

Chapter 12

Beyond the Self and the Environment: The Psychological Horizon

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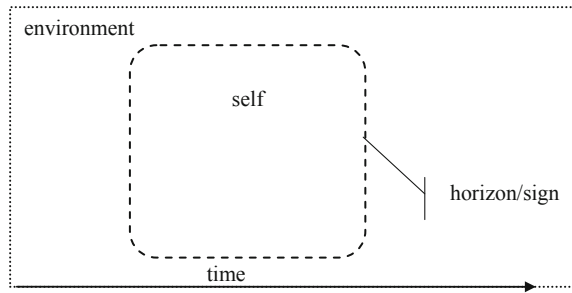
Human beings always come under the horizon's spell. The word horizon derives from the ancient Greek "horizōn kyklos", meaning "separating circle", from the verb "horizō", "to divide", "to separate", and that from the noun "oros", "boundary, landmark" (Liddell and Scott 1925). The horizon is an epiphenomenon emerging from a peculiar combination between the spherical shape of our earth land and the organizational principles of human spatial perception and orientation. The horizon's metaphor has been often used in literature, natural sciences, and philosophy as a catalyzer of the human aspiration to the Unknown. The horizon is the edge of the interaction between human-centered awareness and the infinite realm of nonhuman phenomena, underlying "the separation of resident, or organic, from transient, or objective" (MacDougall 1903, p. 145). In this chapter, I will try to develop the idea of psychological horizon, understood as one of the semiotic elements characterizing the relationship between the self and the environment. The psychological horizon is one of the catalytic factors enabling psychological events. Drawing from Kurt Lewin's field theory, I describe the features of the psychological horizon as a semiotic device and its role in the process of meaning construction.

What lies beyond the horizon is not yet in the condition of perceived reality, thus unable to interact with our senses or orientate our action. Through the idea of psychological horizon this reality-not-yet-to-be comes into our life, playing a role in setting up our goals through the imaginative power (Danesi 1995). An example of this psychological role is a short lyric by the Romantic poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), titled "The Infinite":

1. Always to me beloved was this lonely hillside
2. And the hedgerow creeping over and always hiding
3. The distances, the horizon's furthest reaches.
4. But as I sit and gaze, there is an endless
5. Space still beyond, there is a more than mortal
6. Silence spread out to the last depth of peace,
7. Which in my thought I shape until my heart

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Fig. 12.1 The role of horizon/sign



8. Scarcely can hide a fear. And as the wind
9. Comes through the copses sighing to my ears,
10. The infinite silence and the passing voice
11. I must compare: remembering the seasons,
12. Quiet in dead eternity, and the present,
13. Living and sounding still. And into this
14. Immensity my thought sinks ever drowning,
15. And it is sweet to shipwreck in such a sea. (Leopardi 1950, p. 924)

In lines 3–5 the poet has sketched the relationship between the perceptual horizon and the triggering of an imaginative, as well as reflexive process. The image of horizon is evoked by the perceptual limitation to the gaze (“the horizon’s furthest reaches”) in a poetic representation of Herbst (1976) co-genetic logic. In fact, the horizon in Leopardi’s lyrics is not the physical constraint to gaze, but rather the co-generation of constraint and sign (Fig. 12.1), leading to the emergence of several new psychological events: representations and imagination (line 7: “in my thought I shape”); memory (line 11: “I must compare: remembering the seasons”); and emotions (line 15: “it is sweet to shipwreck in such a sea”). The lyric thus synthetically expresses the idea that an act of semiotization and segmentation calls to life the psychological objects of our experience, that is every individual, material object, or sign that plays a role in the psyche. The “hedgerow” at line 2 becomes a sign, namely a horizon/sign, establishing a segmentation between the self and the environment, thus triggering the coming into life space of both the self and the environment as objects of experience (Fig. 12.1).

Another example of horizon/sign in everyday life is the word “now”, that introduces segmentation in the field of experience. It co-creates different objects by placing time into the public sphere, through acts of measurement and semiotization (Heidegger 2010; James 1950). This segmentation and semiotization generates the common sense knowledge about time as an infinite sequence of “nows” in the construction of temporality and its meaning. Horizon/signs can be generated at different levels of abstraction and reality, and they can be either material or immaterial objects (Fig. 12.2).

In the examples of Fig. 12.2, a sign is produced that establishes a segmentation of space, triggering a re-organization of the relationship between the self and the



Fig. 12.2 Real and unreal, material and immaterial horizon/signs

environment. In the case of the painted wall, the sign is working on the physical border of the field, creating an immaterial and quite unreal horizon, modifying and widening the field itself. In the case of the ruins, a material object included into the perceptual field is used as a sign to segment the space, establishing a difference between the self and the environment. In both cases, the horizon/sign co-generates new objects in the field that produce new meaning to the psychological experience, like in the case of the “hedgerow”.

The semiotic process of naming the horizon establishes a meaningful differentiation between the observer and the environment, adding a value to the new co-generated elements. The idea of horizon as semiotic differentiation of elements, rather than just perceptual psycho-physiological process—thought rooted in perceptual activity—was already well known by poets and novelists but largely ignored by psychologists (MacDougall 1903). Whether you start from an empiricist—objective is permanent and subjective is transient—or rationalist—subjective is permanent and objective is transient—perspective, there is something pre-existing, the relationship between the self and the environment, that owns the right to inform the relationship between what is and what is not the subject. Gadamer’s hermeneutic perspective tries to solve this problem by the idea of “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer 1997). This moves the problem from the relationship between the subject and the environment to the process of intersubjectivity. The horizon is still related to subject as the “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer 1997, p. 302). Everyone has his own subjective horizon, and the question becomes how to overcome the individual points of view of historically affected consciousness, as far as “working out of the hermeneutical situation means the achievement of the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter

with tradition (Gadamer 1997, p. 302). Also in this case, the hermeneutic process is possible only if something to be interpreted preexists the intersubjective fusion of horizons. In other words, every approach to the notion of horizon presupposes the existence of something before and apart from the subjective experience.

Summing up, we have at least three different accepted meanings of the word “horizon”: (a) the boundary of physical environment that can be perceived by individual senses; (b) the particular subjective perspective from which the environment is perceived; (c) the established boundary between the observer and the environment. In all cases, the notion of subject is the origin, the focal point of the horizon, also implying that the horizon line moves with the person¹. It is worth noticing that the space within the range of horizon is not empty but populated by people and objects. It is thus reasonable to imagine that even the space beyond the horizon shall be populated as well. This simple assumption makes possible a wide range of inferences that are not strictly related to our direct experience of the phenomenal world. Rather than being a simple constraint to the psychological processes, the emergence of a horizon becomes a potential condition of such processes—like in Leopardi’s lyric—that provides meaning to the individual’s life space. In this view, the idea of horizon starts to look like an example of catalytic process. The horizon is produced as a sign that plays the role of semiotic catalyst promoting and guiding the emergence of new psychological phenomena. The horizon/sign is the valued and positive side of the coin, with respect to time perspective and boundaries. But before, it is worthy to clarify the co-genetic relationship between the self and the environment presented in Fig. 12.1, through the concept of meaningful life space in relationship with the horizon, drawing from Kurt Lewin’s topological psychology.

The Meaningful Life Space in Lewin’s Topological Psychology

The idea of Kurt Lewin’s topological psychology is that human life space—or psychological field—is a multidimensional space “in which locomotion or structural change take place” (Lewin 1997, p. 201), populated by several meaningful objects, each one with its own specific value or charge. The psychological field is an ordered and abstract spatial construct, representing the relationships between psychological phenomena (Brown 1936). Through this abstract representation, it is possible to describe the psychological structure of the person and the behaviors carried out to reach a specific goal. With respect to the individual goal, any action, represented as a locomotion from an initial region to a different one, acquires a direction (Brown 1936). For the same reason, every object included into the field has a positive or negative value, whether it represents a possible pathway toward the achievement of the goal or a barrier to such an achievement. These opposing charges generate a field of forces which makes tension, rather than balance, the most important characteristic

¹ I am grateful to Pina Marsico, University of Salerno (Italy), who gave me this insightful hint during a private conversation.

of life space (Lewin 1935, 1936, 1997). Actually, the basic epistemological principle of field theory is that “any behaviour or any other change in a psychological field depends only upon the psychological field *at that time*” (Lewin 1997, p. 201, original italic). This claim apparently narrows the elements of the psychological life to the here and now, misleading to the conclusion that field theory is a situationistic and behaviorist approach. Lewin’s idea was that elements outside the field as well as the concrete situations of the field in a previous time are not relevant in understanding the psychological processes at stake unless they are brought somehow into the field *at that time*. Objects of experience are included into the life space through a semiotic process of meaning making, that is bringing something into the field of forces and providing it with charge. This is basically an act of segmentation and semiotization of the relationship between the self and the environment. The objects included into the field of forces are also provided with a level of reality that depends upon their relationship with our needs and expectations (Lewin 1935, 1997). Semiotization is thus the process that co-generates all the elements outside and inside the field, as well as the real and unreal, and finally links the present with past and future situations. In this respect, the true meaning of “*at that time*” in field theory is that “the psychological field which exists at a given time contains also the views of that individual about his future and past. The individual sees not only his present situation; he has certain expectations, wishes, fears, daydreams for his future. His views about his own past and that of the rest of the physical and social world are often incorrect but nevertheless constitute, in his life space, the ‘reality-level’ of the past. In addition, a wish-level in regard to the past can frequently be observed. The discrepancy between the structure of this wish- or irreality-level of the psychological past and the reality-level plays an important role in the phenomenon of guilt. The structure of the psychological future is closely related, for instance, to hope and planning” (Lewin 1997, p. 207).

Lewin’s idea of development is based on a general genetic process implying the progressive elaboration by the individual of the life space meaning through differentiation. The child experiences an environment which is boundless, made of objects and persons that are somehow part of his own individuality.

[T]he newborn cannot distinguish between himself and his environment; slowly certain areas, for instance, those connected with eating, take on specific character, become more and more differentiated; the parts of his own body become differentiated from each other and from the rest of the world; social relations develop and become differentiated; needs, emotions, language go through a similar process of differentiation (Lewin 1942, p. 226).

This life space is also timeless, in the sense that the child lives in present time. It is besides magically real, in the sense that the boundary between real and unreal is fuzzily defined.

The young child does not distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality. To a great extent wishes and fears affect his judgment. As an individual becomes mature and gains “self-control”, he more clearly separates his wishes from his expectations: his life space differentiates into a “level of reality” and various “levels of irreality”, such as fantasy and dream (Lewin 1997, p. 81).

According to Lewin (1935, 1942), the boundaries of self are fuzzy unless a progressive differentiation between the self and the environment is dynamically established, through the experience of needs' satisfaction, constraints, others' guidance and frustration.

In the psychological life-sphere in addition to the plane of reality there usually exist various *levels of unreality*. Unreality (the plane of dreams, of so-called imagination, of gesture) is roughly characterized by the fact that in it one can do as he pleases. Dynamically there is a lack of firm barriers and a large degree of mobility. And the boundaries between the ego and the environment are also fluid (Lewin 1935, p. 145).

Differentiation occurs when objects in life space acquire their own symbolic meaning. Thus, an environment understood by the child as an extension of the body becomes a meaningful life space populated by objects charged with a symbolic value. Operating in the environment changes not only the individual state in the contingent present, but also all his reactions in future situations (Lewin 1935).

This influence of the present situation upon future possibilities of conduct, which is particularly significant to development as a process considerably extended in time, is due not only to the child's acquisition of certain intellectual experiences but, above all, to the fact that his whole person is changed in certain specific ways (Lewin 1935, p. 111).

Like in the process of cellular division, the psychological space of the individual becomes more and more populated by meaningful objects and segmented by sets of internal and external barriers (Fig. 12.3).

The life space then becomes more articulated and different regions emerge, separated by more or less sharp barriers (Lewin 1938). This process also implies the creation of relationships between the different objects and regions. New needs, problems and solutions arise. The process of differentiation is concurrent with the process of establishing new connections between regions.

New connections or separations, differentiations or dedifferentiation of psychological areas have taken place. The "meaning" of an event in psychology may be said to be known if its psychological position and its psychological direction are determined (Lewin 1942, p. 229).

Differentiation, boundaries and new symbolic meanings make possible the circular relation between the self and the environment. In particular, "one may distinguish three main dimensions of extension. One deals with the scope and the differentiation of that area which for the individual has the character of the present reality. The second deals with increasing differentiation in the reality-irreality dimension. The third deals with the extending psychological time dimension" (Lewin 1997, p. 260). During the development, the twofold process of differentiating field structure and establishing functional connections between regions affects the construction of temporality. According to Lewin (1942, 1997) the time span of the individual enlarges during development, as well as the capability to include a larger amount of past events into the field and to extend the planning into the future.

The totality of the individual's views of his psychological future and his psychological past existing at a given time can be called "time perspective" (Lewin 1942, p. 230).

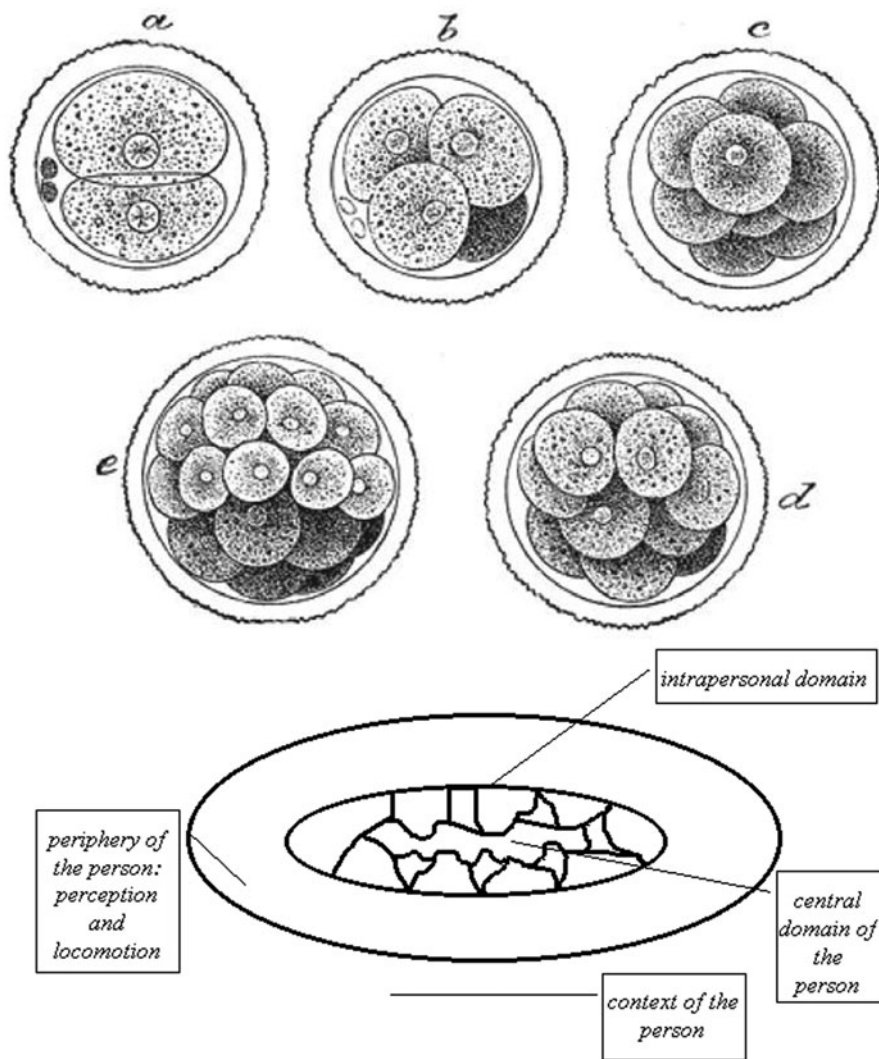


Fig. 12.3 The process of cellular division and the topological representation of person's structure. (Lewin 1969, p. 185)

Time perspective also starts with meaning and boundaries. The development of time perspective triggers a change in the field structure allowing the projection toward the future.

Lewin (1942, 1997) describes several types of barriers surrounding the child's life acting "as a *bounding zone* of an inner sphere" (Lewin 1935, p. 130, original italic), as well as the internal segmentation of the life space in sub-regions with different values. The nature of these barriers could either be material or symbolic, physically coercive

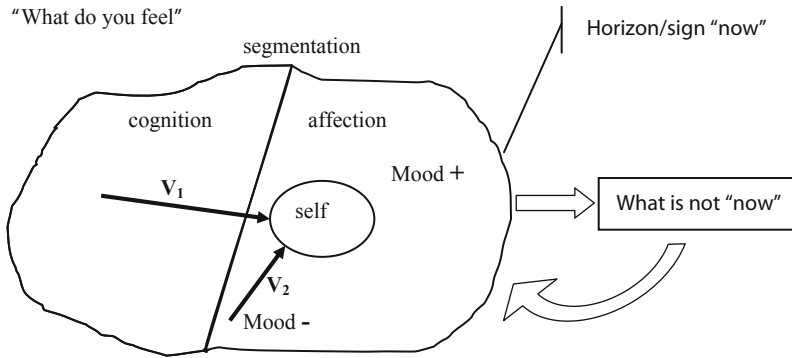


Fig. 12.4 The role of horizon/sign “now”

or internalized by the individual through customs or guilt. The internal regions of the field can be characterized by more or less “*sharply determined boundaries of these regions*” (Lewin 1997, p. 19, original italic). In any case, boundaries are part of the situation and play a role in determining the psychological value of all the objects in life space, as well as the value of the objects beyond these barriers. The other relevant feature of the boundary is to be always related to the future of the action to be taken. In fact, the value of an object as regards to the outer and inner boundaries of the life space is determined by the future-oriented goals. It makes no sense to worry about any constraint of an action already accomplished or a goal already achieved in the past. The past experience with boundaries becomes relevant and meaningful when entering the field, after a semiotic act that makes it still topical, to such an extent that past becomes a new kind of boundary in the field at that time. According to Simmel (2007a), the boundary is the interface between the social structure’s content and the individual’s participation to joint activities. Thus, boundaries are at the same time the product of social constraint and the *conditio sine qua non* of social interactions.

Each border is a psychological, or more precisely, a sociological occurrence. But through its investment as a line in space this reciprocal relationship achieves clarity and security through its positive and negative aspects (Simmel 2007a, p. 53).

For any event to become a psychological object within the field a semiotic process must take place. A sign is thus produced, co-generating a segmentation, a value, and a boundary. These three dimensions build the relationship between the self and the environment. In this respect, relationship and action are synonyms: a psychology of action is a psychology of relationship. As far as action is always oriented toward the future time, it is a relationship to the future. Nevertheless, it is inscribed in an experienced pattern of relationships with the other elements of the field. An utterance like “What do you feel?” is an example of such kind of act (Fig. 12.4).

Describing the situation through topological representation, after the sign “what do you feel?” is produced, it brings into the field a new psychological object—my mood or affective state—and at the same time co-generates a segmentation—mood or state as discrete entities in time, affection with respect to cognition, etc.—with its

related boundaries and its psychological value—desirable or not, positive or negative. This situation triggers a tension between forces in the field, represented by the vectors V_1 and V_2 , leading to a locomotion of the self toward a desired affective state of positive valence. In this respect, according to Lewin's description, "the actual occurrence is conditioned by the present structure of the environment" (1935, p. 117). When a horizon/sign is introduced like in the utterance: "What do you feel, now", a further boundary is generated and something becomes topical which is not totally within the field. The sign "now" projects the relationship beyond the boundaries of the life space. Something that is "not now" appears that is not actually present nor semiotized as a psychological object. Nevertheless, "what is not now" starts exerting an influence on the field, modifying, for instance, the charge of the objects within the life space at that moment. The affective state—for instance feeling a painful waiting—that has a strong negative charge could lose part of its relative value, by the appraisal that, *mutatis mutandis*, it could be more tolerable with respect to something yet to come. I argue that in this example the horizon/sign "now" works like a catalyst, as far as it provides the conditions to construct new psychological phenomena and regulates the existing field (Cabell 2010).

The Psychological Horizon as a Catalyst

I shall now be ready to define the characteristics of psychological horizons and describe how time perspective and life space boundaries are the symbolic horizons that guide individual goal-oriented action. In this sense, the objects within life space acquire a part of their value in relation to these horizons. The word "horizon" is frequently used in social sciences and humanities, and loaded with innumerable meanings. For instance, an archaeological horizon is a widely disseminated level of common artifacts over a geographic area, distinguishing the levels of an archaeological sequence (Anthony 2007). In economics, a planning horizon is the length of time an individual plans ahead or the length of time companies can plan into the future with validity (Richter 2008). In artificial intelligence, the horizon effect occurs because a computational device is able to explore only a definite number of possible alternative states or positions down the choices' tree, for instance some ply in a chess game's tree. Thus, there is a possibility that the computer will make a move after five turns that is detrimental, but the detrimental effect is not visible because the error could happen at lower depth after eight turns. When a significant change exists just beyond the horizon of the search depth, the computer falls victim to the horizon effect (Russell and Norvig 2003). In all the earlier mentioned uses of the word "horizon" both spatial and temporal dimensions are involved, meaning that the portion of reality beyond a given boundary of experience is not accessible, notwithstanding the horizon exerts a certain role of reference in the experience itself. In other words, "horizon" is a synonym of "boundary".

In psychological processes, the boundary is instead always related to the future time of the action, understood as establishing new relationships in relation to future-oriented goals. Unlike the concept of visual horizon surrounding the observer all around, the psychological horizon is only oriented toward the future. “Field theory insists that that the derivation of behavior from the past is not less metaphysical, because past events do not exist now and therefore cannot have effect now. The effect of the past on behavior can be only an indirect one; the past psychological field is one of the “origins” of the present field and this in turn affects behavior” (Lewin 1938, p. 218). This is because the past, once semiotized, enters the field as psychological object provided with relative value, and the current situation is the place where tensions between forces generate the action, that is realizing relationships for “creating meaning ahead of the time” (Valsiner 2007, p. 58). Thus, all the boundaries of life space are related to the future, to such an extent that a boundary behind us is no longer an issue in the action/relationship-oriented psychological life. That is why the “horizon” is the valued and positive side of the coin, with respect to time perspective and boundary. It is a sign that enables some elements outside the life space to be semiotized, and prepare them to enter the field. Besides, the objects within the psychological field acquire value in relation to the semiotic horizon: the relationship between wishes and expectations, the imaginative anticipation, the appraisal of what is happening, the value of the objects and the polarity of forces in the field, the tenacity to pursue our goals, the moral and material price we are willing to pay, etc. (Lewin 1997). The “horizon” then becomes both the touchstone—even because is used retrospectively to evaluate past—and the engine for development. A similar kind of meaning construction is the idea of “fate” in Simmel’s view:

First of all, this concept requires a subject that, on its own and independently of any “event”, contains or represents a sense of something [Sinn], an inner tendency, a demand. Beside this inward sense of the subject, to which it is genetically unrelated, certain events emerge and take their course while nevertheless advancing and retarding it, disrupting its progress or binding together what has been removed, accentuating individual points or judging it as a whole. In this way, with reference to the subject, merely causal events take on a meaning [einen Sinn], a kind of retrospective teleology, as it were. That is, they are transformed into fates. Insofar as these fates, whose origin is entirely accidental with respect to the inwardly and generally determined course of our lives, attain a specific relationship to this course, a vital adaptation cannot be separated from what we call fate, although such an adaptation would have a negative and destructive significance, a connotation of “predestination”. Nevertheless, this sense of predestination only indicates an essentially superficial reflex of the concept of fate. In the first instance, it expresses the ability of the human being to adapt: certain elements are integrated into its life as defining occurrences that take an objective path without diverging from it, so to speak, and assume a meaning—a positive or negative sense of purpose—from the subjectivity of this life, while conversely these occurrences define this same life with respect to its direction and doom [Verhängnis]. As life relates tangentially to the course of the world, the activity and passivity of life have turned the concept of fate into a fact (Simmel 2007b, p. 80).

“Fate” can be considered a horizon/sign to the extent that it enables some events that are external to the field to become valued psychological objects to be put in relationship with the self. Even more relevant, the sign “fate” operates by creating the conditions for the future goal-oriented actions to be guided, and the future signs

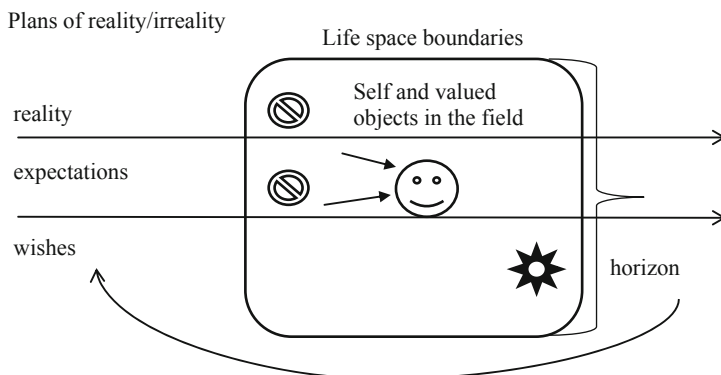


Fig. 12.5 Horizon and plans of reality/irreality

to be interpreted, toward a “direction and doom” outside the borders of the life space at that time, like can happen with the sign “faith” for believers (Cabell 2010).

As far as the individual progressively learns the difference between the plans of reality/irreality, he develops the capability of articulating the different levels with respect to his goals (Lewin 1997). The apparent two dimensional life space reveals itself to be a multidimensional field of forces, in which what is not possible at the level of reality can be at the same time plausible or desirable at the level of expectations or imaginable at the level of wishes. Also in this case the horizon/sign works as a catalyst, enabling the different levels to interact (Fig. 12.5).

In a certain sense, human beings are doomed to develop, that is they are always headed toward a range of possible futures among which just one will be actualized. But, according to the idea of exquisitely future-oriented action, it seems that human beings are also doomed to never learn from their mistakes. It means that the past experience plays a role as far as it becomes a topical psychological object in the field at that time. Thus, its status of something that has already existed but no longer exists on the plan of reality does not affect its role in the field of forces, unless it becomes a new sign. What determines the value of the objects and the direction of the vectors in the field is the tension at that moment, and the whole system is finally guided by the individual goals. It is the case of regressive behavior that Lewin (1997) explains in terms of field theory. Regression is not related to the past experience, rather to the fact that a person can encounter a barrier that cannot be overcome in the field, while trying to reach a goal “corresponding to a need which is characteristic of a certain level of maturity” (Lewin 1997, p. 234). Thus, the person can turn to a different region of the field, corresponding to a less mature level, because this action “seems to promise at least some satisfaction to the need” (Lewin 1997, p. 234). In a multidimensional space, the tension can be represented also at different levels of reality/irreality, and the vectors can make for a level to another. Wishes and expectations can exert a force on the self, as well as desirable or unpleasant objects on the plan of reality. Barriers can be multidimensional as well. The person can encounter a barrier to overcome a region that exists between the plane of wishes and that of expectations or reality. Also

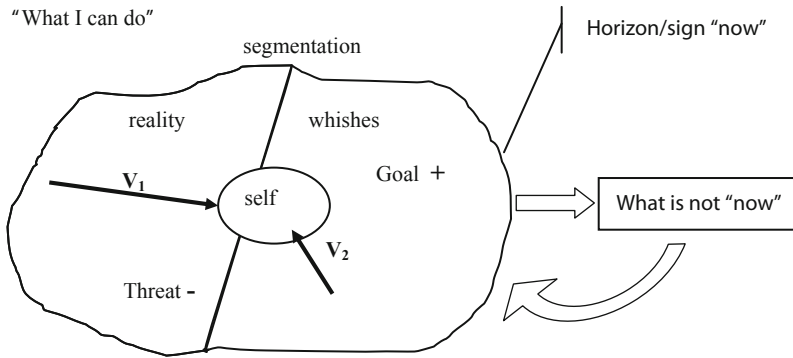


Fig. 12.6 Horizon/sign and levels of reality/irreality

in this case, what lies beyond the boundaries of the field has some relationship with the life space, and the psychological horizon plays a role in determining the situation at that time, when a horizon/sign is produced. Figure 12.6 presents an example using the horizon/sign “now” in a different way.

For the sake of simplicity, the example shows a situation in which only one desired goal “+” exists on the plan of wishes. A sign “what can I do” is produced triggering the situation of the self subjected to opposing vectors. A segmentation occurs and a barrier emerges between the plan of reality and wishes of the field, with a real psychological object in the field threatening the achievement of the goal (i.e., possible blame to the realization of a sexual fantasy) and generating tension by the opposing force represented by vector V_2 . When the horizon/sign “now” is produced, it modifies the situation, even if the condition outside the field “what is not now” has not yet been semiotized. For instance, the barrier between the plan of reality and wishes becomes more permeable, leading to the expectation that what is not achievable at present time could be possible in a future time. Also in this case, the horizon/sign “now” works like a catalyst, as far as it provides the conditions to construct new psychological phenomena modifying the existing field and the relationship between the different plans of reality/irreality.

A different example of horizon/sign production can be found in the work of the Italian–Argentine painter, sculptor, and theorist Lucio Fontana (1899–1968). He is considered the founder of the “Spatialism” movement in modern art. In the mid-1950s, he developed a particular technique called “slashes”, consisting of covering canvases with layers of thick oil monochrome paint and using a cutter to create great fissures in their surface (Fig. 12.7).

The aim of this kind of work is to draw viewer’s attention to the surface of the canvases as a conventional boundary, both underlining and breaking the two-dimensionality in order to reveal the space behind the picture. The slash thus produces a horizon/sign, whose function is to establish a relationship between the observer, the canvas boundary, and what is beyond it, understood as a new unknown, disquieting, and presemiotic sense of depth. In the case of Fontana’s slashes, it becomes

Fig. 12.7 The artist Lucio Fontana at work. (Photograph of Lucio Fontana by Ugo Mulas. The use of this low-resolution image for critical commentary and research purposes qualifies as fair use under United States copyright law. Retrieved 2013 March, 7 from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/bd/Photograph_of_Lucio_Fontana_by_Ugo_Mulas.jpg, available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License from Wikipedia®, a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization)



more evident due to the fact that this process is possible because of the social context in which the psychological field is embedded. In fact, the production of the horizon/sign is related to the social norms and constraints guiding the activity of painting and watching a work of art. The catalytic function of Fontana's slashes consists of the modification of the perceptual field—the background of the canvas becomes an internal, rather than external, barrier—the breaking of social rules of art, and the regulation of viewer's psychological processes—attention, imagination, etc.—in order to trigger new psychological phenomena, by establishing a relationship between the psychological objects within the field and what is not painting. The space beyond the canvas then starts to exert his presemiotic and mysterious power upon the observer's life space.

Conclusions

The idea of focusing on psychological processes and the conditions that cultivate them, goes beyond the concept of context for psychological processes, as well as the idea of horizon goes beyond the idea of life space. In this chapter, I attempt to read again the topological theory through the lens of the cultural semiotic approach

(Valsiner 2007). First, I discuss the idea that any object of experience is included in the field of forces when it becomes a sign, thus becoming a psychological object provided with value. Then I argue that there are some kind of signs, the horizon/signs, that set the conditions for what is outside the life space—that is what is presemiotic—to interact with the self and the psychological environment and to guide the expansion of the life space, modifying the field of forces. The function of the horizon/sign is to catalyze the relationships between the self and the psychological objects in the field towards a future-oriented direction. Besides, the horizon/sign acts upon the boundaries of the life space, by valuing the outer side of the boundary itself. The horizon/sign also produces the conditions of tension in which every sign is produced. When the self is subject to vectors producing a tension in field, one of the possible actions is trying to go out of the field (Lewin 1935). This option is more or less feasible depending upon the sharpness and permeability of the borders. When a horizon/sign is produced, like in the example of the sign “now”, it modifies the nature of the external boundaries, introducing a “not now” that is possible even if not yet fully semiotized. The life space, as a landscape of individual psychological experience, “stands as an objective, self-contained construct that nevertheless retains an interconnectedness, though one hard to express, with the whole soul, the full vitality of its creator, sustained and still perceptibly permeated by it” (Simmel 2007c, p. 22). The semiotic activity of socially guided psychological life generates segmentations, boundaries, and values oriented toward an unknown future. In other words, every production of signs is both an act of creation of psychological objects and of delimitation of a portion of reality.

This condition came into its own in modernity and assumed the leading role in the processes of culturalization. Underlying the plurality of relationships that interconnect individuals, groups, and social formations, there is a pervading dualism confronting us: the individual entity strives towards wholeness, while its place within the larger whole only accords it the role of a part (Simmel 2007c, p. 22).

This generates a sense of disquieting which is splendidly expressed in lines 4 and 5 of Leopardi’s lyric: “But as I sit and gaze, there is an endless/Space still beyond”.

The psychological horizon *is the infinite realm of possibilities ahead of time yet to be semiotized, thus still partially socially unbounded*, that is necessary as a reference point to the person’s widening of life space. The horizon/sign *is the specific sign that, once produced, establishes the conditions for the psychological horizon to participate in the production of new psychological phenomena through the co-regulation* of psychological processes. This process is also related to the temporality experience and to motivation, to such an extent that “whether or not an activity is disgraceful or unpleasant depends to a high degree on its psychological “meaning”, that is, on the larger unit of events of which this action forms a part. In the role of a patient, for example, the individual permits as “treatment” by the doctor what would otherwise be vigorously resisted because of bodily pain or social unpleasantness” (Lewin 1997, p. 82). This is a well-known phenomenon, for instance, in the treatment of addictions, where the problem of substance abusers’ psychological horizon affects both the persistence of drug use despite severe consequences and the success of treatments (Petry et al. 1998). If the idea of the horizon/sign is well-founded, then

the process of its production and the different types of horizon/signs could be studied in order to better understand their role in catalyzing the new psychological objects and the phenomena they trigger. Besides, a therapeutic use of horizon/signs aimed at fostering a reconstruction of the field could be imagined. Another potentially relevant field of application of the idea of horizon/signs is how they play a role in development and education. In fact, if the horizon/sign works as a catalyst for the change of the life space, investigating these signs in developmental processes could make us understand the fundamental human condition of seeking “the horizon’s furthest reaches”.

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