from a "middle distance."

letter rack. Rather, he views the surface of everyday reality, the wall-and-rack, from a middle distance; he sees it in an ordinary ("unthinking") way, perhaps in the way of Heidegger's "use of equipment" (*Zu-Handen*, ready-to-hand rather than *Vor-Handen*) rather than closely in the way of an analytic thinker/scietniest or far away n the sense of a purely "metaphysical-poetic" or "speculative" thinker. The truly "poetic" intuition, Poe/Dupin may be suggesting, is the mathematical-poetic intuition which like Arnheim's artist or earth-angel sees the earth from a middle distance and only needs to look at it to "know it's beautiful." Perhaps he sees that the whole as the sum of its parts (Poe's poet) but also as itself a part (Poe's mathematician); perhaps he sees it as an ugly-and-also-beautiful chaotic surface whose "true beauty" is formed or created in a totally arbitrary manner.[31]

Peripheral Vision
in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

However, while also beginning from a flat surface which only the detective can clearly "see," the earlier "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" takes a slightly different perspective: now the problem lies in seeing, not the logical self-evidence of an indefinitely-extended plane surface but its semi-concealed periphery. Here Dupin and his companion read the newspaper account of two women who were mysteriously murdered in a locked fourth-story apartment, one whose window could not possibly have allowed of human entry or egress—a classic "locked room mystery." And here again the Prefect (and his police) are looking too closely or too narrowly at the surface, though not in the too-minute, too-mathematical-mechanical way that we get in "Purloined Letter." Rather, they are arguably already taking here a middle-distance perspective, whereas Dupin moves to a slightly further-back perspective.

The problem is that in their conventional thinking the police assume the murderer must be a human being: their "normal" range of thinking (of "possibilities" being considered) is too restricted; they can only see that portion of the "surface" that is right in front of them, its most "central" portion. Dupin, on the other hand, who of course figures out that the killer could not have been human (since no human could have gotten into and out of that fourth-floor window)—and then deduces from particular pieces of evidence that it must have been an orangutan, though I take this as being secondary to the main point of the story, his seeing the

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[31] See note 30.

possibility of a non-human perpetrator—is able to see that which is *outré*, to see the "periphery."[32]

In other words, Dupin does not think too "deeply" about the room in question (the scene of the crime); he does not think of it as being "solid" (or at least "semi-solid") and, like the police in "Purloined Letter," look into every nook and cranny of it. (The police in "Rue Morgue" start doing this but, not even knowing what to look for, they quickly realize that this seems to be an "impossible case.") Rather, Dupin—after briefly examining the room, something he never does in "Purloined Letter" until he has already figured out, in principle, how to find the letter–"projects" as surface- model this room or rather the *mystery* that it presents, precisely that which seems puzzling and indeed impossible about this case given the location and structure of the physical room. Then he looks, like the man looking at a star from the corner of his eye, at the entire surface including especially its periphery, since he knows this is what the police are unable to see:

> Vidocq [a French minister of police] . . . erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see . . . one or two points with unusual clearness, but in doing so he . . . lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the most important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-tops where she is found. [This can be explained by] the contemplation of the heavenly bodies. To look at a star by glances—to view it in a sidelong way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the *retina* (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distinctly—is to have the best appreciation of its luster—a luster which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision *fully* upon it. A greater number of rays actually fall upon the eye in the latter case, but in the former, there is a more refined capacity for comprehension. By undue profundity we perplex and enfeeble thought; and it is possible to make Venus herself vanish from the firmament by a

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[32] *Outré* (a word appearing several times in this story) is from the French *outrer*, "to carry to excess," thus meaning, "violating convention or propriety; bizarre." "Periphery" is from the Greek *peripherein*, "to carry around," and means, "the perimeter of a circle or polygon; the exzternal boundary or surface of a body; the outward bounds of something . . . ." (*Merriam-Webster's* 826, 865)

scrutiny too sustained, too concentrated, or too direct. (Thompson 252)

By means of his "peripheral vision," then, Dupin can go beyond the limits of conventional thinking and see the *outré* truth: the killer must not have been human. Ironically, the path to this truth has turned out to be "wide" yet "superficial" in the sense of "not deep," "not penetrating the surface." The scientific analogy here is very interesting, but so are the closely-related "artistic" analogies: "star-gazing" is the custom, after all, of romantic poets and painters (and photographers) as well as astronomers—who also rely heavily on photography as well as, of course, telescopes. I think especially of "Arnheim" and the earth-angels gazing down, presumably without telescopes, at the earth from a middle distance in the "upper atmosphere" with the final line above: "The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-tops where she is found." At first this line may seem puzzling, if only because one would expect "surface" instead of "mountain-tops" here: we expect Dupin to say that "the true depth—that is, the real "truth"—is the most superficial one." Yet perhaps Poe is thinking of "mountain-tops" as representing "surface" here? In any case we have a (slightly ruptured or uneven) surface, with far-above observers looking for the parts or points in it which are "true" (the detective) and/or "beautiful" (the artist).

But what about false-deceptive and/or ugly-incongruous? For the earth-angels the human artist's "beautiful" is "ugly" and *vice-versa*: does this also mean the human "truth" is "false or "deceptive" and vice-versa as seen from far above, from the middle-view? For the earth-angels (equating truth and beauty) this might make sense, Dupin (as detective) is only trying to pick the single truth (ape as killer) from out of a "background" of many wrong answers (or by analogy the one beautiful spot in a sea of ugliness). Yet the latter suggests a slightly different "surface-model" for Dupin than the one suggested above, or perhaps it is simply an "extension" of that model: once we are out on the periphery beyond all the normal explanations (none of which seem possible), do we start to see a different picture, one in which we must pick the one most-likely *outré* possibility out of a background of many such possibilities? Perhaps this right answer suddenly catches (the far side of) our eye, as by a kind of "intuition" (like that of the artist or mathematician or theoretical scientist); perhaps it suddenly "jumps out at us" like "mountain" from a level surface, when looked down on from above (and thus not normally so easy to distinguish from the plane or plain), in a kind of purely *arbitrary* fashion—as might after all fit the intuition of the "abstract poet." Also, in the context of Poe's notion

that the earth-angels have a "death-refined appreciation of the beautiful", we may be struck by Dupin's point that when we see a star peripherally "there is a more refined capacity for comprehension," though this may not quite seem to fit the above picture of "intuition" as a momentary and somewhat arbitrary "leap" (*Works* 550?). Finally, as for the idea that even Venus would disappear if we "look at it too hard," this is perhaps most easily related to both "Rue Morgue" and "Purloined Letter" (to which any of the above thoughts might also apply) through its contrary: it is when we "stop looking" (stop trying to look) at or for a particular object that we (peripherally, intuitively, arbitrarily) suddenly see it.

At the outset I suggested that the relation between vertical and horizontal axes of the "Gothic cathedral" is ambivalent/paradoxical: on the one hand the vertical (as essence, beauty, truth) is hidden within/beneath the horizontal taken as incongruous external decorations/supports and thus (in its sacred "lightness") also rises above it; on the other hand the soaring of the vertical is also an illusion made possible by the "loading forces" of its horizontal support-structure, in another sense itself the hidden element. With both "Arnheim" and "Usher" I looked at this relationship in the context of collapsing or projecting the vertical "roof" ("heaven") down onto the horizontal ground/earth-surface, and in both cases temporality was a significant factor: in "Arnheim" the wider/deeper spatial perspective of the earth-angels also gives them a "before" and "after" (past and future) time lacked by the initial (human) ground, onto which they now become projected; in "Usher" there seems to be a somewhat similar pattern of ambivalence (or paradoxical pattern) at work, since in the context of temporal decay and spatio-temporal collapse the present "earth-surface" time can be seen as wither horizontal or vertical, and the same for the "frozen time-of-the-past" (time-of-the-ancestors). However, in the two detective stories we are beginning from the spatio-logical surface (projection of room-onto-plane has already occurred) and thus time predictably does not seem to play very much of a role. That is, although we might get a slight suggestion of evolutionary (as opposed to geological) time in "Rue Morgue" (ape as proto-human), the detective's praxis of "seeing the surface" is primarily logical-mathematical-spatial, as in the viewing of a painting.

Nonetheless, there does seem to be a very special way in which time enters "Rue Morgue" directly within the narrative flow, or narrative logic, something it does not quite do in "Purloined Letter." In one long passage we get a very strange series of metonymic connections between the partly-random thoughts in the mind of his companion, themselves deduced or guessed by Dupin, so that in effect we have a temporal series closely tied to a logical or epistemological one. What in particular

strikes me here is the possibility of a "Gothic cathedral" reading according to which this temporal-logical thought-chain now becomes the horizontal support-and-decoration axis, obtrusive and incongruous, precisely because this chain (this whole "series") largely obscures the central or essential "meaning" of the story (the solving of the murder case), now taken as the "vertical" axis. That is, in purely structural rather than thematic terms—for in thematic terms what is most "Gothic," the ape and his way of killing, seems tied to the central or vertical meaning of the story– we have a horizontal narrative "surface" full of largely irrelevant, superfluous and in this sense incongruous elements that obscure the story's "core."[33]

This occurs just before Dupin and his friend read the newspaper account of the mysterious murders in the Rue Morgue, as they are walking through a street in Paris at night. Dupin is amusing himself by divining the entire sequence of his silent friend's thoughts, beginning from the point at which a passing fruit-seller forces the friend to veer off his path and walk across a "pile of paving-stones . . . collected at a spot where the causeway is undergoing repair" and ending with the point at which the friend looks up at the stars and then "draws up to his full height" (Thompson 245-46). Later the detective explains the process (literally the series of steps) through which, starting from his friend's initial thought, which he could deduce (or induce) from the man's act of looking down at the paving stones, he metonymically arrived at the last, also correlated with his bodily movement (looking up at the stars), in the other man's stepping-stone series of thoughts:

> "You kept your eyes upon the ground– . . . (so that I saw you were still thinking of the stones,) until we reached a little alley called Lamartine, which has been paved, by way of experiment, with the overlapping and riveted blocks. Here your countenance brightened up, and, perceiving your lips move, I could not doubt that you murmured the word 'stereotomy,' a term very effectively applied to this species of pavement.[34] I knew that you could not say to yourself 'stereotomy' without being brought to think of atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus; and since . . . not very long ago, I mentioned to you how singularly . . . the vague guesses of that noble Greek had met with

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[33] Or, looked at another way, this is simply (proto-) postmodern fiction as in, for instance, Borges.

[34] Stereotomy is the art/science of "cutting solids," an "a-tom" being an indivisible whole or particle.

confirmation in the late nebular cosmogony, I felt that you could not avoid casting your eyes upward to the great nebula in Orion, and I certainly expected that you would do so. You did look up; and I was now assured that I had correctly followed your steps." (Thompson 245-46)[35]

In this playfully-performed thought-sequence (thought-dance, *tête-a-tête*) of Dupin-and-friend, now "stereotomized"—we note the author's self-reflexive move, his *mise-en-abime* where the "abyss" now becomes a single isolated atom—in the manner (here parodied) of the empiricists Locke and Hume, Poe associates stereotomy with Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher influenced by Democritus' atomism. According to atomism everything in the universe (including the human body and mind or soul) is nothing but atoms in a void. Of course, any further readings of the "logic" of this entire passage (see notes 34 and 35), any attempts to delve further into its incongruous-*excessive* horizontal structure here—its horizon-tally-extended, metonymically-yet-randomly linked "supports" hiding the essential "points," its "blind alleys" or "false clues" (to the story's total "meaning," as if there could be one) which must "put the reader at fault"—would seem super-fluous.[36]

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[35] The following steps may be briefly summarized. The constellation Orion reminds Dupin, and by a kind of metonymic extension he knows it must have reminded his friend, of a drama in which a diminutive cobbler-turned-actor is currently performing the leading role of Xerxes. For one thing the two have been recently discussing a critical review of the play which argues that the actor, Chantilly, is too short to play this heroic role; for another, it was after looking up at Orion in the night sky that Dupin's companion himself stands up straight (in true heroic or mock-heroic fashion); the point is further *over-determined* by the "heroic" nature, in the view of both men, of the Herschels' "nebular cosmogony." One should note here, keeping the oppositional dynamics of our "Gothic cathedral" in mind, the obvious play between extreme points on a vertical scale: down below (on the earth-surface) the cut paving stones, shoes, footsteps, shortness; up above (on the celestial surface) the heroic sky, stars, constellations, nebula.

[36] Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* says: "*humor* is the art of surfaces and of the complex relation between the two surfaces" (248). An example of such excessive, labyrinthine "wrong turns" would be Poe's extended play with Orion in the "stereotomy" passage: the drama critic points out that the too-short actor (formerly a cobbler) also changed his name when he took the stage name Chantilly, just as in Ovid's *Fasti* the account of the birth myth of the Boetian Orion contains the line: "*Perditit antiquum litera prima sonum*" ("The first letter has lost its original sound"; Thompson 246). This alludes to the fact that before the heroic hunter changed it, Orion's name was Urion, "to urinate": the story goes that an old peasant urinated on a piece of bear hide and planted it, and from the ground sprang the baby Urion. Beyond the common animal theme (bears, orangutans) and more generally the primitive, barbarian or "wild" theme in "Rue Morgue," we could make endless attempts to interpret the tale *via* such "leads" while getting nowhere. Thus Dupin says the crime has put the Paris police (like the reader) "at fault," a term referring to dogs

And yet, this metonymic series may actually catch the very thought with which Poe opens this tale: "The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis" (Thompson 240). (After the first three pages of purely "analytic" discourse as befits an essay, we get the switch to narrative with this line: "The narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced," Thompson 242). The opening thought is that we can only demonstrate the action or play of the detective's analysis, *his analytic skill or power*; we cannot "explain" it, either by going back behind it to deduce it from some higher axiom—as in Plato (whose highest axiom is "One Being," reduced by Democritus, via Parmenides, to a single atom)—or by "analyzing" it, "cutting it up" (as with an abstracted version of the orangutan's razor.)

Thus the monstrous (ape as monstrous human) and properly "Gothic" ape-murder theme does indeed have a rival for the "central meaning" and "vertical axis" of the story: the philosophical idea—violently separated from the crime plot by being placed in a totally different, discontinuous discourse at the beginning of the essay-story—that "analysis cannot be analyzed," that is, cannot be cut into tiny "logical parts" (as opposed to physical ones like stones, particles, indivisible atoms) through a purely logical yet still fierce stereotomy. But if we decide to make *this idea* the vertical axis (and the crime-plot the superfluous and obscuring, horizontal support/decoration axis, structure or "outwork"), then the above "mind-reading" passage—itself merely demonstrating Dupin's powers of analysis as free-play and thus ultimately "to no purpose" (not only as regards the crime-plot but as regards any plot or coherent, extended, significant "theme")—begins to take on a new light.

Gothic Light and the Blank Surface

In fact there are still two abstract elements, closely-related and noted by every Medieval observer of Gothic cathedrals, which I have intentionally left for last: walls-as-windows and light. (Light often gets mentioned first in descriptions of the "Gothic effect.") The relative thinness of the walls of the inner, vertical chambers,

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that are put on the "wrong scent" ("wrong trail," "wrong tracks"). Again we see how the endless circle of (to a degree self-reflexive) metonymic "connections," like obtrusive supports in the Gothic cathedral, might fill the entire area of the "textual surface" and thereby conceal rather than reveal any deep or essential meaning. Meantime, on a "transcendental ironist" reading, the author is laughing at us, perhaps urinating on his own text, on its "bearskin," and/or on our attempts to interpret it.

made possible by the massive external buttresses which support them, allows them to consist largely of stained-glass windows.[37] These thin "walls of light"— beautified by immense paintings-on-glass of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the saints—suggest the extreme precariousness or "fragility" of a structure which cannot "collapse" since in a sense it is "not even there"; they thus powerfully reinforce the illusion of a vertical-divine upward thrust. As for this light, we naturally want to correlate it with the vertical-divine, with Heaven, yet we see it coming through these huge windows (in order to illuminate otherwise dark interiors) at something like a 45-degree angle with respect to the earth's surface, "on a slant."[38] This would seem to put the incoming light ambiguously between the vertical and horizontal axes, perhaps as a "moderated light" or even "darkened light": if we take vertical-Heaven as pure light and the vertical-"underworld" as pure darkness, then the horizontal plane of the earth's surface is itself a place of "half-light."[39] Of course, this incoming light also becomes literally (physically)

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[37] For Binding the "essence" of the Gothic style includes "the vertical, the illusionistic, the fragile" (30). This correlates "essence" with "the vertical," though the ambiguity of "illusionistic" lingers.

[38] Inevitably one thinks here of Dickinson's poem, "There's a certain Slant of light," which reflects explicitly on the *light* coming through cathedral windows on "Winter Afternoons" and contains her most "Derridean" line: "Heavenly Hurt, it gives us— / We can find no scar, / But internal difference, / Where the Meanings, are—" (Poem 258, Baym et al, 1174-75). The "landscape of death" in the final stanza is also formed by the light/dark interplay: "When [the light] comes, the Landscape listens— / Shadows—hold their breath— / When it goes, 'tis like the Distance / On the look of Death—."

[39] Poe gives a geometrical sense to "light" and "darkness" by speaking of their "inflections"—this term originally meant "a change in curvature of an arc or curve from concave to convex and conversely" (*Merriam-Webster's* 599)—thus implying that they may be both on the same "larger scale" and are somehow reversible or interchangeable. In *Pym*'s concluding "Note" we get an "Ethiopian verbal root" which means "'To be shady'—hence all the inflections of shadow or darkness" and an "Arabic verbal root" meaning "'To be white,' whence all the inflections of brilliancy and whiteness" (Thompson 562).

Deleuze, interpreting Leibniz' "baroque," speaks of the point of inflection on the mathematical arc or curve in relation to the soul: "[The point of] inflection already moves through virtual transformations. . . .[T]he *metaphysical point*, the soul or the subject . . . is what occupies the point of view, it is what is projected in point of view.

darkened as an effect of time (day and night) and of clouds blocking the sun, and further darkened as it enters the cathedral's vast stone interior.

Walls of any sort also combine horizontal and vertical axes; their horizontal dimension makes us feel imprisoned or "walled in"—even if, on the vertical axis, we could climb or jump over walls that were low enough—and their (potentially "observable") vertical soaring lets us feel free, unless or until we are stopped by a horizontal ceiling. But what about walls so thin that they become "walls of light"? This suggests a dematerializing, dissolution or indeed (to use a more Poe-like term) "decay" of the walls themselves, their stones and perhaps even their molecules, for now incredibly tiny photons (Poe may have thought particles or waves) come rushing through at an extremely high speed. We naturally tend to correlate light with order and truth (and knowledge and moral goodness), and also with creation: God created the universe (in *Genesis*) when He said, "Let there be light." But the world's horizontal is a place of half-light, and light has a "dark side" which we see, for instance, in the destructive (as well as creative) power of fire. Coming closer to Poe, then, perhaps light not only fits but in some sense also *grounds* the fragility of windows and the destruction or dissolution of opaque walls, in whose absence or nothingness it is able to shine through, to shine in.[40]

Finally we are left with the blank surface upon which the detective gazes—perhaps the horizontal that remains after the vertical is collapsed or projected down onto it; now it seems possible that either the vertical-"light" or horizontal-"dark" might finally dominate this surface. We may think of the surface as being "empty" and yet, in another sense, as whiteness ("blank" also means "white"), and thus as

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Thus the soul is not in a body in a point, but is itself a higher point and of another nature, which corresponds with the point of view." (*The Fold* 15, 23)

[40] Focillon: "Light is treated not so much as an inert factor as a living element, fully capable of entering into and of assisting the cycle of metamorphoses. Light not only illuminates the internal mass, but collaborates with the architecture to give it its needed form. Light itself is form . . . . (75).

absolutely "overdetermined": in physical terms whiteness is the combination of all colors (all the light is reflected from the surface). But then we might wonder how this blank surface could be distinguished from a dark or indeed black surface, which "absorbs" all light, all colors, and thus is absolutely "underdetermined."[41] Yet in "The Purloined Letter" Dupin is interested in the pure "self-evidence" or "self-transparency" of this surface, and "transparency" suggests that we might see the surface as the pane of glass in a window and/or as the purely "logical" surface of the detective's mind (where logic itself dissolves into intuition). Perhaps then we could think of this pure mental surface as a window with the light coming in, coming through it from "outside" (from the domain of the utterly incongruous, almost-unthinkable *outrê*) and illuminating those otherwise invisible figures within the glass.[42]

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[41] This also suggests the Serresian reading of Dupin's strategy of "finding by not finding" in "Purloined Letter" (see notes 21 and 30.) Serres' correlation of chaotic hyper-order with "blankness" and of chaotic hypo-order (or non-order) with "darkness" fits the correlation above, though in fact one might also think of blankness as under-determined, darkness as over-determined. From a chaos-theory perspective we might say that order and disorder themselves may easily *Gestalt*-switch into one another. (Every order is an order of disorder, every disorder is a disorder of order.) Or, in some sense, these two "extremes" are "the same." (*Laozi* 1on "essence" and "manifestation" [Wilhelm: "miraculous essence" and "spatial limitations"]: "Both are one in origin / and different only in name. / In its unity it is called the secret," Wilhelm 27).

[42] Though we need to keep in mind that "even stained glass can construct a wholly fictitious light within an illusion of space" (Focillon 82). Focillon also raises, in this context, the question: "In other words, is a work of art conceived as an object within the universe, lighted as other objects are by the light of day, or as a universe with its own inner light, constructed according to certain rules?" (80) The "figures in the glass" is of course also an allusion to the orangutan, who/which gestures with its/his master's shaving razor—soon to become the murder weapon—in humorous imitation ("aping"), gazing at its/his doubled face in the mirror

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