

Running Out Of Place:

The Language and Architecture of Lewis Carroll

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A Dissertation

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This study examines the links between architecture and literature through the work of English author/mathematician/geometrician Lewis Carroll/Charles L. Dodgson. The premise is that throughout Carroll's work, questions concerning the position of the body in relation to its surroundings—the possibility for one to forge a sense of place—are recurrent. Carroll stages a series of bodily movements in space: changes in scale, transformations, alterations, translations from bottom to top, from left to right, from the inside to the outside, and so on. Reading the work, one is constantly reminded that one's perception of space, as well as one's understanding of where one stands, are phenomena that take place in language, through utterances, through words. Approaching Carroll's work with particular attention to the space of bodily movements and to plays on language, one can access a subterranean architectural discourse. This discourse is oblique, suggested rather than explicit, but nonetheless raises pertinent questions concerning the formation of architectural meaning: the relationship of sense to its limits—to nonsense—in architecture.

The following texts are studied: Carroll's two architectural pamphlets; the two *Alice* stories with their convoluted spaces; a long epic poem dealing with the space of discovery; a drama on geometry and a logical exposition on the paradoxes of movement. Throughout Carroll's multifaceted work, nonsense guides the construction of the texts. Working at the limits of language and literary genres, Carroll's parodies possess strong allegorical powers: sense travels obliquely and the work remains enigmatic. However, the reader somehow understands the work; the experience of the work produces a certain kind of knowledge.

In architecture, meaning is also tied to its outer limits—to the polysemy of nonsense. Through one's experience of space, a stable and orderly building becomes heterogeneous, loaded with qualities and symbols. A sense of place emerges and meaning momentarily appears along the sinuous paths that run between bodily movements, thoughts, dreams, desire and words.

Dans la présente étude, il s'agit des liens entre la littérature et l'architecture tels qu'ils apparaissent dans l'œuvre de Lewis Carroll, écrivain, logicien et géomètre. À travers toute l'œuvre littéraire de Carroll, il est question des rapports du corps à son environnement : changements d'échelles, transformations, altérations, déplacements de bas en haut, de gauche à droite, du dedans vers le dehors, voilà autant de mouvements des corps dans l'espace que Carroll met en scène. À la lecture des fictions carrolliennes, une notion est sans cesse portée à l'attention du lecteur : la perception et la compréhension de l'espace surviennent dans le langage, passent à travers les mots. En abordant les textes de Carroll, à la fois du point de vue de l'espace et des jeux de langages, il devient possible de formuler un discours architectural. Un discours oblique, que l'œuvre suggère plus qu'elle ne dicte, mais qui soulève néanmoins des questions pertinentes quant à la problématique du sens en architecture, quant aux rapports étroits que les sens entretient avec son propre dehors, avec la prolifération de significations propre au non-sens.

Les textes à l'étude sont les suivants : deux feuilles volantes où l'auteur traite directement d'un projet architectural; les deux histoires d'Alice dans lesquelles l'espace est mis sens dessus dessous; un long poème épique où il est question de l'espace propre à la découverte; un drame sur la géométrie et un essai de logique sur les paradoxes du mouvement. Dans l'œuvre plurielle de Carroll, le non-sens guide la construction du texte. Opérant aux limites d'un langage ou d'un genre littéraire donné, le recours à la parodie confère aux textes une force allégorique : le sens procède par détours et ne se livre jamais de manière univoque. Malgré tout, le lecteur comprend l'œuvre, un savoir s'en dégage.

En architecture, le sens est aussi lié à son dehors, à la polysémie du non-sens. L'espace construit et réglé devient hétérogène, qualifié, chargé de symboles; lieu dont le sens se fait et se défait, empruntant les sentiers ondoyants du corps en mouvement, de la pensée, de la rêverie, du désir et des mots.

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Il y a (...) architecturalité dès lors que l'espace fait sens alors qu'il n'y a encore ni image, ni figure, ni signe, ni symbole, ni écriture. (...) Si l'architecture n'a pas le monopole de l'espace, sans doute, l'attention qu'on lui porte est-elle une « voie royale » vers une pensée de l'espace (c'est-à-dire de l'espace actif, de l'espace qui espace, de l'espace qui se disloque en espaces, de l'espace qui fait sens). (...) Sur cette dimension première, spatiale, du sens, viennent se greffer, bien entendu, des codes analogiques et symboliques. (...) le sens d'une architecture ne se livre donc jamais à celui qui se recueille en tâchant de lire ou de déchiffrer un prétendu message.¹

— Bruno Goetz, *La Dislocation*

The notions that a building can be “read,” through time, as one travels within its walls, or that written narratives bear strong spatial qualities—being architectonically structured and constructed—have become common *topoi*. It is generally acknowledged that there exists an analogy between literature and architecture. For writers and architects of past centuries this analogy was perhaps stronger and more direct—with the understanding of an “architecture parlante”² in the Eighteenth century, the literary dimension of architecture

¹ Bruno Goetz, *La dislocation: Architecture et philosophie* (Paris: Éditions de la passion, 2001), 66.

² The architecture most preoccupied with questions of language appears to be that of the Enlightenment. In fact, from the point of view of a Ledoux or a Boullée, architecture that “spoke” had the power, in certain ideal conditions, to positively influence human values and behaviour. In the work of such architects, geometric symbolism, social organisation, legislation and architecture converge towards the creation of a better society. The architectural projects of Ledoux and Boullée reflect the desire to reach an appropriate balance between a geometrical ideal and the reality of experience. Language is at the centre of this preoccupation. See Claude Nicolas Ledoux,

became a central paradigm of major architectural theories. However, in the context of the Nineteenth century, the links between literature and architecture were reformulated in terms of a polemic, alienating the building from the book and placing them in a competitive relationship. A widely celebrated and discussed example of this new relationship can be found in the theoretical chapter entitled “Ceci tuera cela” that literary writer Victor Hugo added to his *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

“Ceci tuera cela” was included, in 1832, along with two other chapters, to a second edition of the famous Gothic novel (only a year after the original version of 1831). The text announces the replacement of architecture, the bible of stone, by the printed text, the bible of paper. According to the Hugolian analysis, architecture had progressively lost, since the inception of the printing press in the 15th century, its power to “speak.” If architecture and, particularly, the Gothic Cathedral of the Middle-Ages had enjoyed, Hugo argues, the power to embody and convey the truth of complex religious “texts” in a somewhat mysterious albeit physical manner—similarly to ancient hieroglyphs—this was no longer to be the case. Only the most developed form of literary fiction—the novel—could achieve the goal of effectively conveying meaning—religious, social or political truths—in the modern world.

L'architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation. Tome Premier (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1804). See also, Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, *Étienne Louis Boullée (1728-1799): de l'architecture classique à l'architecture révolutionnaire* (Paris: Arts et métiers graphiques, 1969).

Though Hugo's text is generally understood as a pointed observation on the ambiguous condition of the architecture of his time, an architecture conceived through the narrow lens of stylistic debates—"une architecture qui n'a que la peau sur les os"—what is most interesting to me is that "Ceci tuera cela" is a discussion on architecture that takes place within a work of literary fiction.³ The text was not written by an architect nor was it presented explicitly to an architectural audience. Instead, it was integrated in a work of fiction and presented as a digression from the narrative flow of the novel. Nonetheless, "Ceci tuera cela" has been studied extensively by both architects and literary theorists, giving both camps a perfect opportunity to explore potential connections and divergences between the two disciplines. This incursion of architectural discourse into a literary work of fiction testifies to an interesting phenomenon that can be observed, especially from the beginning of the Nineteenth century onwards: the dispersal of architectural discourse into other forms of writing than the architectural treatise.

Since the beginning of the Nineteenth century, architectural theory has taken various shapes and transgressed into many disciplines, to the point that it becomes almost impossible, today, to trace the limits of architectural discourse.⁴

³ See Victor Hugo, "Ceci tuera cela," in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975), 174-188.

⁴ This could be said to have happened earlier. As architecture was previously understood as the Mother of all the arts, architectural questions were indeed discussed in texts of many different natures. However, in the context of the Nineteenth century, as most artistic disciplines have reached their full autonomy, the dispersal of architectural discourse becomes more apparent.

Far from negative, this condition allows for alternative ideas to emerge, sheltered from the major discussions and their, at times, limiting impact. Moreover, the fact that the ties between architecture and literature tend to be polarised – books against buildings, or vice versa – does not mean that the potential, reiterated by Hugo, for asking questions about the one through the other, is exhausted. On the contrary, it seems timely in the current context to reshape the question of the linguistic dimension of architecture.

Having been seen negatively since more or less the beginning of the Nineteenth century, ambiguity of language is generally avoided in contemporary architectural practice. Questions concerning meaning in architecture are therefore hard to address. Questions of architectural meaning were progressively ignored in favour of more “scientific” concerns like the structural properties of materials and the plan as a rational organisation of the functions of the building. Following this rationalisation of architecture, not only did architectural representation become a “scientific” i.e. accurate model for the production of buildings, the question of style also became the major aesthetic concern. Meaning was understood as self-evident to a given style or combination thereof and the linguistic dimension of architecture codified into a simple syntax of forms.⁵

Though it has become clear, especially in the past hundred years, that architecture has a symbolic power that can be used as an instrument of

⁵ This passage bears the influence of an unpublished text on language by Alberto Pérez-Gómez (2003).

propaganda, and though it is known that the environment, built or “natural,” has strong influences on how one lives, socially, politically and economically, it remains difficult to identify how architecture, understood both as a human process of creation and as the general ground in which humanity takes place, can “translate” or embody meaning as directly and effectively as a written or spoken text. Moreover, it is not clear what kind of message can actually be conveyed through, or interpreted from, the built environment. This begs the more complex question of the relationship of architecture to language, a question that I will only begin to address through this work. However, it is my contention that both architecture and literature partake in a larger historical discussion concerning the “clarity” or “obscurity” of means of expression understood as human ways of accessing knowledge. In the context of the Nineteenth century, as the “Truth” of positivistic science became the hegemonic mode of discourse of the modern tradition, other, more indirect—poetic—modes of expression such as enigmas, fables, parables, riddles, etc.—literary figures already present throughout the Western tradition—were re-appropriated as crucial discursive alternatives. In a sense, the apparent scarcity and reification of architectural theory in the Nineteenth century seems to hide an underground proliferation of “alternative” discourses, often presented to the reader in a *minor* mode, and that can be accessed, if only indirectly, through the works of non-architects.

For the purpose of the present dissertation, I will revisit the intricate relationship between literature and architecture through a much less known contribution to the architectural debate of the Nineteenth century by a literary writer, found in

the work of English author/geometrician/logician Lewis Carroll (Charles L. Dodgson). Among the large literary corpus produced by Lewis Carroll are two short pamphlets on architecture published more or less anonymously at Oxford: *The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford* (1872) and *The Vision of The Three T's* (1873). The texts belong to a group of nine known as the Oxford pamphlets and in them Carroll criticises political and social matters that had an impact on his life as a member of the university and, most importantly, of Christ Church College, where he lived as a Fellow for most of his life. The architectural pamphlets are critiques of a project that was being built at Christ Church: they address the 1872-79 restoration/addition, by controversial architects George Gilbert Scott and George Bodley, of the new belfry of the College.

As is the case for all nine pamphlets, the tone and structure of the two texts do not follow conventional criticism, but bear the same kind of humour, tendency towards parody and enigmatic quality that characterise Carroll's better-known literary production. There is a strong satirical aspect to the works: several plays on words, puns on the names of people involved in the project, as well as parodies of poems, songs and books of the English literary tradition. In that sense, the two pieces obviously do not qualify as "standard" architectural theory. However, they represent, within Carroll's work, the most direct discussion on the theme of architecture and bear some influences from the ongoing debate concerning architectural style, historicism, and restoration.

Though it is noticeable that Carroll was critical, on the one hand, of a simple return to the principles and forms of Gothic architecture, and, on the other, suspicious of the categorisation of architecture under stylistic concerns, what comes out most clearly through a study of the two pamphlets is Carroll's concern for language, a concern which lies at the core of his literary production as well. In that sense, the presence of the two architectural pamphlets within Carroll's work not only testifies to his interest in architectural questions, but highlight a specific region of Carroll's work, revealing a concern for space, for time, and for that special kind of encounter with space and time that can only happen in bound, that is architectural environments.

Hence, with the two pamphlets in mind, it becomes possible to engage in a close reading of the larger corpus of Dodgson/Carroll's works of fiction as well as his more "scientific" production in fields such as logic and geometry and find there a strange architectural discussion. Focusing on the paradoxical—nonsensical—structure of Carroll's work in relation to notions of space, time, movement and perception, this study will explore the potential relationships between architecture and literature, architecture and language, architecture and meaning.

The word meaning needs qualification. I intend to look at it not in terms of the fixed—objective—signification of a thing, but rather as an event that takes place within language, as a temporary, temporal occurrence. In the English language, two words are used in relation to signification and understanding: *meaning* and

*sense*⁶. The word sense is more directly related to perception, it is a means of approaching objects that relates to the body: I see a tree in the garden. Sense is also a means of forging a knowledge of things by assigning them a value. The notions of “common sense” or “good sense” thus take shape. On the other hand, the act of “making sense” of things, of assigning them a meaning, is partially an act of transcendence; in order to approach the things of the world, I have to be projected outside of myself, outside of the tree that I am looking at. To make sense is also a means of ordering, the faculty of reason that allows me to distinguish, to differentiate, using a series of guiding principles (identity, causality, non-contradiction). In the process of understanding, a notion of temporality is implied: meaning is a projection of the perceiving subject into the object; it directly involves one’s sense of being. To understand is *to be oriented towards what is not yet formed*. If the expression *to explain* can be described as an operation through which a thing is set in relation to a rather near idea of its causality, *to understand* involves a larger acknowledgement of past and future. Meaning also possesses a spatial dimension. In order to make sense of a thing, one needs an inclination, an orientation towards something that is not yet,

⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following etymology for “sense” (noun): F. *sens* or ad. L. *sensus* (u stem), perception, feeling, faculty of perception, meaning, f. *sentire* to feel. Cf. Pr. *sens*, *sentz*, Sp. *seso*, Pg. *siso*, It. *senso*. Sense means both “faculty of perception” and “meaning or interpretation.” An early use of sense comes from the French *sens* with its roots in the Latin *sentire*, “to perceive, feel, know.” It was used in a figurative manner as “to find one’s way.” In its current French use, *sens* refers to both the senses and the idea of orientation or direction. The old Irish word *set*, “way, journey,” or the Welch *hynt*, “way,” also express this idea of orientation. The application of the word sense to any one of the *external* or *outward senses* (touch, sight, hearing, etc.) was first recorded in the Sixteenth century (around 1536).

towards a process, an event. This inclination involves the presence of the observer's body in relation to things. In the present study, focus will be on such instances in which meaning is in the process of being recognised, when one is "on the verge of understanding something," rather than on the more stable forms of meaning like "this is the meaning of that."

Such processes take place within language. For Plato, meaning lies in the spoken re-activation of a written text that allows the speaker to access an objective, *ideal* sense, a *pre-existing* signification that demands reactivation. This pre-existing signification is always already present in the immortal soul of man and can be reactivated through the process of reminiscence, with the help of memory. Understanding is like walking hand in hand with the God who is the bearer of all meanings.⁷ For Edmund Husserl, and in the context of his phenomenology, meanings are equated with utterances, sense lies in the "expressed." Though, for him, the expression is no longer tied to a transcendental ideal, its origin lies in the pre-reflective formation of a language preceding all languages, a *Ursprache*.⁸ It is perhaps with Ludwig Wittgenstein that meaning was first approached in relation to its absence. Understanding the formation of sense as a game of language governed by a series of logical rules, Wittgenstein sees sense as co-dependent with nonsense. For him, understanding always involves a struggle against the

⁷ See Plato, "Theaetetus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961) 845-919. See also "Phaedrus," *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, esp. the last section 489-525.

⁸ See Edmund Husserl, *L'origine de la géométrie*, trans. with intro by Jacques Derrida (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974).

tendency inherent to the way one generally approaches language and attempts to stabilise meaning, to construct immutable systems. In a way that echoes Nietzsche's philosophy, Wittgenstein asserts that in order to step out of such systematisation, one has to discover something like a *pure nonsense*: understanding is strengthened by venturing beyond the frontiers of language, by re-entering the aspects of language that are directly connected to life.⁹ In his *The Logic of sense*, Gilles Deleuze proposes a relevant study of the relationship between sense and nonsense as present both in the work of the Stoics and in Lewis Carroll's approach to language. For Deleuze, meaning is most productive of knowledge when it is understood as an event.¹⁰

Following that tendency, the present discussion will address the possibilities for architecture to make "sense" (which is intended here both as meaning and direction, or orientation) in a manner that is perhaps linguistic, but that can only be observed once looking at the limits of language, when grammar, spelling and semiotics dissolve and yet, when meaning still unfolds. In order to find connections between Carroll's specific mode of nonsensical writing – understood as a literary "invention," as a mode of "making" literature – and the ways in which architecture is experienced, spoken about and understood in the current context, I will proceed through a displacement from buildings to books, that is,

⁹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (New York: Harper, 1969) and *Philosophical investigations* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1953). See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

¹⁰ See Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969).

from Carroll's discussion on architecture to his literary works of fiction, and back.

If the two architectural pamphlets have generally been overlooked, the works of literature published by Dodgson under his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll, have, on the contrary, received a lot of attention and are well known around the world. The Carrollian stories, initially written for children, were quickly welcomed into other fields of knowledge. For example, since its first publication in 1865, Carroll's masterpiece *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been the object of numerous interpretations, subjected to a wide range of analysis and studies, not only in the realm of literature or semiotics, but also from philosophical, psychological, psychoanalytical, sociological and scientific points of view. Yet, Carroll's literary work remains enigmatic. He uses language in a way that resists complete analysis or exhaustive interpretation and thus, the range of his work can hardly be defined by any literary movement or category—it oscillates endlessly within the thin line that connects Romanticism and Surrealism¹¹, fairy tales and *nouveau roman*, artistic and scientific discourses.

Born in 1832, Carroll began his prolific and heterogeneous literary production at a young age and pursued it throughout his life until his death in 1898. Most of

¹¹ Octavio Paz emphasises the importance of Romanticism in the modern context, seeing the movement as a productive attitude that attempts to reconcile the *mythos* and the *logos*. According to Paz, such movements as Romanticism and Surrealism are visions of the world that can travel underground, through history, and reappear when they are least expected. Octavio Paz, *The Bow and the Lyre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), chapter 8, especially 154-55.

his non-fiction work, though it did venture into such strange topics as the functioning of tennis tournaments or voting systems, primarily centred on problems of logic, geometry, and mathematics. Carroll's production in all fields is somehow presented through very similar written forms, follows similar processes leading to the literary genre that has usually been referred to as a literature of "nonsense." Carroll's nonsense will be understood as an attitude, as a way of looking that is present throughout the ensemble of his work. I will purposefully not differentiate too much between these apparently antagonistic disciplines—children's literature, architecture, logic, mathematics, and geometry—in an attempt to reveal the underlying connections among these. The two major sides of his work—the artistic and the scientific—represent appropriate vehicles for the present investigation in the way they simultaneously participate in the modern scientific debate and the realm of fiction and poetic imagination. The tight link between these two modes of thought made explicit in his work—the "art-science" interdependence—is in fact key to an understanding of the transformations of architectural thinking in the modern context. For the sake of the present study, it will be important to expose the richness of the theoretical framework that one can find in Carroll texts, understood as poetico-philosophical discussions, in relation to modern artistic and scientific traditions.

The following texts will be read as primary material: *The New Belfry of Christ Church Oxford* (1872) and *The Vision of the Three T's* (1873), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1868), *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872), *The Hunting of The Snark* (1876). In addition to these, I will discuss

Carroll/Dodgson's work in the field of geometry and logic, mainly *Euclid and his Modern Rivals* (1879) and *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles* (1894).

In regards to Carroll's fictions, I will situate his work in relation to a literary tradition revolving around the enigma and obscure means of conveying ideas and meaning. In each of Carroll's stories, a different logic is at work. In each book, a logical system governing the relationship between space, time and movement unfolds. In each one, the problem of language in relation to two opposed realms—the realm of thought and the realm of embodied experience—is approached differently and in that sense, in each of them, the shape, thickness and porosity of boundaries—physical and/or theoretical demarcations—therefore appear under different conditions. For that matter, each fiction will be approached separately, understanding each one as the careful exposition of a different possible world.

The first chapter is devoted to Carroll's architectural pamphlets. In the second chapter, the discussion of the fiction works begins with the study of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. By far the most famous of Carroll's text, *Alice* can be read, in light of his other work, with a focus on the conditions of timeless spaces. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, time and movement are put in a conflicting relationship to a space in which boundaries are mobile. The successive alterations that the protagonist undergoes provoke a reflection about one's identity in relation to language and about embodied experience versus the intellectual framework that one constructs around/from that experience.

In chapter three, the discussion will be centred on the second of the Alice books, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. In this story, Alice is no longer exploring the depths of the underground, rather, she is following lateral movements – translations. Alice’s encounters, dialogues and actions happen following a perpetual (ideal) movement in a space that appears as an unlimited extension.

In chapter four, I will examine Carroll’s famous poem, *The Hunting of The Snark*. This poem tells the story of a crew of “hunters” who embark on a journey, sail and reach a strange landscape evoking the surface of the moon. The text deals very obliquely with the implications of the modern scientific quest for Truth. It also raises questions about logic and language. Most importantly, it playfully stresses the intricate relationship, in research, between discoveries and desire.

Finally, in chapter five, I will consider Carroll’s participation in the Nineteenth century scientific debates on geometry as expressed in his most scientific work, *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*. The text is an exposition of Carroll’s take on the non-Euclidean geometries, revealing how for him, the primacy of perception and its relationship to language and discourse cannot be disregarded in favour of totally abstract scientific ideas. This shall allow an understanding of how, in the larger corpus of Carroll’s writings, geometrical ideas navigate under the surface, allowing for connections to be traced, for meanings to emerge. The investigation will then travel from the land of geometrical entities back to the realm of words

through a discussion of the paradox and its formulation in Carroll's *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles*. In this text, Carroll stages an infinite regression that reaffirms the paradoxical nature of one's experience of space and time.

Carroll's work took place in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, a period that saw the systematisation of several levels of human affairs; science through pragmatism; language through linguistic theories; the categorisation of the human sciences as autonomous disciplines; the use of technology as a means of achieving the Industrial Revolution. Though this conjuncture has its roots in earlier manifestations of modernity, the late Nineteenth century represents a kind of culmination and complex installation of the systems that now condition daily reality in the West.

Carroll's position within the rules and conventions of Victorian society Romanticism (often understood as the reactionary counterpart of the systematisation tendency) and Historicism is complex and subtle. On the one hand, he is a forerunner of what is now referred to as modern (or sometimes post-modern) literature, opening up possibilities for new means of dealing with words and meaning and leading to a series of literary experiments conducted at the limits of language (Joyce, Beckett, etc.). On the other hand, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle also demonstrates: *le nonsense est un genre revolutionnaire-conservateur*¹². This means that Carroll's views and position on several matters are, at times, far

¹² Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "Intuitions linguistiques," in *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle* 68, 763 (1990): 60.

from revolutionary. He was in many ways a conservative English clergyman and lived his life according to very strict, though at times idiosyncratic, religious and social principles.

However, the apparent contradiction in Carroll/Dodgson's position is only superficial. What appears at first to be revolutionary in his work, his provocative use of language, ties into a long tradition of literary and philosophical explorations on the problem of clarity in relation to the expression of truth and the formulation of meaningful knowledge. In the same vein, the most conservative aspects of his work, his participation in the romantic ideal to retrieve something from the humanist culture of the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance, can also be understood in terms of what Walter Benjamin has called "*la modernité paradoxale*," that is, as a certain way of looking back at the past in order to propose—to project—alternatives for the future.

Nonsense in literature does not mean the absence of meaning. Rather, as Gilles Deleuze explains, it always somehow points to a surplus of different meanings or to the coexistence of opposites.¹³ Thus, Deleuze adds, nonsense is inseparable from paradoxes. It constitutes a kind of formulation, through language, of the somewhat paradoxical, never completely resolved nature of one's encounter with the things of the world. Paradoxes have indeed contributed to shape the philosophical tradition of the West and have resurfaced, here and there, throughout history, especially in the context of discussions concerning literary

¹³ See Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, (Paris: Minuit, 1969), intro.

creation, discourse, language and meaning. As paradoxes inevitably present the two opposite sides of a given problem, magnifying the distance, the difference and the non-reconciliation between them, they constitute, in their manifold linguistic embodiments, *ways* of asking perennial questions – *modes* of thinking and making.

Paradoxes being always staged in Carroll's stories, they put on a poetic disguise. Because Carroll's paradoxical narratives are, indeed, poetic, they differ from the logical formulation of paradoxes as it generally appears in the tradition of philosophy. Meaning is veiled, obscured, multiplied to such an extent that it becomes hazardous to venture into any attempt at explaining the sense of the texts. This does not mean, however, that Carroll's texts are totally hermetic. As I will show, their constructions rely on guiding principles, on rules that are inextricable from language itself, which Carroll playfully bends but which, nonetheless, remain.

The "game" of nonsense involves issues of power and desire. It implicates, I believe, a kind of desire similar to what drives the scientist towards a discovery, or the builder of a machine (or any technological innovation) towards its completion. This very kind of desire exists between humans and the things they make and share, precisely because the conditions of meaning are never fulfilled. Making and understanding are both processes that involve a movement towards something, an inclination, an angle. Being eccentric and unstable in nature, both processes thus lead to approximations, to always slightly inaccurate

representations of ideas and experiences, that is, to the making of poetic images. Yet, this approximative quality inherent to making works of art, and this is especially true for architecture, is crucial, as it leaves open the necessary space for the “ideal” to remain while, at the same time, it preserves the very possibility for human experiences to take place. Carroll’s work can thus be understood as a series of experiments conducted at the margins of language, allowing it to expand, to grow, literally.

Language comes, on the one hand, with a certain degree of opacity, and, on the other, with a set of rules and a structure that allows for clarification and ordering to take place. These two opposite impulses – towards obscurity or clarity – have been, in the history of the Western tradition, the concern of successive generations of artists, writers, linguists and theoreticians of literature. Carroll’s literary invention – which can be seen as a subtle, extremely rigorous transformation of an endangered (humanist) understanding – brings forth the importance of the obscure, uncontrollable aspects of language in how humans can frame appropriate knowledge of the world.

Obscure modes of expression, that are generally associated to the domain of poetry, rely on figures of speech (the most common being tropes like metaphor, analogy, metonym, etc) to express ideas (in poems but also in discursive texts). Through the process, meaning becomes more opaque, indirect, concealed, and, most importantly, unstable. The interpretation of a poem and, to some extent, of a piece of poetic prose is never fully transparent. And yet, as one reads, one has

the feeling of understanding “something.” To paraphrase Octavio Paz, the whole body and mind of the reader are involved when engaging with a poetic text—through the rhythm of the verses, the sounds that the syllables make, the succession of overlapping “images” that appear and disappear in the mind’s eye, the text emerges into the world, it is re-activated. One’s understanding of the text is linked to that somewhat physical process. Meaning comes, partially, out of the act of reading itself, out of one’s interpretation and in that sense it constitutes a singular “event.” Nonsense, seen here as this intricate—enigmatic—mode of writing, may represent, within the modern, scientifically driven tradition, a means of overcoming the fallacies of clarity, a possibility to express ideas in an extremely oblique, indirect manner, yet while still *proposing* meaning.

This strange physicality of literary experiences indeed evokes the experience of built spaces. But to equate the two phenomena would be hasty. What this reveals, in my view, is the specific position of language within one’s experience of the world, a position that is both incarnated and abstracted from bodily experience. Moreover, and I will tend to emphasise it here, this specific position is rather unstable, always caught in the movement between ideas and things, between knowledge and experience. Thus, a study of the relationship between literature and architecture has to happen within this mobile frontier, and can hardly be systematised.

The present work will focus on the modalities—or conditions—that lead the writer of nonsense to construct the inner structure of his writing in order to

“conceal” meaning. The nonsense literature of Carroll can effectively be useful in that it presents us with a language that is simultaneously stable, i.e. written, and, mobile, the meaning of which has to be constantly recreated to an extreme degree. Carroll’s stories can also be understood as experiments on the liminal relationships between time, space and movement, as well as on one’s experience and understanding of these notions. For that matter, Carroll’s work is particularly effective in revealing the relationship between unstable meaning and the limits of discourse. Though it remains impossible to extract a clearly identifiable architectural theory from Carroll’s nonsensical constructions, they nonetheless offer an alternative way to approach the problem of architectural meaning in the modern context. This excursion at the margins of architectural theory may in turn bring about new ways of thinking and writing about architecture today.

chapter one vision and architecture

To look at a work of art [or architecture] (...) means to be hurled out into a more original time: it means ecstasy in the epochal opening of rhythm, which gives and holds back. Only by starting from this situation of man's relationship with the work of art is it possible to comprehend how this relationship—if it is authentic—is also for man the highest engagement, that is, the engagement that keeps him in the truth and grants to his dwelling on earth its original status. In the experience of a work of art, man stands (...) in the origin that has revealed itself to him in the poetic act. In this engagement, in this being-hurled-out (...), artists and spectators recover their essential solidarity and their common ground.¹⁴
Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*

To discuss Carroll's architectural pamphlets, it will be necessary to briefly describe the context of the architectural project with which they are concerned, that is, the construction of the new belfry of Christ Church. The fact that, in the context of the nineteenth century, an architectural intervention on Christ Church would provoke discussion, if not polemics, is not surprising. The College had been, since its foundation in the sixteenth century, celebrated, along with Christ Church Cathedral, as one of Oxford's most impressive architectural landmarks.

In founding Cardinal College (which was later to become Christ Church) at Oxford University in 1525, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey¹⁵, then Henry VIII's chief

¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 102.

¹⁵ Cardinal Thomas Wolsey was England's leading statesman, churchman and patron of the arts for a period of over fourteen years (1515-1529). He was the main consultant—and political educator—of King Henry VIII. His position of power led him to envision a series of building

minister, had high aspirations. According to his plan, the college was to be the largest one so far, surpassing all others both in Oxford and Cambridge, by its architectural features as well as its academic achievements. Construction began really fast and though Wolsey's proposal was not built exactly as planned, most of it was nonetheless completed before the Reformation, that is within a few years of its conception, and has remained more or less unaltered to this day – it constitutes the core of Christ Church, the largest of Oxford older colleges. Built around the most spacious quadrangle of Oxford, Tom Quad, the plan of the college was laid out on the side of the three western bays of the nave of Christ Church Cathedral (originally the church of St Frideswide's Priory, which was made cathedral by Henri VIII in 1546). In 1529, Wolsey fell from power and work on the building was interrupted. The chapel he had envisioned was never built (Ch. Ch. Cathedral is now both the college chapel and the main church of

projects all tied to his attempt at reforming the Church of England. His numerous commissions range from small individual houses to magnificent university colleges and bear the influence of the Italian Renaissance. This influence, coming both from the Italians and the French, is primarily visible in the programmatic choices (galleries, stacked lodging, individual domestic projects) and the iconography (stain glass, sculpture and painting, design of seals, etc.). Other Renaissance ideas permeate his work: the magnificence of architecture as a symbol of political and religious power, the utmost importance given to patronage in relation to the building, his emphasis on educational projects and the transmission of knowledge, the heightened presence of all the arts in the building project, and so on. In 1529, Wolsey fell from power as he refused to follow Henri VIII's position on the divorce issue. See *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State and Art*, ed. S. J. Gunn and P. G. Lindley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

the city), nor was the gate tower of the main facade, which was only completed several decades later.¹⁶ But, as Geoffrey Tyack writes,

“Even in their unfinished state, Wolsey’s buildings impress by their sheer magnitude. The main survivals from the original project are the bulk of the west and south ranges, including the Hall (the most impressive element of the interior project), the Kitchen, and the lower parts of the gatehouse.”¹⁷

The vault of the Hall staircase was the last major building undertaken in Oxford before the Civil War and can be roughly dated 1640.¹⁸ It was carried out in the purest gothic style, probably following a lost design by Wolsey¹⁹, and represents one of the most elaborate examples of such fan vaulting in England.²⁰ Eventually, in the late seventeenth century, the long symmetrical facade of Wolsey’s original plan was completed, along with the tower above the main entrance to the college, Tom Tower, which is of Sir Christopher Wren’s design and dates from 1681-82.

¹⁶ See Tyack, Geoffrey. *Oxford An Architectural Guide* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77.

¹⁷ Tyack, *Oxford An Architectural Guide*, 75.

¹⁸ See Sherwood, Jennifer and Nikolaus Pevsner. *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 110-112.

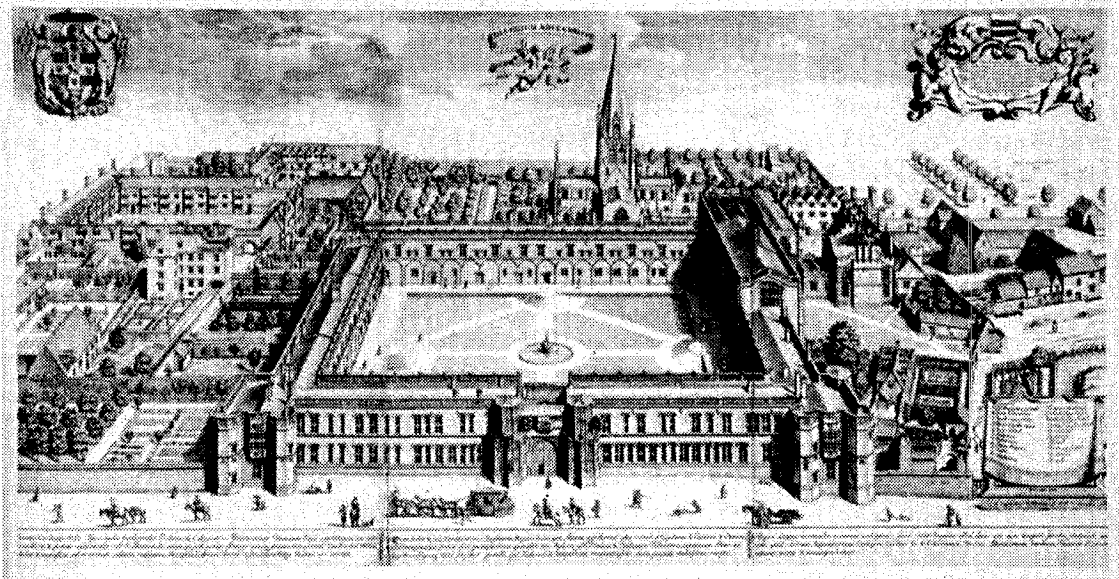
¹⁹ Sherwood and Pevsner agree in that sense.

²⁰ It should be noted that the actual staircase to the Hall is an early nineteenth century addition (1805), by architect James Wyatt.

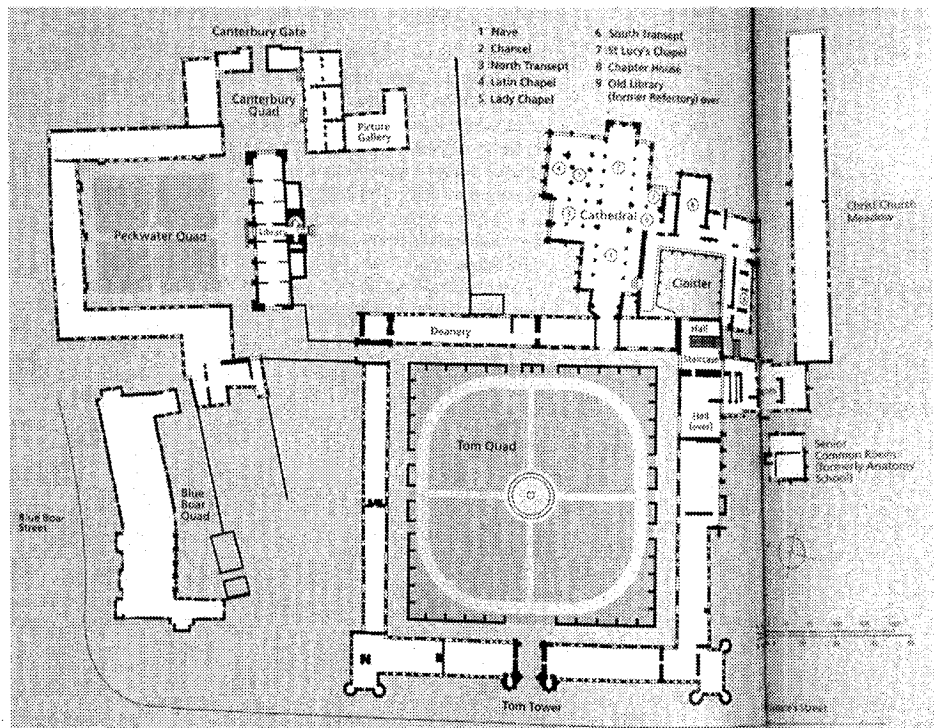
The project commissioned in the 1870's by the Dean of the College, Henry George Liddell (1811-1898),²¹ was to end a 350 years long process of building at Christ Church. The construction of a new bell tower was envisioned at the junction of the two major interior elements, Wolsey's impressive Hall of c1528-29 and the magnificent vault over the staircase of c1640. From the beginning, Liddell's project was extremely controversial, as it touched upon the most pristine parts of the building, and was to alter the physical appearance of the college as it was experienced from the main quadrangle, Tom Quad. Designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878) and executed by his former student George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907) of *Bodley and Garner*, the nature of the project is as follows.

First, Great Tom, the college bell which had been housed inside Wren's tower above the main entrance gate, had to be extracted from the structure and moved above the vaulted staircase, where the new belfry was to be built. To accommodate the new bell tower, a breach was opened in the parapet above the Hall. This gesture is what Carroll and his colleagues at Christ Church referred to as the "trench". Concurrently, it was decided that a new access to Christ Church Cathedral was to be provided. Following Liddell's commission, Scott (or Bodley) condemned one of the students rooms on the ground floor in order to pierce through the east wing of the college all the way to the Cathedral so that, from Tom Quad, visitors could have direct access to the church without actually

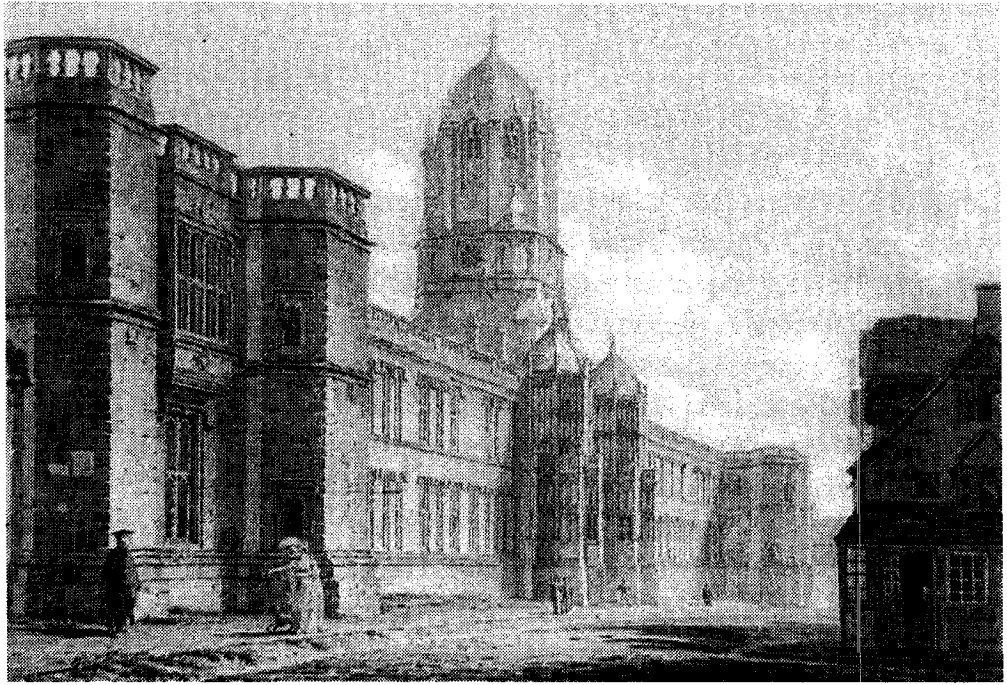
²¹ Dean Liddell was at the head of Christ Church College from 1855 to 1891. Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was inspired by and dedicated to Liddell's second daughter Alice.



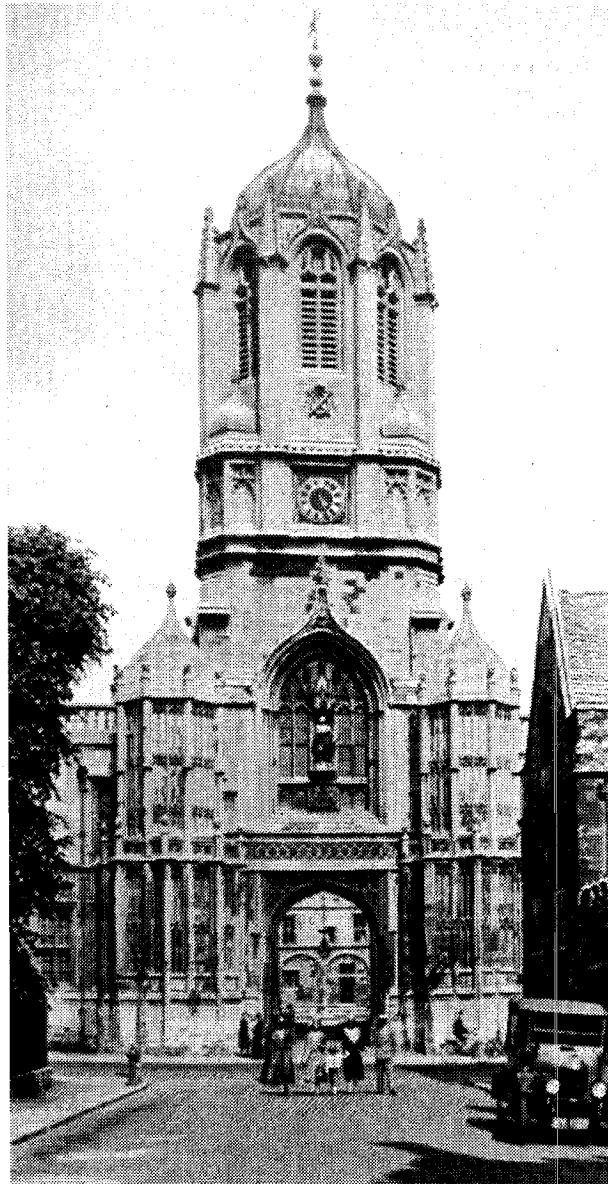
1 Logan's view of Christ Church (1675) showing the recently completed Tom Quad before the building of Tom Tower. Reprinted in Geoffrey Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 141.



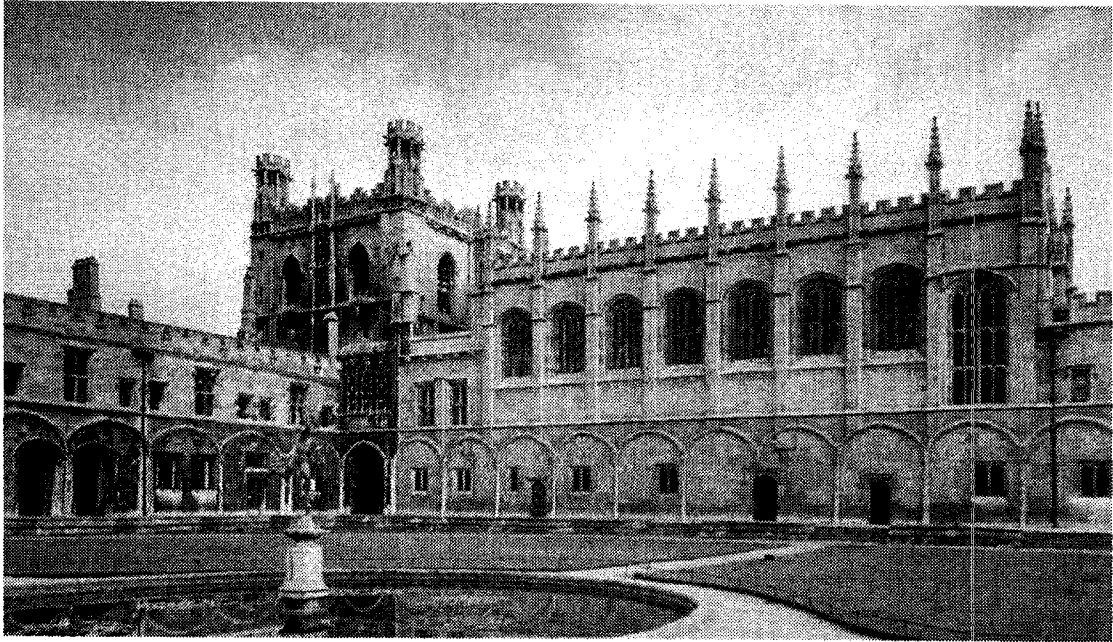
2 Christ Church, ground plan. The new belfry was built at the top right corner of Tom Quad, above the hall staircase. From Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 74.



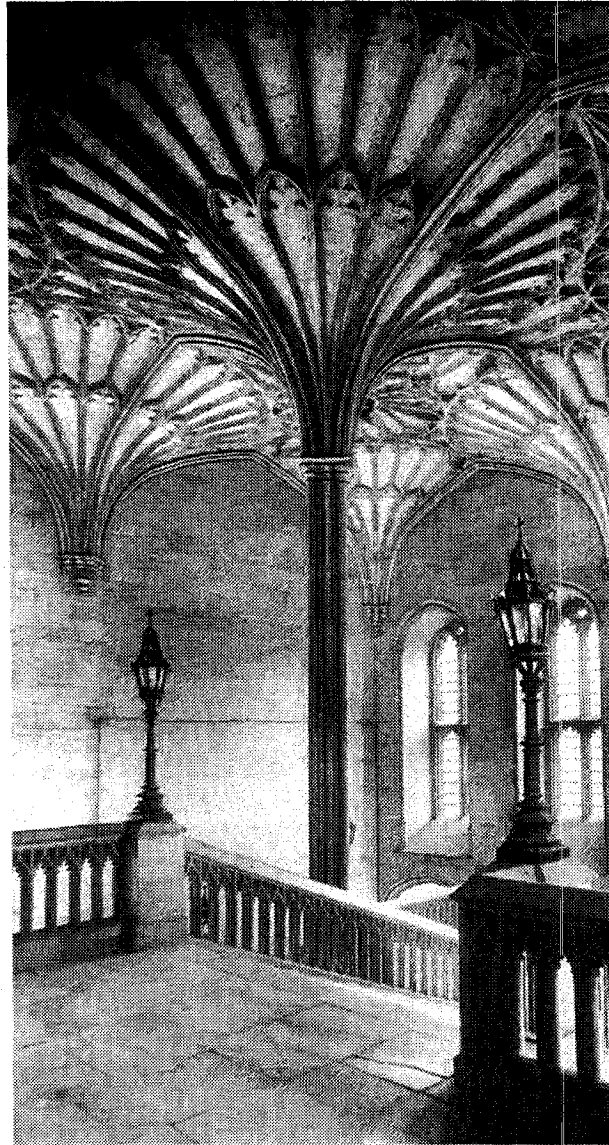
3 Main facade of Christ Church in 1794. The gate tower (Tom Tower) dates from 1681-2. Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 73.



4 "Tom Tower" above the central gate of Christ Church College, begun c.1525, the upper part is by Sir Christopher Wren, 1681-2. Reprinted in Jennifer Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Oxfordshire: The buildings of England*, London: Penguin, 1974, fig.51.



5 Tom Quad, looking south towards the Hall. To the left of the Hall is G. F. Bodley's belfry (1876-9) over the Hall staircase. At the left of the picture (on the East side of Tom Quad) is the double passage leading to Christ Church Cathedral (the "Tunnel"). Notice also the circular pond at the centre of the quadrangle. Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 77.



6 Hall staircase by James Wyatt (1801-04) with the famous fan shaped vault of 1638. Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 113.

entering the college. Two narrow vertical apertures with arches were cut through the facade. This symmetrical, double passage way is what Carroll's satirically refers to as the "tunnel". These two stages of the project were actually finished as Carroll was writing the pamphlets (they are dated 1872-73). Both interventions will be discussed in the second pamphlet, *The Vision of the Three T's*, as two of the "t's", the "tunnel" and the "trench". The third "t" of the *Three T's*, the "tea-chest" is related to the belfry itself.

A few years after the project began, construction had to be momentarily interrupted due to financial problems. Bodley, then the architect in charge, was asked to design a temporary structure to house Great Tom above the Hall staircase until enough funding was gathered to complete the new belfry as planned. A temporary construction—a cubic wooden scaffolding—was erected in place of the bell-tower as it now stands. The plain wooden box was quickly given the rather unflattering moniker of the "tea-chest". It seemed unclear how long this temporary construction was to last, both due to its brittle nature and to the unconvincing prospect of finding enough money to properly execute the project. Hence it became a source of irritation and controversy. The actual belfry was indeed completed between 1876-79,²² but in 1872, as Carroll was writing the first pamphlet, the wooden "tea-chest" had already been there a little too long and the future completion of the project remained uncertain.

²² See Sherwood and Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire*, 112. See also Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 77.

It seems important to mention that what Carroll is criticising in his architectural pamphlets is not the project as it was actually completed in 1879. Rather, his critique is directed at an intermediary step of the building process. In that sense, the two architectural pamphlets are not intended solely at questioning the nature of architectural intervention per se but, instead, address the project as a whole: the programmatic basis of the intervention, the choice of the architects, the unfolding of the building process, its financial and political implications, and finally, the aesthetic choices and stylistic nature of the intervention. Carroll's critique seems to imply an understanding of architecture that is broader and which encompasses all steps of the architectural project, from the artistic vision leading to the design, to its completion.

The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford was first published anonymously²³ in 1872.²⁴ It was reedited twice that same year. The third edition of 1872 bears the inscription "2nd thousand." A fourth and fifth edition came out in 1873 and, in 1874, the text was published in section IV of *Notes of an Oxford Child*.²⁵ *The Vision of the Three T's* was published in 1873 "by the author of *The New Belfry*" and also included as section V of the *Notes of an Oxford Child* in 1874. According to Jean-Pierre Richard in his notice to the Oxford pamphlets, the successive reprints

²³ The signature for the New Belfry is D. C. L. an anagram for Charles L. Dodgson but, also, the acronym for *doctor civilis legis* (doctor of the law), a title given at Oxford to the highest-ranking personalities. See "Notes sur les pamphlets oxoniens", in Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 1859.

²⁴ See Carroll's diary entry of May 31st 1872, in Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres*, 1153.

²⁵ See "Notes sur les pamphlets oxoniens," in Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres*, 1859.

of the two texts suggest that they were widely circulating and well known within the context of both Christ Church and Oxford.²⁶

In the *New Belfry* one can find clues regarding Carroll's critical position. The strange shape of the text, a monograph, is a rare occurrence in Carroll's work, as he usually favours the dialogue form. The monograph, which was at the time generally associated with classification endeavours in Natural History (Darwin) is a text in which the author is concerned with one single thing/object, describing its main attributes in the most exhaustive manner, in opposition to the more general form of the treatise in which the same object will be dealt with as part of a wider subject. To produce a monograph of a family, a tribe, or a genus, or else, to monograph it, means that nothing shall be neglected which is necessary for a perfect knowledge of it.²⁷ Carroll's recourse to the form of the monograph²⁸ suggest that the new Belfry can be seen as a completely "new" object of study, a genus of its own, a new category of things previously unknown to mankind.

The text begins with a quote from John Keats's *Endymion* (1818) "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" which is placed on the page slightly above what is then referred to as the "elevation of the new belfry as it can be seen from the plain."

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

²⁸ In the current context, the monograph has become one of the major types of architectural publication.

The illustration shows a perfectly blank square, the sides of which are traced with a thick black line. The juxtaposition of the verse and the geometrical figure is intriguing. One might be led to believe that the text will emphasise the “natural” (and eternal) beauty of pure geometrical shapes. But as the text unfolds in a rather satirical manner into a series of thirteen categories: (1) etymological significance; (2) style; (3) origin; (4) chief architectural merit; (5) other architectural merit; (6) means of obtaining the best view; (7) impetus given to art in England; (8) feelings with which old Ch. Ch. men regard it; (9) feelings with which resident Ch. Ch. men regard it; (10) logical treatment; (11) dramatic treatment; (12) future, and finally; (13) moral, the reader soon realises the irony of the text.

The first category concerns the etymological significance of the new belfry. As is often the case when monographing a genus or a species in the Natural Sciences, the name given to it is important. It will allow the reader to place it within the rest of the classification endeavour, revealing something about its position within the larger natural realm—knowing the origin of the name will tell something about the object itself. In the case of the belfry, the word is composed, Carroll tells us, from etymons borrowed in two different languages, from “the French *bel*, ‘beautiful, becoming, meet,’ and from the German *frei* ‘free, unfettered, secure, safe.’” “Belfry” is thus equivalent to “meatsafe,” as attested by its perfect resemblance, if not formal coincidence to the refrigerated container. The name given to the belfry is therefore eloquent of what it looks like, of how it appears, in a way that evokes more ancient modes of classification

than those currently in use in the nineteenth century.²⁹ Carroll has recourse to this mode, which was still familiar to most readers, in order to make his point: the construction indeed looks like a box.

The second category is extremely brief, but this brevity is rather telling. Carroll writes: "The style is that which is usually known as ""Early debased"": very early, and remarkably debased."³⁰ Early, perhaps, in that the design lacks maturation. Debased in the sense of ungrounded, both architecturally and historically. I shall come back to the question of style further in this chapter but my hypotheses is as follows: Carroll does not elaborate on the question of style, indeed the central question of the architectural discussions of his time, because for him, the problem of architecture lies elsewhere.

If the first and second points are rather short, others are more elaborate and may include parodied excerpts of songs or, in a few instances, of Shakespearean drama. It is within these categories that the most insight on Carroll's views can be gathered. The third one, "On the origin of the new Belfry" is the lengthiest. In it, the reader learns that the question of origins can rely on different sources like, for instance, information gathered from the very best authorities, the shape of the building itself, or else on Rumour. Carroll elaborates: the question of origin

²⁹ On the historical transformation of such modes of representation, see Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

³⁰ Lewis Carroll, "The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford," in *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*. (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), 1026.

in relation to the architecture of the Belfry is one of authorship – “to *whom* we are to attribute the first grand conception of the work.” As will become evident in a more developed form in *The Vision...* Carroll stresses here the question of authorship, of recourse to precedents and, ultimately, of intentionality in the making of architecture. He writes:

On this point, [the origin,] Rumour has been unusually busy. Some say the Governing Body evolved the idea in solemn conclave—the original motion being to adopt the Tower of St. Mark’s at Venice as a model: and that by a series of amendments it was reduced at last to a simple cube. Others say the reader in Chemistry suggested it as a form of crystal. There are others who affirm that the Mathematical Lecturer³¹ found it in the Eleventh Book of Euclid.³² In fact, there is no end to the various myths afloat on the subject. Most fortunately, we are in possession of the real story.³³

The true origin of the new Belfry goes as follows: “The head of the house, and the architect, feeling that their names should be embodied, in some conspicuous way, among the alterations then in progress, conceived the beautiful and unique idea of representing, by means of a new Belfry, a gigantic copy of a Greek Lexicon.” Carroll inserts a footnote: “The editor confesses to a difficulty here. No sufficient reason has been adduced why a model of a Greek Lexicon³⁴ should in

³¹ This was Carroll’s position at Christ Church.

³² The elements of Euclid (323-283 BC) contains thirteen books, grouped into three sections: 1 to VI, plane geometry; VII to X, the properties of numbers and the theories of irrational numbers; XI to XII, stereotomy. Book XI is concerned with the treatment of parallelepipeds. See “Notes sur les pamphlets oxoniens,” in Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres*, 1860.

³³ Lewis Carroll, “The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford,” 1027.

³⁴ At the time of the construction of the belfry, Henry Liddell was working with Robert Scott on the completion of a Greek lexicon. This passage suggests that if the idea behind the building is only to “embody” the names of its patrons, instead of the their whole persona or “character” as

any way 'embody' the names of the above illustrious individuals." This once again stresses the relationship of words to things and will be reinforced by the following chapter "On the architectural merit of the new Belfry" where Carroll claims to mimic the pure, profound and *simple* simplicity of the construction through the "meagre outline, and baldness of detail" of the chapter, by writing a single line: "The Belfry has no architectural merit."

The idea of embodying the names of the project's patrons, Carroll tells us, could not, in the end, be reduced to a working form since they both had to leave the site of construction and were replaced by Jeeby (an acronym of George Bodley), the wandering and insane architect. This character, which will be reintroduced in the second pamphlet as Lunatic (still the architect), is here said to have found his inspiration for the building,

when idly contemplating one of those highly coloured, and mysteriously decorated chests that, filled with dried leaves from gooseberry bushes and quickset hedges, profess to supply the market with tea of genuine Chinese growth.³⁵

Jeeby, the mad architect, has materialised his prophetic vision and so, Carroll insists, it is rather he who is responsible for the newest decoration of Christ Church, and not Scott. The latter "is *said* to have pronounced it a '*casus belli*'³⁶(...) meaning merely 'a case for a bell'" as a manner of reproach. For the third time in

was the case in earlier architectural theories, then the fact that Scott the architect is a different person than Scott the professor of classical languages is irrelevant.

³⁵ Carroll. "The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford," 1028.

³⁶ For the reader, the Latin meaning rather evokes the idea of what initiates a war: a warlike event or the provocation to engage in a fight.

the pamphlet, Carroll proposes ways to make sense of the architectural object through the help of words. Since the architectural element itself, the temporary Belfry, does not yield its meaning, one can (ironically) find ways of understanding it through a series of similar analogical twists. It's a tower? It's a book? No, it's a tea-chest! There is, in the case of the Belfry, and perhaps due to its extremely simple features, a direct correlation between the vision (inspiration) of the architect and the way the building appears, perceived through the vision (sight) of an observer. This notion will be criticised further in *The Vision of the Three T's*. For now, this will lead us to discuss another important point of the first pamphlet, "On the means of obtaining the best views of the new Belfry".

Starting from the assumption that a correlation between the vision of the maker and that of the observer is possible, the problem then becomes one of point of view. Which is the best position for the observer to contemplate the edifice, through a kind of Baroque process of recognition, and to recreate, for an instant, the vision of the architect? On this point, Carroll writes:

The visitor may place himself, in the first instance, at the opposite corner of the Great Quadrangle, and so combine, in one grand spectacle, the beauties of the North and West sides of the edifice. He will find that converging lines forcibly suggest a vanishing point, and if that vanishing point should in turn suggest the thought, 'would that *it* were on the point of vanishing!' he may perchance (...) 'wipe away a tear.'³⁷

Carroll then suggests that the visitor may take the circuit of the Quadrangle, "drinking in new visions of beauty at every step," leading to the actual "*best*

³⁷ Carroll. "The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford," 1029.

view of the Belfry", which, he adds, "is the one selected by our Artist for the admirable frontispiece to the first Volume of the present work."³⁸

This emphasis on lines in vision evokes a more ancient concern of architects for geometry. The passage from drawings to built forms, though it appears evident today, is a historically constituted concept that was more or less framed into its current shape during and after the Renaissance. It is through that period that line drawing (*le dessin au trait*) became the primary conception tool for architects. The transfer from drawing to building—from idea to reality—was therefore ruled by a new concept: for Renaissance architects, the notion of *lineamenti* was crucial to the appropriate conception and making of a building. *Lineamenti* are lines that are, in nature, somehow analogous to the modern idea of "essence." These lines first appear in the mind of the architect and are formalised through the geometrical operation of drawing. They will remain present throughout the building process.

Any process of formalisation of an ideal necessarily involves a suspension of experience—drawings tend to emulate the geometrical purity associated to divine perfection. In that sense, *lineamenti* represent the outline, the geometrical simplicity of the building as a perfect solid body. In its concrete materialisation, the building will however be of a different order. Once the transcription into

³⁸ Ibid.

matter takes place, a gap³⁹ will set itself between the perfection of the divine order and the relative order of the human realm. Though *lineamenti* are abstract and as close as possible to the ideal, the only way for us to experience them is through their concrete/material presence—*lineamenti* need matter to be made visible. In the pre-Cartesian mindset of the Renaissance, the perfect order of the divine—the ideal—is not intended to be transliterated in the world of lived experience.

Matter, in the case of architecture, ornamented matter, is a vehicle for the appearance and the preservation of *lineamenti* into the world that allows for an aesthetic experience to take place. The architect can imagine a plurality of possible materialisations but has to ensure that the most appropriate one is chosen. The transmission of *lineamenti* is as follows: when an observer experiences the building, he or she has access (in a physical and intellectual manner) to the initial simple form. A trace of the ideal has been left and can imprint itself into the soul of the observer. Though the observer cannot access the initial form entirely, he or she can nonetheless retrace the conceptual origins of the building, partially re-enacting the work of the architect, somehow going backwards. An impression of meaning and order can thus take shape, precisely

³⁹ Through the process of materialisation, something of the ideal is lost; a gap remains. In the imperfect context of the real, the order that the building brings about is fragile. Hence, for Renaissance architects, it is capital to maintaining the building “alive.” The organism/building analogy present throughout that period testifies to that phenomenon. In the Renaissance mind, the building continues to evolve—slowly becoming what it is—after its physical completion. Like a human being, it is conceived and passes through similar stages as those of human life. It goes through embryonic form, is born, grows and ages, needs care and nutrients, and so on.

because of the previously mentioned gap that induces a movement of both body and mind. This whole process of recognition persists after the experience of the building—the spectator gathers his “impressions” and carries them away. The experience of beauty remains, like a trace, in the soul of the observer.⁴⁰ The encounter with the building is, in Renaissance terms, a magical occurrence. The faculty of imagination of the individual is crucial for the whole process to take place. The material embodiment of the geometric lines generates images, but these images are, at the same time, poetic images because of the way their coming into the world implicates the act of imagining, which relies on metaphor.

Congruence is the precise rule that connects and makes visible what appears. In that sense, congruence is similar to linguistic or poetic tropes, to metaphorical connections. However, there is never a complete correspondence, as I have said, a gap remains that allows the movement to take place and meaning to occur. With the aid of number (or proportion) that emanates from the soul (Aristotle), the space of geometry, at the time understood to be the space of truth, is connected to the realm of experience. In Carroll’s story however, the coincidence between the lines in both geometric visions is perfect, the space of experience has

⁴⁰ For example, in the work of Alberti, the geometrical order appears most effectively in the facade of the building, and so in contrast to medieval architecture, frontality, in the Renaissance, became crucial. The beauty of a building, like that of a person, appears first and foremost in the face. Beauty does not (only) lie in the details (of the ornament or the specific elements of a figure), it is presented to the observer in the form of the general outline, the ordering lines, that define the geometry of the face, of the body. In that sense, beauty depends on place, on number, on modes, on the order conveyed by *lineamenti*. See Leon Battista Alberti, *On painting*, trans. with intro. and notes by John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

been closed and the disclosure of meaning through the experience of the building is rendered void, it can no longer take place. Carroll has already warned the reader about the belfry's lack of architectural qualities.

Carroll critique is further developed towards the end of the monograph when he proposes to treat the belfry from a dramatic point of view. The text takes the shape of a drama in which Carroll playfully parodies, among others, Shakespearian texts. The play begins: "Curtain rises, discovering the Dean, Canons, and Students, seated round a table, on which the mad Architect, fantastically dressed, and wearing a fool's cap and bells, is placing a square block of deal." The Dean (as Hamlet) claims to see there a Bell-tower, and when the canons ask him where, he replies: "In my mind's eye." Their conversation is then disturbed by the entrance of a spirit, the Great Bell (disguised as a mushroom), who complains about his precarious situation trapped under a wooden box. The whole situation unfolds into a rather absurd confusion as the Belfry enters (as Box) and argues with the Bodley Librarian (as Cox).⁴¹ The latter is criticising the Belfry for appearing as corners only, with nothing in the middle. Box then puts the skeleton of an umbrella upside down on top of itself, but since this seems to add nothing to its features, not the slightest mark of artistic design, the librarian recognises his long lost door-scraper and hugs the utilitarian object

⁴¹ This passage is a parody of a famous comic text of 1847, "Box and Cox," by John Maddison Morton (1811-1891). In this text, two protagonists have unknowingly rented the same room and end up sharing it against their will. See "Notes sur les pamphlets oxoniens," in Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres*, 1862.

with great affection. The drama ends with a variation on the song of Ariel celebrating the death of beauty.

In the play, the Dean cannot connect the vision which appears in his “mind’s eye” with his experience of the Belfry, for reasons mentioned above. A sort of disjunction between body and mind occurs precisely because there is nothing between the corners of the abstract box, nothing that would render its experience meaningful. This disjunction is also alluded to earlier in the text: “We see the Governing Body’, say they: ‘Where is the Governing *Mind*?’”⁴² To which the nymph Echo answers “(exercising a judicious ‘natural selection’ for which even Darwin would give her credit) (...)—‘where?’” It is interesting to see here that the two nymphs appearing in the story are sonic nymphs, Rumour and Echo. These figures are both carriers of sounds. Rumour propagates a kind of unfiltered background noise, which emanates from humans but is never completely audible. Echo, on the other hand, by duplicating and stretching the speed of sounds, gives the measure of spaces and contributes to their temporal dimension. Distances can somehow be perceived as sounds bounce on surfaces. The experience of architectural spaces occurs through words; body and mind are thus interconnected. But in the case of the Belfry, Echo cannot properly transmit sound.

The relationship between space, time and one’s experience of architecture will be further studied in the coming chapters. For now, it is interesting to see how

⁴² Carroll, “The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford,” 1030.

Carroll foresees the future of the Belfry. He writes: "The Belfry has a great Future before it—at least, if it has not, it has very little to do with Time at all, its Past being (fortunately for our ancestors) a nonentity, and its Present a blank."⁴³ And so it seems, the edifice came out of nothing and entertains no link whatsoever with history. But since it *does* exist, all it can have is a future: either the bell is rung leading to the "pulverisation" of the building, or else, enough money is found and the building process can resume.

Finally, Carroll informs the reader, as in the case of all good poems, the monograph ends with "the Moral of the new Belfry." He writes: "every thing has a moral, if you choose to look at it." This one goes as follows:

"Look on the Quadrangle, squarely, for is it not a Square?
And a Square recalleth a Cube; and a Cube recalleth the Belfry;
And the Belfry recalleth a Die, shaken by the end of the gambler;
Yet, once thrown, it may not be recalled, being, so to speak,
irrevocable.
There it shall endure for ages, treading hard on the heels of the
Sublime—
For it is but a step, saith the wise man, from the Sublime to the
Ridiculous:
And the Simple dwelleth midway between, and shareth the
qualities of either."⁴⁴

The belfry stands there, hovering, like a throw of die frozen in mid air, halfway between the ridiculous and the sublime, in this momentary yet dangerously permanent state that irritates Carroll to the point that he will, the following year, devote a second pamphlet to the topic.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1036.

For this second pamphlet, the shape of the text changes and Carroll returns to his favoured mode of writing, the dialogue. No longer framed as a monograph, the text, as the title's word play announces, will deal with the topic as part of a larger subject and will adopt the more traditional form of the treatise. Carroll has recourse to a well-known model that he then adapts. *The vision of the Three T's* constitutes a shorter, parodied, version of one of the most famous and widely reprinted treatises inherited from the Renaissance, *The Compleate Angler*, by Isaak Walton.⁴⁵

First published in 1653, *The Compleate Angler, or the Contemplative Man's Recreations* was an immediate success and was reedited a few times during Walton's lifetime. It then fell into oblivion, until its rediscovery in the Eighteenth century. Since then, some three hundred reprints have appeared and, in the Nineteenth century, it was one of the most widely circulated books. *The Compleate Angler*, a treatise on fish and the art of fishing, is a rather strange little book. Shaped as a drama taking place over the course of five days, its three characters, Piscator (a fisherman), Venator (a hunter) and Auceps (a falconer) each discuss and commend their respective activities. Angling (fishing) is celebrated as the one that is most conducive to contemplation and therefore the most suited to the wise man. Walton compares angling to mathematics, as arts that are so beautiful and complex that they can never be fully learned, but on

⁴⁵ Walton (1593-1683) was also a biographer. He wrote the *Lives* of, among others, Sir Henry Wotton and John Donne (completing the version already begun by Wotton himself).

which man shall constantly reflect in order to enhance his intellect. According to Walton, angling has a positive effect on the morality of those who practice it.

If *The Compleate Angler* is a rather light-hearted, joyous celebration of fishing, *The Vision of the Three T's*, as the subtitle a “threnody” suggests, has a slightly different tone—it constitutes a complaint. Threnodies, or Elegies, are usually songs or poems for the dead, mourning the lost of a loved one, expressing nostalgia for bygone days. But despite this difference in tone, Carroll borrows extensively from Walton’s text. Two of the characters Piscator and Venator, come straight from Walton’s book, the style of writing as well as the structure of the dialogue are extremely similar. When the pamphlet came out, most readers would have been familiar with *The Compleate Angler* and in that sense, their experience of *The Vision...* must have been quite different from that of today’s readers—a variation on a very familiar text, or phrase, always strikes home. Reading the text today, one may indeed find it a little strange, but it is nonetheless possible to access Carroll’s criticism towards the Belfry and its architects.

The threnody, organised into three chapters, takes place over the course of an afternoon. A series of different protagonists enter into conferences, or dialogues, with the two main characters, Piscator and Venator. The opening chapter begins with the two sportsmen arriving at their fishing site, a perfectly circular little pond situated at the centre of a great quadrangle (there is actually a round fountain at the centre of Tom Quad). As they get settled for fishing, they marvel

upon the perfect geometry of their surrounding—indeed a perfect location for angling—and debate about the sorts of fish they may encounter as well as the best way to catch each kind.

Fish being rare in this rather artificial setting, contemplation is facilitated and they begin to notice some modifications in the “noble Quadrangle.” Venator asks: “Is all we see of a like antiquity? To be brief, think you that those two tall archways, that excavation in the parapet, and that quaint wooden box, belong to the ancient design of the building, or have men of our day thus sadly disfigured the place?” Piscator, having been there a few years earlier, can undoubtedly confirm the novelty of the three “things”.

The passage of a Collegian, Professor, near the men’s fishing spot interrupts their reflections. They introduce each other and the sportsmen take the opportunity to ask their interlocutor about the architectural transformations. Piscator enquires: “we would ask the cause for piercing the very hearth of this fair building with that uncomely tunnel, which is at once so ill-shaped, so ill-sized, and so ill-lighted.” To which the professor of Natural Sciences answers, after having made sure that Piscator and Venator do not speak German, “Warum nicht?”⁴⁶ insisting that all that is good, nowadays, comes from the German, especially in science. And when Venator inquires about the “ghastly gash above us, hacked, as though by some wanton school-boy, in the parapet adjoining the Hall,” Professor replies, once more in German, “Wie befinden Sie

⁴⁶ Literally: Why not?

Sich?"⁴⁷ Finally, when asked about the "unseemly box that blots the heavens above," his answer, which he delivers this time in English just before leaving, is equally enigmatic:

"Be you mad sir? Why this is the very climacteric and coronal of all our architectural aspirations! In all Oxford there is naught like it! ... And, trust me, to an earnest mind, the categorical evolution of the Abstract, ideologically considered, must infallibly develop itself in the parallelepipedisation of the Concrete!"⁴⁸

Even though this time the Professor's answer is uttered in English, it does not seem more comprehensible to the two interlocutors. Luckily, another protagonist enters.

Lunatic is the architect responsible for the project and goes by the name of Jeeby. The rather convoluted conversation they have with him is interesting in two regards. First, as the sportsmen wonder about the nature of the garment that the mad architect is wearing, Lunatic's answer concerning fashion is telling. After having asked them if they read the *Post*, he goes on:

"Tis a pity of your life you do not. For, look you, not to read the *Post*, and not to know the newest and most commended fashions, are but one and the same thing. And yet this raiment, that I wear, is *not* the newest fashion. No, nor has it ever been, nor will it ever be, the fashion."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Literally: How do you find yourself? The expression can also mean How do you do? It ironically evokes a very German concern of nineteenth century philosophy about the possibility of having the certainty of one's existence.

⁴⁸ Lewis Carroll. "The Vision of the Three T's," in *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1996), 1040.

⁴⁹ Lewis Carroll. "The Vision of the Three T's," 1043.

Jeeby's outfit, which looks like a cross between the dresses of a jockey, a judge, and a North American Indian is totally ill-assorted and gaudy. For the architect, it is perfect because totally a-temporal, beyond the concerns of fashion and, just like his architecture, unique, eccentric and completely new.

When asked by Piscator and Venator about each of the wondrous architectural interventions, the architect wildly replies "'Tis mine! 'Tis mine!"—all three realisations are his deed. He goes on to recall his *vision* for the "tunnel". Though this constitutes a rather long passage, I reproduce it entirely.

Is mine sir! Oh the fancy! Oh the wit! Oh, the rich vein of humour! When came the idea? I'the mirk midnight. Whence came the idea? In a wild dream. Hearken, and I will tell. Form Square, and prepare to receive a canonry! All the evening long I had seen lobster marching around the table in unbroken order. Something sputtered in the candle—something hopped among the tea-things—something pulsated, with an ineffable yearning, beneath the enraptured hearthrug! My hearth told me something was coming—and something came! A voice cried 'Cheese-scoop!' and the Great Thought of my life flashed upon me! Placing an ancient Stilton cheese, to represent the venerable Quadrangle, on the chimney, I retired to the further end of the room, armed only with a cheese-scoop, and with a dauntless courage awaited the word of command. Charge, Cheesetaster, charge! On, Stilton, on! With a yell—another bound—another cavity scooped out! The deed was done.⁵⁰

Logically, Piscator wonders, if the holes were done with a cheese-scoop, the apertures in the wall should have been round. To which Lunatic replies that they were at first, but that as he "wrought out that vision of beauty", he made some

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1045.

slight changes. "Oh, the ecstasy," he says, "when yesterday the screen was swept away, and the *Vision was a Reality!*"⁵¹

Lunatic's mad vision was made real in an almost one to one manner. The nature of his vision, which occurred in a flash of insanity in the middle of the night evokes an understanding of artistic genius completely detached from any other concerns than pure form. Lunatic can find inspiration in a piece of stilton; the materiality of the building is irrelevant. Cheese or stone, it is all the same; only form matters.⁵² The question of intentionality and the possibility for observers to make sense of the work are left unanswered. The wild architect will leave the site without providing his interlocutors with more information and the two will have to turn to a third visitor in order to gather more insight.

The third Collegian who passes by is Tutor, a professor versed in ancient languages and unknown tongues. As he provides them with his explanation on the architectural interventions and in order to structure his argument, he uses a rule of Latin grammar, which, he says, was the motto of the Governing Body in commissioning the project. When asked about the relevance of using this

⁵¹ Ibid, 1046. My emphasis.

⁵² It is interesting to read here the influence of John Ruskin, who emphasised the participation of human sensibility in the encounter of a work of art. Ruskin was defending such an attitude against pragmatism. For him the materiality of architecture was primordial: one should ask the stone what it has to say. A stone could tell the story of how it was crafted and could reveal the passage of time upon its face. See John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ed. with intro. Jan Morris (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981). See also, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London, 1910) and *The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art*, ed. Joan Evans (London: Phaidon Press, 1959).

grammatical example as a motto, he replies: "Sir, if we are not grammatical, we are nothing!" He then goes on using another rule, this time a mathematical one, in order to explain the twin arches. The non-harmonic means being, in the rule of long divisions, the means Absolute, the "Tunnel" represents the ultimate architectural achievement of the time, especially if one compares the heavy pier at the centre of the archway to the obelisk that the *Ideal Architect* inevitably and carefully places at the centre of his creations, "in the midst of all." Tutor states the importance of these rules, the grammatical and the mathematical, as if they were self-evidently leading to an understanding of the architectural interventions. The irony implied in the use of such rules evokes a concern for language recurrent in Carroll's work. For him, meaning, and in this case architectural meaning, does not always take place within the rule, but more often than not, understanding happens in liminal conditions, as the rule is bent, within a temporary incursion at the limit of grammar, of mathematical formulae, of architectural form, and of language itself.

Meanwhile, Piscator has fallen asleep and is having a strange dream. As he wakes up, he recalls his own *vision* of the three T's. In a tone that evokes the biblical Apocalypse or some prophetic psalm, he retells his dream. The spirit of Cardinal Wolsey appears wearing a dress not dissimilar to that of Lunatic, with a cap and ribbons that defy gravity. He is surrounded by a myriad of other spirits howling and making loud noises.

Darkness gathered overhead, and through the gloom sobbingly down-floated a gigantic Box! With a fearful crash it settled upon the ancient College, which groaned beneath it, while a mocking voice cried 'Ha!

Ha!'. ... A darker vision yet! A black gash appeared in the shuddering parapet! ... Then a wild shriek rang through the air, as, with volcanic roar, two murky chasms burst upon the view, and the ancient College reeled giddily around me! ... Stand here with me a gaze. From this thrice-favoured spot, in one rapturous glance gather in, and brand for ever on the tablets of memory, the Vision of the Three T's! To your left frowns the abysmal blackness of the tenebrous Tunnel. To your right yawns the terrible Trench. While far above, away from the sordid aims of Earth and the petty criticism of Art, soars, tetragonal and tremendous, the tintinabulatory Tea-chest! Scholar, the Vision is complete!⁵³

This passionate retelling of Piscator's vision has apparently triggered the appetite of the two sportsmen who decide to have lunch and resume to fishing.

The story ends abruptly when the sportsmen see a fish and hook it.

The two visions, the vision (or inspiration) of the architect and the quasi-divine revelation of the observer are analogous, yet very different. They both occur in a kind of dark dream-like situation, and portray artistic creation as a revelatory experience. However, an unbridgeable distance remains between Lunatic and Piscator's visions. Like in the case of the *New Belfry* earlier mentioned, the geometry of the interventions, the outlines and general form can perhaps coincide, yet, the meaning of the architectural construction remains impossible to reconcile. Lunatic's vision, being utterly detached from the considerations of the world, from social, economical, material concerns (c.f. the episode of the cheese), but, most importantly, from questions of architectural significance, leads to the production, in Piscator's dream, of a vision of horror, the realisation that the architecture is entirely "other" – *une pure altérité*.

⁵³ Carroll. "The Vision of the Three T's," 1051-52.

I will now briefly return to Carroll's allusion to the problem of style and to the relationship of architecture to time and history. George Gilbert Scott, the architect initially appointed to the project of the Belfry was one of the major proponents in the discussion around historicism and restoration in the second half of the Nineteenth century. He built extensively and also wrote a series of books.

A plea for the Faithful restoration of Churches was published in 1850. In this short text, Scott exposes his ideas concerning the restoration of religious buildings and provides the reader with numerous sketches of his own hand showing the best "examples" of Gothic architecture. Scott's position regarding architectural restoration was highly criticised, as were his numerous realisations as an architect. Strongly in favour of a return to Gothic, his position could be briefly summarised as follows: though the architect shall respect the building on which he is to intervene and take into account all the successive architectural interventions that constitute its history, he should nonetheless decide (with great licence) which parts should be kept and which should be destroyed in order to harmonise the whole in the purest and most appropriate Gothic fashion, regardless of the antiquity of the parts to be removed and replaced. The result, as some of his interventions on Christ Church Cathedral testify, can be rather confusing. It becomes very difficult to tell what is "original" and what is "new." But this is not the most problematic aspect of his position. Rather, what seemed to upset his contemporaries, is the choice of a preferred style, the high pointed Gothic of the late Middle Ages, as the ultimate Gothic. The Ecclesiologists, like,

for example, Pugin, and to some extent Ruskin, had a different view on the matter. The choice of a “style” could not be arbitrarily determined and had to rely on religious, social, historical concerns, concerns that were irrelevant for Scott. For Ruskin, it was important to act carefully when dealing with ancient edifices – intervening on their integrity or changing their appearance could alter their significance as testimony of human history.⁵⁴

On the other hand, when it came to the question of building new edifices, Ruskin was also in favour of Gothic, but in a much broader sense, including in his favourite precedents such Italian constructions as Basilica Di San Marco in Venice and others.⁵⁵ He nonetheless advocated that his contemporaries should indeed *choose a style* and conform to it, and that this style had to carry the proper moral, religious, and social significance. In that sense, architects had to find a way for the architecture of their time to be meaningful for society as a whole, a consideration that had been at the centre of architectural theories of the Eighteenth century (c.f. Ledoux, Boullée, etc). In his “Lamp of Obedience,” Ruskin writes: “Architecture never could flourish except when it was subjected to a national law as strict as minutely regulative as the laws which regulate religion, policy and social relations (...) The architecture of a nation is great only when it is as universal and as established as its language.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ John Ruskin, “The Lamp of Obedience,” in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1907) 203-219.

⁵⁵ See John Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic,” in *The Stones of Venice* (London: Collins, 1960) 182.

⁵⁶ Ruskin, “The Lamp of Obedience,” 207.

Carroll was a great admirer of John Ruskin and the two men met on several occasions at Oxford, through Dean Liddell's circle, but, most importantly, through their common interest in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. By his very brief consideration of the question of style and his constant emphasis on the problem of architectural significance, Carroll seems to be sharing Ruskin's position in regards to the responsibility of the architect. His harsh depiction of Lunatic—the base nature of his personality being somehow equated to his architecture, or vice-versa—seen here as the image of the Nineteenth century architect is certainly not flattering.

As one reads Carroll's pamphlets, it seems that the problem of architectural significance is somehow tied to the larger question of historical distance proper to the Nineteenth century. At the core of the modern condition lies a problem of transmissibility that results from the heightened sense of distance or differentiation between Past, Present and Future that characterises Western cultures. Unlike in the more mytho-traditional cultures where there is a correspondence between the thing that art transmits and the act of transmission itself (grounded in ritual), there is, in most modern cultures, a gap, a missing link between the act of transmission and the thing transmitted (as a cultural and historical symbol, idea, or meaning) which leads to a valorisation of the latter independently of its transmission, resulting in what Benjamin has pointedly

characterised as the accumulation of culture.⁵⁷ In that sense, and in contrary to how it would appear at first glance, the break with tradition does not mean that the past is lost or without value. In fact, it is perhaps only through such a process that the past acquires considerable weight—a power previously unrivalled. On the one hand, the loss of a traditional ground does mean that the past has lost its transmissibility and in that sense, unless new ways of relating to it are found, it shall remain a sole object of accumulation. On the other hand, not only do ties to the cultural past remain, their value is pushed to a vertiginous height. In a culture that has progressively lost its transmissibility, the present is nonetheless judged in terms of the past, but this past has a weight that is primarily accumulative and the possibility to trace links between what is made now and distant, yet, crucial cultural signs, is rendered more and more difficult. What is lost is the possibility for an individual to find ways to guide and ground his actions. As a society, we thus find ourselves caught in the space opened up between past and present, projected along a timeline that is elusive and foreign, but which keeps carrying us forward at a destabilising pace.

This is pretty much the situation of the protagonists facing the new Belfry in Carroll's pamphlets, and it was perhaps the situation in which he and his contemporaries found themselves in relation to the architecture of their time. In such context the notion of aesthetics assumes a position similar to the role

⁵⁷ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 107-8. See also, Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," In *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1973), 107-154; "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," In *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

previously fulfilled by tradition before its rupture. According to Agamben, the priority given to the aesthetic dimension of the work of art is a result of the new sensibility carved by western men in the modern context following the break with tradition. For him, the formal and stylistic qualities of the work of art have become central as man was thrown into the linearity of historical time. Buildings tend to be seen as objects perceived mainly from a visual point of view. They are intended to generate pleasure for the observer. Once the break with tradition sets in, the space of aesthetics is both what allows for transmission to take place while, at the same time, it points to the very impossibility for that transmission to actually take place. And thus, after the beginning of the Nineteenth century, the work of art, and of architecture, is bound to speak about that very problem of the transmissibility of culture. This becomes evident in the notion of "*choc*" proposed by Baudelaire.

However, in that same context, the emphasis on beauty and the aesthetic value of the object has led, in many instances, to *Kitsch*, placing beauty as the ultimate (only) goal of art without acknowledging questions of meaning and historical distance (Scott's buildings, most Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the works of some architects in the Arts and Craft movement, etc.).⁵⁸ The artist or architect who

⁵⁸ According to the Pre-Raphaelites, the Academic tradition in painting was filled with mistakes, the origin of which could be traced back to Raphael who represented for them the last great painter. Consequently, they proposed to go backwards and to revisit more "primitive" themes dear to early Renaissance painters. As reactionary as it may appear, there seems to be something else behind that position. Pre-Raphaelitism could be two-fold and carrying a certain dose of irony. The idea to go backwards into time—to obliterate a period of three hundred years and to use the name

wishes to avoid *Kitsch* and allow his work to make some connections with the past while proposing a future has to account for the problem of transmissibility inherent to the modern context. Only then can the work break the gap between the thing to transmit and the act of transmission, partially returning to a more mytho-poetic system that opens up a space for participation. In that sense, while one remains caught within the historical status proper to modernity, one can nonetheless construct, through the experience of a work of art that deals with the problem of transmissibility, the necessary space to grasp, albeit partially, the range of one's existence in the present and the meaning of one's actions.

Within the realm of literature, Carroll's writing, I believe, is conducive to such processes of recognition. Carroll constantly gives priority to the transmission of possible meanings (and, at the same time, to what impairs that transmission) allowing his work to venture into dark, uncontrolled, scary places. And it is my

of the artist situated at the hinge of what they saw as two antagonistic periods, preceded by the prefix "pre"—implies a certain critical commentary on the concept inherited from the Enlightenment that time follows the linearity of History. Millais' *Ophelia* was one of the first three founding paintings of Pre-Raphaelitism. In an extremely realistic manner, the painting shows a woman, floating in shallow water, who appears to be dead. The observer can almost see, behind the painting, a real woman (Millais's wife?) entering the water and posing for the painter (or staying there just long enough to be photographed). The painting suggests a process of *mise-en-scène*; it evokes the idea of a mock-up, a make-believe. One does not really know, or wish to know, if or how the setting took place in reality, but can perceive an intrinsic temporal conflict; Millais' painting is saying: "Look, I am a nineteenth-century woman painted in the state of re-enacting a theme from the past." However, the emphasis on Beauty as Truth also typical of Pre-Raphaelitism does not prevent the painting to undeniably lean towards *Kitsch*. See Ruskin, "The Pre-Raphaelites," in *The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on art by John Ruskin* (London: Phaidon Press, 1959), 63-66.

contention that his position concerning the belfry points to that same problem. Outside of time, outside of gravity, blinded by the weight of the past, the limiting concern of "style," and his desire for novelty, the modern architect of Carroll's stories does not manage to sacrifice what he holds to be a vision of true beauty for the love of transmissibility. Thus, the space of participation is foreclosed. As he violently shapes the concrete to comply with the abstract into a mute, meaningless box, what he may have intended to transmit remains entirely incommunicable.

chapter two

alterations and the problem of being

Le temps est rigide et pourtant le temps coule. Dans le flux du temps, dans la descente continue dans le passé, se constitue un temps qui ne coule pas, absolument fixe, identique, objectif. Tel est le problème.⁵⁹

Edmund Husserl, *Leçons pour une phénoménologie de la conscience intime du temps*

Romantic writers and artists of the Victorian era often favoured, in their work, a return to themes inherited from past moments of the Western tradition. Though Carroll's work is not generally identified with that movement, it nonetheless bears some connections to it: *The Vision of The Three T's* is a parodied version of Isaak Walton's *The Compleate Angler* published in 1653, *The Hunting of the Snark* is written out as an epic poem and emulates the work of the great Romantic poet Tennyson, *Sylvie and Bruno* is a novel organised around the world of "fairies." *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*⁶⁰ is no exception to the rule. Close examination

⁵⁹ Edmund Husserl. *Leçons pour une phénoménologie de la conscience intime du temps* (Paris: presses Universitaires de France, 1996) 64.

⁶⁰ The book was first published in November of 1865, but the genesis of the story took place a few years earlier. Carroll came up with the initial nucleus of the tale in July of 1862, in the context of an afternoon excursion on the Isis River in Oxford, where he and a friend took the three Liddell daughters, Alice, Lorina and Edith, on a boat ride. Carroll was apparently inventing the story as he conveyed it to the girls; he first told the story orally. Alice then demanded that he wrote it down for her, which he did, and a few years later, in November of 1864, he presented her with an illustrated manuscript version entitled *Alice's Adventures Underground*. The interest generated by this first version amongst Dean Liddell's circle led Carroll to approach an editor and seek publication. For the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the pseudonym of "Lewis Carroll," chosen with help of the editor, was used for the first time. See "Notice sur Les

of the narrative structure of the text reveals that Carroll is once again revisiting, and parodying, a literary genre inherited from the Western literary tradition, though in this case, there is no direct reference to a specific work or author. The tale of young heroin Alice roughly follows the model of the "allegorical dream," a literary *topos* dear to writers of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.⁶¹ Evidently, Carroll's re-appropriation of the genre, which involves a high level of parody, led to something new, not only in terms of children literature, but from a larger literary perspective as well.⁶² As Jean-Jacques Lecercle has shown, Carroll's specific way of placing issues of logic and language at the core of the story produces, within the work, a critical dimension. This inherent critique, apart from being a playful commentary on the genre itself, is also directed at the way language is commonly used and serves to question a number of assumptions regarding meaning that govern one's daily interactions.⁶³

In the story, the heroine is transported into a dream world called Wonderland. The tale is divided into two parts. In the first half, Alice progressively discovers

aventures d'alice au pays des merveilles," in Lewis Carroll, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 1644-1651.

⁶¹ A well-known example of Renaissance allegorical dreams is Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*.

⁶² In the context of the Nineteenth century, caricatures and parody abound. Such modes of representation were praised for their way of expressing a profound verity about something by pushing the traits of a person, an idea or a work to such an extent that it would provoke laughter. In that sense, the caricature is not simply a critique.

⁶³ See Jean Jacques Lecercle, "Une case en avant, deux cases en arrière," in *Lewis Carroll*, *Cahier de L'Herne* (Paris: Éditions de L'Herne, 1987), 45-52, esp. 49-50.

her surroundings and strives to get through a small door to what she sees as “the loveliest garden that ever was.” Making it through that door will turn out to be quite a challenge, as Alice will need to create the adequate conditions—having the key in hand and being the right size—in order to be able to pass through. This difficulty will allow Carroll to stage a series of humorous or absurd situations, slowly introducing the characters and progressively constructing the enigmatic thread of the story. In allegorical dreams, the migration of the hero through a narrow threshold, which generally occurs at the midpoint of the narrative, is usually interpreted as a sort of rebirth—it is a major step in the initiation of the hero.

In the case of *Alice's Adventures*, once Alice reaches the other side—entering the realm of live playing cards and the court of the beheading Queen of Hearts—the purpose of her quest becomes rather ambiguous. Caught in a senseless game of power and social conventions, Alice will meet mythical creatures and attempt to decipher their revelations, but the allegorical dimension of their sayings is rendered somehow twice removed by how Carroll turns language on itself. As the tale unfolds, Carroll playfully breaks the rules of the genre in several ways. The concluding chapters of Alice's journey, revolving around the backwards trial about stolen tarts, are rather unconventional. Alice's presence, her own growing body, is held as evidence against her while she finally manages to escape, growing back to her normal human size and waking up just in time before things get completely out of hand. Unlike more conventional instances, in the case of *Alice* the reader only finds out at the very end that the whole tale

takes place in a dream. Moreover, there is no obvious moral conclusion to the story. Alice does not return to real life morally or spiritually transformed. Alice's dream does not involve vision, premonitions or the revelations of oracles. In that sense, her dream remains, in the end, closer to dreams as they are normally experienced (outside the realm of psychoanalysis): a rather senseless collection of fragments that entertain extremely thin connections, if no connections at all, to the awoken life of the dreamer. Carroll's extensive recourse to parody seems, a first, to restrain the allegorical dimension of the dream, turning it back on itself, provoking a crucial reflection on the genre before opening up again onto larger questions.

In his Fifth century commentary on Cicero, Macrobius states that the allegorical dream is amongst "the fables that can properly be used by philosophers," and that "the way it communicates to the reader is in a figurative style which relies on the help of interpretation."⁶⁴ For Renaissance readers, and this is valid, to some extent, for readers of Carroll's time as well, the use of the enigma is not, in itself, original. It fits into an exegetic tradition, a tradition in which most readers are accustomed to distinguish, within a text, several levels of meaning. Even beyond the narrative frame of the "dream," the enigma represents, in such works as, for example, Rabelais's *Gargantua*, the principal sign of the allegorical

⁶⁴ Macrobe, *Commentaire du songe de Scipion*, trans. M. Nissard (Paris: Dubochet, 1850), III, 12-14. Quoted from Gilles Polizzi, "L'esthétique de l'énigme : le spectacle et le sens dans 'Le Songe de Poliphile,'" *Rivista di Letterature moderne e comparate*, vol. XLI, July, Septembre (1988): 209-233. My translation.

dimension of the narration.⁶⁵ The allegorical quality of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures* has, over the years, led to the production of an impressive scholarship in which numerous interpretative attempts coexist. The polysemic nature of the work indeed seems to validate antagonistic interpretations. Reading the book, one can, at times, have the feeling of participating (or being played with) in a game, the rules of which escape understanding. The succession of Alice's encounters creates, within the space of fiction, paths around which the reading of the tale is organised, but these paths seem to matter more, in themselves, that the eventual meaning they could lead to. In analogy to Alice's journey, the reader gets lost within the thickness of the tale and wonders. The plurality of often antagonistic meanings that form in his mind is more important than any exhaustive interpretation of the allegorical dimension of the tale. The preservation of opposite *sense* (meaning and direction) is what generates humorous situations and pushes the mind to think, through laughter.

In *Alice's Adventures* the enigmatic quality of the story is introduced very early on. It is generated, for the most part, by two sets of interconnected elements: (1) Alice will read or hear things that don't quite make sense to her, or to the reader – obscure linguistic fragments that nonetheless resonate with the cultural baggage of the reader in that they refer to proverbs, nursery rhymes, well-known literary works, etc. These fragments form an intertextual thread that the reader attempts to follow. (2) Alice encounters a series of figures/characters that

⁶⁵ This passage is based on Gilles Polizzi's analysis of the enigma in the Renaissance context. See Gilles Polizzi, "L'esthétique de l'énigme," 210.

also resonate with the cultural background of the reader. Such figures often come straight from nursery rhymes or well-known literary works, as is the case, for example, of Humpty Dumpty in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*... They can be derived from famous sayings or play on words ("mad as a March Hare"), or else, they can be things brought to life (the Mock-Turtle would be, if it existed, the animal used to cook mock-turtle soup). These figures tend to reappear, often transformed or disguised as the story unfolds, and represent a second enigmatic layer. The allegory of time found in Carroll's text is of particular importance.

The first character that Alice encounters, the White Rabbit, will quickly be associated, in the reader's mind, with the concept of time. The White Rabbit carries a pocket watch, which he seems to be continuously glancing at, complaining: "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" The Rabbit is in a hurry, but no matter how fast he runs, he still will be late. This gives the reader a first hint: in Wonderland, something is wrong with time. Drawn by curiosity, Alice follows this unusual rabbit (she had never before seen a rabbit that spoke and carried a pocket watch in its waistcoat) into the rabbit-hole and her adventures begin. For Alice, the passage of the White Rabbit somehow represents a break in the normal continuum of things, a singularity that disrupts the slow passage of time in a boring afternoon. As Alice is falling, *very* slowly, into the rabbit-hole, time seems to be suspended, as can often be the case in dreams—an instant in waking life is stretched to interminable length in the experience of the dreamer.

But in Wonderland, time has also become a character in the story, a figure.⁶⁶ The flow of the narrative is thus rendered much more complex and so are the spaces that Alice will experience.

Alice's encounter with the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, which takes place at the hinge of the story, just before she manages to enter the garden, introduces Time as a character. The Cheshire Cat tells Alice that the Hatter and the Hare live in opposite directions. She chooses to go and visit the March Hare but strangely, both the Hatter and the Hare share the same house, with their friend the sleeping Dormouse. Alice sits at their table and they have a conversation in which she is asked to solve a riddle. She soon finds out that neither the Hatter nor the Hare have the slightest idea what the answer to that riddle is.

Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."

"If you knew Time as well as I do," said the Hatter, "you wouldn't talk about wasting *it*. It's *him*."⁶⁷

Since the March Hare quarrelled with Time, Time won't do a thing he asks (with the clock). Since then, it is always six o'clock—tea-time⁶⁸—and the trio is

⁶⁶ The personification of moral traits or virtues began in the Renaissance as a way of revisiting the traditions of ancient Greek and Roman myths. The ancient gods were associated with moral attributes in an attempt to integrate their symbolism into the religious reality of the Christian West. Carroll's personification of Time ties into the Romantic revalorisation of such figures, while, at the same time, it alludes to how ancient cosmogonies were formed through the personification of the basic elements of the world (earth, sky, sea, sun, etc.).

⁶⁷ "Why is a raven like a writing desk?" The famous riddle remains unanswered to this day. Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," in Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, intro. and notes Martin Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 97.

constantly moving round the table. Alice then ventures to ask, "But [what happens] when you come to the beginning again?" "Suppose we change the subject," the March Hare interrupted, yawning.⁶⁹ It seems that the March Hare and his friends have become, in the absence of Time, prisoners of a cyclical ritual, of a meaningless and infinite cyclicity. In the absence of Time, there can be no beginning nor end, their action or utterances no longer have weight. They are caught in an interminable instant, a *very* long "now." The two different figures that serve to construct the allegory refer to two opposite conceptions of time. On the one hand, the White Rabbit has to do with instantaneity, with time conceived as a series of flashing instants. On the other, there is Time himself who is the sign of continuity, of the historical linearity understood as a continuum. In Wonderland, the latter has left. The temporal dimension can therefore be read as a broken collection of instantaneities.

From the first underground space in which Alice finds herself, to the realm of flat surfaces and the Queen's garden, Alice (and the reader) will go through a lengthy exposition of the problem of sense in relation to one's experience of things. Things have a dual nature that manifests itself through time. For Plato, two categories of things can be established: (1) on the one hand, there is the realm of *things that are limited and measured*, the realm of fixed *qualities*: smallness, whiteness, fastness, etc. Whether these are temporary or permanent, they always

⁶⁸ In the Victorian era, tea was often served at six o'clock. See Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," 99.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 99-100.

presuppose arrested moments, pauses, which establish the *present* as such and designate subjects. This is the realm of *designations*, of attributes. A thing *is* small at a given moment. (2) On the other hand, there is the realm of the *state of things*, of formations and occurrences, the realm of a constant becoming that never stops. The second category escapes the present, it takes place in a temporality that is always pulling in both directions at once, in which *past and future*, more and less coincide. A thing *becomes* bigger or smaller, and as it is becoming, it cannot cease to become, otherwise it would *be*.⁷⁰ This is the realm of *verbal formations*: growing bigger or smaller, whitening, running faster, etc. This second category of things is what Deleuze refers to as pure-becoming, as the realm of a perpetual *becoming-mad* that underlies the more stable nature of things.⁷¹ In Carroll's work, emphasis is put on this second category. In his stories, events take place in conditions that allow for this aspect of things to be exacerbated.

In addition to distinguishing two categories of things, Plato differentiates two *species* of movement: *alteration* and *translation*. In a dialogue on the Pre-Socratic notions of immutability versus perpetual motion, Socrates warns Theodorus of the inherent problem of considering movement solely from the point of view of

⁷⁰ I owe much of this passage to Gilles Deleuze's analysis of Carroll's work and especially his latest novel, *Sylvie and Bruno*. See Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris : Minuit, 1969), intro. This dual aspect of how things are approached by the senses and framed through the intellect is also present in Plato's *Timaeus*. See Plato, "Timaeus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961) 1176-77.

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 9-10.

one of its incarnations.⁷² In *Alice's Adventures*, Carroll stresses the relationship of space to time, pushing time to a limit that problematizes movement, so that movement becomes something very close to pure alteration. Eating, drinking, growing, etc. are transformations in space that Alice undergoes and that, in turn, condition the making of space as she experiences it.

It is as if Carroll, engaging in a process of play not dissimilar to that of scientific hypothesis, constructed his story as an experiment on the relationship between time, space and movement, once time is pushed to a limit, that is, when time becomes practically negligible ($t=0$)⁷³. What happens to space, to the space of lived experience, to the space of language and human affairs, and to the possibility for movement, communication, and understanding if the idea of time as a continuum vanishes, leaving behind the traces of a passage and the potentiality of a return? Understanding time from the point of view of its smallest imaginable part only—as instantaneity—will necessarily have consequences on one's experience and understanding of space. Caught in the thickness of an interminable cyclical instant, Alice is wandering and wondering. For Alice, there is no real important place to go—"so long as I get *somewhere*," she confesses to the Cheshire Cat—except when the White Rabbit passes: Alice then seems to be forced to follow him. The passage of the White Rabbit opens up a new eventuality—Alice can "jump" to the following flashing instant.

⁷² See Plato, "Theaetetus," 887.

⁷³ Time is pushed towards its smallest divisible part, a part that becomes smaller than the smallest imaginable part—a non-dimensional point in the geometric sense.

However, and Carroll knows this very well, time, space, or movement cannot be idealised or else, simply seen in relation to one's experience. These concepts are cultural constructs and therefore cannot be dissociated from their linguistic formation at the level of discourse. As this level occupies a mediating position between ideas and experiences, it is somehow outside of time (and space) and in that sense, continues to operate even when time dissolves. It is precisely due to this relative autonomy of language that Alice can still "function" in Wonderland, conferring to the work an immanent logic.

For the sake of the present study, I will approach Carroll's *Alice* with these notions at the forefront: the idea of time as a *series of isolated instants* and the idea of movement as *alteration*. Reading the story through this conceptual framework will allow me to focus on a specific aspect of space as it is experienced from the inside, placing emphasis on the notion of interiority. I will examine how space develops around an individual and how, in turn, such "isolated" conditions threaten one's sense of self, weakening the identity of the person "caught" (willingly or not) in such a space.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ I am aware that the argumentation I propose does not account for such passages in which Alice is running, swimming, and so on, passages in which, for the reader, Alice is indeed moving around. The idea is to put the emphasis on the successive transformations of her surroundings, somehow reversing the sense of movement, and looking at it as if the space in which Alice finds herself is transforming itself from her point of view.

Emphasis will thus be put on the qualitative changes of a single space: a room the boundaries of which have become mobile, constantly and simultaneously moving inwards and outwards; a space for which the inside and outside coincide. This is the space of Alice's own perception, a perception that is affected greatly by her successive changes in scale, but also by the conversations that take place with the characters she meets. Each dialogue has an effect on Alice's understanding of where and who she is, leading to the successive transformations of her surroundings. Following that reasoning, I propose to read the story from a spatial perspective as interconnected events taking place in a series of "rooms," each room being, in the end, a different expression of the same space.

"Down the Rabbit-Hole": A Hall with Many Closed Doors

After having fallen for a while, Alice softly hits the ground, follows the White Rabbit into a long passage and finds herself, alone, in a long, low hall with a series of doors on each side, lit up by a row of lamps hanging from the ceiling. Alice wanders around and realises that all doors are locked. She returns to the centre of the room and finds a tiny little golden key on a three-legged glass table. The key does not fit into any of the locks, either the key is too small or the locks too big, except for this one small door she discovers behind a curtain. Behind that door, Alice gets a glimpse at the Queen's garden, but she cannot make it through—the door is only fifteen inches high. Back at the centre again, she discovers a bottle (which, she is convinced, was not there a moment before)

labelled with the following inscription: "Drink me." Alice drinks from it and "begins to shut up like a telescope," getting smaller and smaller until she reaches the height of ten inches, just about the right size. Unfortunately, she has left the little key on the table and she is now too small, or else, the table is too big. In Wonderland, what Alice eats or drinks alters her size and, for the first half of the story, she will have to get used to such drastic transformations, trying to learn to control her own size in relation to her surroundings, trying, also, not to vanish completely.

[Alice] looked down at her hands, and was surprised to see she had put on one of the Rabbit's little white kid gloves while she was talking. "How *can* I have done that?" she thought. "I must be growing small again." She got up and went to the table to measure herself by it, and found that, as nearly as she could guess, she was now about two feet high, and was going on shrinking rapidly: she soon found out that the cause of this was the fan she was holding, and she dropped it hastily, just in time to save herself from shrinking away altogether.

"That was a narrow escape!" said Alice, a good deal frightened at the sudden change, but very glad to find herself still in existence.⁷⁵

Alice's sense of self is weakened by the sudden nature of the changes she undergoes. She comes to conceive of herself as constantly changing and, consequently, the notion of her own existence is weakened.

"(...) I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, that's the great puzzle!"⁷⁶

⁷⁵Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," 39.

⁷⁶Ibid, 37.

Throughout the story, Carroll puts the protagonist in situations that shatter her sense of being, creating a sort of exacerbated version, a caricature, of one's state of consciousness as it is generally experienced. From the point of view of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, "there is a perpetual uneasiness in the state of being conscious."⁷⁷ As the world is experienced from within, there is always a limit to one's perception. At the moment one perceives a thing, one has the feeling that this thing was already there, outside of one's perception. Consequently, there is a sense that many things escape perception, that there is, outside one's field of vision, an infinite horizon of things to grasp surrounding the small number of things that can actually be perceived. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty emphasises: "something in space escapes our attempt to look at it from 'above.' (...) I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me."⁷⁸ This limited aspect of perception seems to be exacerbated in a space conceived apart from any temporal dimension. When time is removed from space—as in basement spaces lit by artificial light (like, for example, the basement of a suburban bungalow, the parking lot of a shopping centre, or, the long hall in Wonderland)—the impression of space as "other" is amplified.⁷⁹ In that sense, there is in one's perception of one's surroundings an alienation of

⁷⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press 1964), 28.

⁷⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 175-178.

⁷⁹ On this notion of "same, different and other," see Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

oneself, a loss—one has to give away something in order to engage with this “otherness” that the world represents. Estranged from her surroundings, worried about her identity, Alice will have to rely on language, to enter the level of discourse, in order to be able to restore a sense of order and position herself in Wonderland.

The Pool of Tears, A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale: building a social space

This episode, which runs through two chapters in the story, begins with Alice talking to herself, realising she has difficulties speaking English properly, but mostly, difficulties remembering things as she used to before entering Wonderland. She attempts to recite, by heart, a series of topics she has learned at school, beginning with multiplication tables. As she gets it all wrong, she decides to try another topic since, she confesses, “the Multiplication Tables doesn’t signify.” Everything she tries to remember comes out wrong: in geography, she confuses England with France and France with Italy. When she tries to recite a famous poem, all the words are jumbled up. Already worried about her identity, this is even more disquieting—Alice is no longer sure who she is, “I must be Mabel after all.”⁸⁰

All along the story, Alice will be talking to herself, in a form that will later be referred to as the *interior monologue*.⁸¹ She will also enter in a kind of dialogue

⁸⁰ Mabel was a little girl of lower social class who did not have access to a good education.

⁸¹ Ann McGarrity Buki effectively shows that connections can be traced from Carroll’s *Alice* stories to James Joyce’s work, especially to his *Finnegan’s Wake*. See Ann McGarrity Buki,

with herself, pretending to be two people. "But it's no use now," thought poor Alice, "to pretend to be two people! Why, there's hardly enough of me left to make one respectable person!"⁸² As her sense of self is weakened, language progressively becomes more problematic, or vice-versa. All alone in the hall, Alice begins to long for the presence of other beings. Talking to herself is not enough to restore the order of language, to put words back into their proper place.

Still in the long hall, Alice accidentally slips into a sort of salty lake created by the tears she shed when she was much bigger. There, she is not alone anymore—the pool of tears is crowded with a multitude of animals and creatures. Alice is swimming about, trying to keep herself afloat, when she hears something. "At first she thought it must be a walrus or hippopotamus, but then she remembered how small she was now, and she soon made out that it was only a mouse, that had slipped in like herself."⁸³

Alice addresses the Mouse, but it does not reply. Thinking this could be due to a language problem, she tries again, this time in French. Her knowledge of that foreign language being somewhat limited, she tries: "Où est ma chatte?"⁸⁴ with

"Lewis Carroll in *Finnegans Wake*." In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration* (New York: C.M. Potter, 1982).

⁸² Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," 33.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 41

⁸⁴ "Where is my cat?"

the effect of startling the Mouse a great deal. Alice apologises, remembering the notorious animosity between cats and mice and the Mouse, trembling down to the end of its tail, speaking English after all, offers to enlighten Alice on the genealogy of its family's hatred for cats. They swim back towards the bank, joined in by a strange crowd of animals and curious creatures.

Since everyone is "dripping wet, cross and uncomfortable," the first question becomes how to get dry again. They all have a consultation about the matter. Alice quickly finds herself "talking familiarly with them, as if she had known them all her life." This is the beginning of her social interactions in Wonderland, and so far, it's going well. A certain hierarchy already seems to exist among the group. She notices that the Mouse is sort of in charge and, when arguing with the Lory, the latter claims that being older in age, it must know better. The Mouse begins to tell a very dry historical tale, hoping this would solve the matter. After a while, as everyone is still wet as ever, the Dodo proposes to adopt a more energetic remedy: a Caucus-race.

"What is a Caucus-race?" said Alice (...) "Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it." (...) First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, ("the exact shape doesn't matter," it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no "One, two, three, and away!" but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half-an-hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out, "The race is over!"⁸⁵

From the long hall in which she felt estranged and scared, through the pool of tears where she encountered other live beings, and, finally, to the social realm of

⁸⁵ Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," 48.

the Caucus-race, Alice has moved within a space that was, at first, completely “foreign” to a more cultural and historical ground—a linguistic realm in which she can interact. In a similar way, one’s perception of built space has to do with the common activities that it shelters on a somewhat day-to-day basis. When he writes about the unspeakable aspect of space, (*l’espace indiscible*) Le Corbusier uses the following statement: “to occupy space is the first gesture of all living beings, of men, beasts, plants and clouds. This is the most fundamental display of equilibrium and duration. The first proof of being is to dwell in space.”⁸⁶ From a neutral pre-existing space, one has to construct and tame architecture in order to render it more familiar, inhabitable. This transformation requires something very similar to the Caucus-race: according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, this could be called a *ritournelle*⁸⁷. They write:

Now we are at home. But home does not pre-exist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile centre, to organise a limited space ... Sonorous and vocal components are very important: a wall of sound, or at least a wall with some sonic bricks in it.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ “Prendre possession de l’espace est le geste premier des vivants, des hommes et des bêtes, des plantes et des nuages, manifestation fondamentale d’équilibre et de durée. La preuve première d’existence, c’est d’occuper l’espace.” Le Corbusier, *Le modulor*, (Boulogne sur Seine: Éditions de l’architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1950), 31

⁸⁷ The *ritournelle* is a round dance or nursery rhyme, in the translation of *Mille Plateaux* the word “refrain” is used. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987) chapter 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 311-13.

Once space is occupied, it needs to be *uttered* in order to become a place—this place, my place. After the race, Alice and her new acquaintances all “[sit] down again in a ring, and [beg] the Mouse to tell them something more.”

“You promised to tell me your history, you know,” said Alice, “and why it is you hate—C and D,” she added in a whisper, half afraid it would be offended again.”

“Mine is a long and sad tale!” said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

“It is a long tail, certainly,” said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse’s tail; “but why do you call it sad?” And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking.⁸⁹

As is often the case in Carroll’s writing, the meanings of two words of similar sonority will be confused. In Alice’s mind, the words she hears literally take the shape of a long tail. Carroll pushes the play a little further and on the page, the words are also typed in the shape of a tail, going down following a series of sinuous curves, getting smaller and smaller. The nature of this passage differs, for the reader, from the rest of the text—it becomes a sort of inscription containing a message. The intertext speaks about a Fury taking a Mouse to trial in lack of better things to do and prosecuting it without jury or judge, trying the whole cause itself and condemning the Mouse to death. The passage serves to warn the reader of what awaits Alice at the end of the story. It is constructed following a typical process in allegorical writing. However, in the context of Alice’s story, the dramatic quality of the statement is parodied and what comes out from the passage is rather the absurdity inherent to the process of a trial than any real death threat. On the other hand, the passage effectively stresses the relationship between words and space.

⁸⁹ Carroll, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,” 50.

Someone else's room: "The Rabbit sends in a little bill"

This relationship will be explored further in the successive series of "rooms" or places in which Alice finds herself. At the beginning of the fourth chapter, the White Rabbit is trotting back again, this time more slowly, looking anxiously around. Alice realises that it must be looking for the pair of kid gloves and the fan that it dropped earlier, the same fan that made her shrink so fast as she held it a few instants before. She begins to look for the lost items as well, but they are nowhere to be seen – "everything [seems] to have changed since her swim in the pool, and the great hall, with the glass table and the little door, [have] vanished completely."⁹⁰ This time, the Rabbit notices Alice and calls to her in a rather angry tone, "Why, Mary Ann, what *are* you doing out here? Run home this moment, and fetch me a pair of gloves and a fan! Quick now!"⁹¹ Alice does as it says, knowing that the Rabbit took her for its housemaid, but too scared to try and explain the misunderstanding. She instantaneously comes up the house of the White Rabbit, goes in, and finds herself in a tidy room with a table in the window. On the table is another bottle, similar to the one labelled "Drink me" that she had found in the hall. "I know something interesting is sure to happen," she said to herself, "whenever I eat or drink anything: so I'll just see what this

⁹⁰ Ibid, 55.

⁹¹ Ibid, 55-56.

bottle does. I do hope it'll make me grow large again, for really I'm quite tired of being such a tiny little thing."⁹² Alice drinks and quickly finds out.

She went on growing and growing, and very soon had to kneel down on the floor: in another minute there was not even room for this, and she tried the effect of lying down with one elbow against the door, and the other arm curled round her head. Still she went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot came up the chimney, and said to herself, "Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What will become of me?"⁹³

Alice has become a prisoner of space. As her body is contrived into a rather uncomfortable position, her whole disposition, her mood, will be greatly affected by the restrictive aspect of her surroundings: she is getting quite angry. The Rabbit tries to get into the house but fails—Alice's elbow is blocking the door. A few animals will gather outside the house and try to solve the matter.

Alice cannot see outside and her whole understanding of what is happening is based on sounds, on the voices she hears. Though the physical boundaries of the house somehow concord with her own body, space nonetheless extends to the outside: she can hear the animals talk about what they are going to do next; she can project her loud voice and discourage them. And so, when she hears them sending Bill the lizard down the chimney, she knows exactly when to kick up with her foot with the effect of projecting little Bill flying back out of the chimney like a skyrocket. The animals, in a state of panic, threaten to burn the house down but instead, they start throwing little pebbles through the window. Alice hears

⁹² Ibid, 57.

⁹³ Ibid, 57-58.

more shattered glass and can feel the small pebbles hitting her face and falling on the floor. She notices that, as they fall, the pebbles turn into little cakes. She eats one and quickly begins to grow small again, alas. Alice runs out of the house as fast as she can and finds refuge in a thick wood.

As Alice can determine her own size in relation to things (objects or creatures). She realises she has grown even smaller when a huge puppy dog barks at her, wanting to play. In order to grow back to a more convenient size, Alice needs to find something comestible. She notices a large mushroom. As she gets on tiptoes to look on top of it, she comes face to face with a large blue caterpillar, sitting, "with its arms folded, quietly smoking a long hookah, and taking not the smallest notice of her or of anything else."⁹⁴

A natural room, the "clearing": "Advice from a Caterpillar"

The Caterpillar turns out to be a creature of very few words. After a long moment of silence, it takes the hookah out of its mouth and asks, in a slow and sleepy voice: "Who are You?" Alice does not find this to be a very promising conversation but nonetheless, she replies. Here is their dialogue:

"I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar, sternly.

"Explain yourself!"

"I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."

"I don't see," said the Caterpillar.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 66.

"I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly," Alice replied very politely, "for I can't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."

"It isn't," said the Caterpillar. (...)

"Well, perhaps *your* feelings may be different," said Alice: "all I know is, it [feels] very queer to *me*."

"You!" said the Caterpillar contemptuously. "Who are *you*?"⁹⁵

They have gone in a full circle but the tone of the conversation has changed. Alice, a little irritated at the Caterpillar's *very* short replies, says: "I think you ought to tell me who *you* are, first." The Caterpillar answers with a question: "Why?" Finding it difficult to engage, Alice turns away. The Caterpillar calls her back, promising he has something important to say. "So you think you're changed, do you?" "I'm afraid I am, Sir (...) I can't remember things as I used – and I don't keep the same size for ten minutes." To verify, the Caterpillar asks Alice to recite another well-known poem but, once again, it does not come out quite right. "Some of the words have got altered," Alice says timidly. From this point, the conversation alternates between long silences and short dialogues. The Caterpillar is smoking again and his words are interspersed between long pauses and deep breaths. He finally gives Alice an advice:

"One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter."

"One side of *what*? The other side of *what*?" thought Alice to herself.

"Of the mushroom," said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight.⁹⁶

Alice, looking thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute, tries to make out which are the two sides of it. As it is perfectly round, she finds this a very

⁹⁵ Ibid, 68.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 73.

difficult question. Alice's dialogue with the Caterpillar is what comes closest, in the whole story, to a philosophical dialogue. The rhythm of the Caterpillar's breath evokes a very ancient understanding of how wind, the symbol of spirit, participates in the transmission of knowledge. And though Carroll's dialogue can indeed be read as a caricature of the revelations of some old, wise man, it nonetheless contains an implicit reflection on existence and on one's sense of being. After this episode, Alice has somehow re-entered the realm of communication and has taken more control, if not on her sense of being, which remains problematic, at least on her own size.

Stretching her hands as far as she can, she breaks two pieces of the mushroom on opposite sides. "And now which is which?" Alice nibbles a little bit on the right-hand side and her chin suddenly hits her feet. A little bit on the left-hand side makes her neck grow so long that her head sticks out from the top of the trees. For the pigeon, Alice is nothing but a serpent menacing its nest. But having in hand the solution to controlling her size, she will not bother too much trying to convince the pigeon of her humanity and will quickly resume to her initial plan to reach the garden.

"Pig and Pepper": the Cat's Monologue on Madness

In this episode, Alice meets the Duchess and her Cheshire Cat for the first time. This encounter will give the reader a sign of what awaits Alice once she reaches the garden and has to get acquainted to the court members surrounding the Queen of Hearts. Trying to find her way back into the long hall, Alice comes

upon another house. After debating for a while what she ought to do and the best way to get in, she decides, as the door suddenly opens and things are flying out, to venture inside and have a look. The spectacle she witnesses is rather odd. In the Duchess' kitchen, everything is flying around following a rather chaotic movement, undergoing quick metamorphosis. Pepper is indeed flying around with the result that the Duchess and her baby are sneezing, which puts them both in a particularly bad mood. The Duchess' baby is crying. Words too are flying around, quite violently. As Alice asks the Duchess why it is that her cat is grinning, she answers: "It's a Cheshire Cat (...), and that's why. Pig!" The duchess says the last word with such sudden violence that Alice jumps. At first, she thinks the word is addressed to her, but soon realises it is to the baby. The cook then starts throwing everything within her reach at the Duchess and her baby: saucepans, plates, and dishes are flying upon them while the Duchess begins to sing a rather cruel lullaby, violently shaking the baby at the end of each line. Alice, concerned about the baby's survival, grabs the little boy in her arms and runs out.

What follows is a rather peculiar passage in which the baby, slowly going from sobs to grunts, literally transforms into a pig. In the story, it is somehow the most drastic alteration of a character. It takes place in the most furious of spaces, a space in which words acquire the crudest nonsense. The baby is becoming less of a baby and more of a pig, but, at the same time, less of a pig than it will become

in an instant.⁹⁷ This shows very well how events take shape in Carroll's work, how they always take place in a relative instantaneity that is not exactly the present, because it is simultaneously pulling in both directions, manifesting the deep nonsense that lies way before one can start to put things in perspective, before any kind of common sense or good sense can be forged. It is often the case, in Carroll's work, that characters undergo transformations, literally becoming other or quickly changing their dispositions—many characters have *very* unstable moods. From the chaotic space of the Duchess' kitchen, Alice will move quickly into the realm of appearances. Her dialogue with the Cheshire Cat is similar, in a way, to the one she had with the Caterpillar: words have the power to act as a stabilising device. The Cat has a way of vanishing "quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail and ending with the grin, which remained sometimes after the rest of it had gone" (the rest being useless for conversation).

From Alice's encounter with the Cheshire Cat, the reader learns that Wonderland may be the space where dreamers and mad men eventually meet. Alice asks the Cat:

"What sort of people live about here?"
 "In *that* direction," the Cat said, waving its right paw round,
 "lives a Hatter: and in *that* direction," waving the other paw,
 "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both
 mad."

⁹⁷ This coincidence of "being" with "becoming" echoes the argument put forth by Plato in his *Parmenides*. See Plato, "Parmenides," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), 956. See also Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 9-12.

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."⁹⁸

There seems to be an extremely tight and yet hardly definable link between the experience of time—and space—and one's state of mind, between temporality and one's encounter with the real. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks the following question: "how can you determine whether at this moment we are sleeping, and all our thoughts are a dream; or whether we are awake, and talking to one another in the waking state?" Having concluded that the two states are extraordinarily alike, Socrates adds: "And the same holds true of disorders or madness (...)."⁹⁹ In the Platonic text, the "dreamer" and the "mad man" are spoken about in similar terms, as if they shared this problematic perception of the real. Throughout one's life, one goes from waking moments to dreamy ones, sometimes entering ever so brief periods of insanity. An entry from Carroll's diary resonates with the platonic dialogue. Carroll asks:

When we are dreaming and, as often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane? *May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which is the sleeping life?* We often dream without the least suspicion of unreality.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid, 88-89.

⁹⁹ Plato, "Theaetetus," 863.

¹⁰⁰ Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," 90. Italics are mine.

In Wonderland, Alice has entered the sort of becoming-mad that always lies beneath one's perception, she is passing through the land of the dreamer/mad-man, and she is undergoing transformation. The alterations take place in a space that is first and foremost linguistic, in which words are also transforming themselves, in which sounds and senses are confused. This somehow occurs outside of historical time, in the non-dimensionality of an instant that is caught between past and future and pulling in both directions at once. The oscillation—the rhythm—opens up a mobile frontier that can be thick and spacious, but, at the same time, extremely thin and fragile—a folded surface in the Leibnizean sense.¹⁰¹ On each sides of this frontier is the same space, there is no longer an inside or an outside. When Alice opens a little door on the side of a tree, she is back into the great hall.

The Garden: "The Queen's Croquet Ground"

The midpoint of the story turns out to be a new beginning. Alice manages to combine size and key and passes through the narrow threshold reaching into the garden. She enters the realm of flat surfaces, of live playing cards. Alice is invited

¹⁰¹ For Leibniz, every monad *represents* the whole world within itself, as if it was folded/stretched indefinitely upon itself. Depending on the relationship of a monad to others and on its capacity for perception, a section of the surface unfolds, becomes distinct, revealing a clearer section of the world, while the rest remains confused in the obscurity of something akin to a fold. Embodied experience is made by the connections traced between numerous small perceptions. Some perceptions make an imprint, which modifies one's knowledge of the thing perceived, while others are simply forgotten (they remain in the body but are never explicitly reflected upon). See Gotfried W. Leibniz, "Monadology," in *Philosophical Writings* (London: Everyman's Library, 1973), 179-194, esp. 188.

to participate in the Queen's game of croquet, but the rules of the game have been changed, everyone is playing at the same time, with hedgehogs in lieu of balls and live flamingos as mallets. The playing cards have to bend over in the shape of arches and keep moving around. Everything is governed by a nonsensical decorum in which things are turned upside down. The Queen cannot stop shouting "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" every minute, but no one ever gets executed. In the four last chapters of the book, Alice plays croquet, discusses a little with the Cheshire Cat again, meets the Mock-Turtle and the Gryphon, and is finally invited to the trial of the Knave of Hearts who is accused of having stolen the Queen's tarts. In these chapters, Carroll's writing involves a lot of puns and plays on the meaning of words. I will focus briefly on Alice's conversation with the Mock-Turtle and the Gryphon, a passage that further demonstrates the intricate relationship of words to space.

"The Mock-Turtle's story": the harsh life of mythical creatures.

At the beginning of this chapter, Alice is approached by the Duchess who is now in a much better mood – all cuddly and nice. The Duchess has a very strange way of speaking, everything she says ends with an assertion "...and the moral to that is – ...". Comparing two completely different sentences, she affirms that they mean much and the same thing and assigns to that statement the following moral: "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves."¹⁰² Speaking about mustard-mining (Alice thinks mustard is a mineral) she

¹⁰² This passage is quite interesting in that once again, Carroll insists, meaning is the central problem.

concludes: "And the moral to that is—"The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours." When Alice exclaims that she has a right to think, the Duchess begins, "Just as much right, as pigs have to fly: and the m—," but she stops midway. The reader won't find out what that last moral could be, the enigma surrounding the word "pig" is preserved. The conversation's circularity will be broken off by the intrusion of the Queen and by Alice being introduced to the Mock-Turtle who, it is said, has an important story to tell.

Alice is first introduced to the Gryphon¹⁰³ and together, they go up to meet the Turtle. The Mock Turtle and the Gryphon are very interesting creatures that further emphasise how one's notion of being is complexified in Wonderland. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a Griffin appears in the elaborate procession in the terrestrial paradise, pulling a gorgeous two-wheeled chariot bearing Beatrice. Of multiple symbolic meanings that may be attached to this Griffin, its Christ-like role—"one person in two natures"—is the most obvious. Dante dramatizes this incarnational symbolism when he has the Griffin's image, reflected in Beatrice's eyes, miraculously alternate between a complete eagle and a complete lion, while

¹⁰³ The Gryphon, or Griffin, is a hybrid creature with the features of an eagle (wings and head) and a lion (body). Griffins were depicted in ancient Egyptian art (the myth is likely eastern in origin), and, as actual creatures, were thought to live at the northern limits of the world. They are included among unclean birds in the Bible (Lev. 11:13; Deut. 14:12), and Isidore of Seville, an early medieval encyclopedist, says Griffins are "fierce enemies of horses" and, he adds, they "tear men to pieces." See

<http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/purgatory/10terrestrialparadise.html#griffin>.

the creature itself remains fixed in its hybrid form.¹⁰⁴ In Dante's work, another passage based on the same composite process as been read as a parody of incarnation. In the second transformation of the thieves in the *Inferno*, a human and a six-legged serpent are fused into a grotesque new form that is "neither two nor one" [*né due né uno*].

With the Mock Turtle, Carroll pushes the parody even further, combining a rather "serious" mythical creature like the Gryphon, with "the thing Mock Turtle soup is made from," which has the body and flaps of a turtle combined with the head, feet and tail of a calf. Both the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon are rather sad (the Mock Turtle cannot stop sobbing and tears are constantly coming out of its eyes) and in this episode, Alice will be instructed on the harsh life of mythical creatures. Alice finds out about the Mock Turtle's education, going to school at the bottom of the ocean, having to learn hard topics like "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision." It seems that in Carroll's story, the two mythical creatures don't really have a purpose and therefore find it difficult to justify their existence. They insist on speaking about their education, but their knowledge no longer seems to make sense to Alice, or to the reader. Projected outside of history, the mythical creatures of Carroll's story have retired and speak about their past with great nostalgia.

¹⁰⁴ See Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*, canto 31.118-26.

<http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/new/index.html>

The following passage, devoted to the "The Lobster Quadrille," takes a slightly different tone and in it, the reader gets an idea of the potentially powerful nature of mythical creatures. As the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon explain to Alice what a Lobster quadrille might look like, the text becomes intertwined with the moves of the dance that the two creatures mimic as they are describing it. They are jumping around Alice like mad things and, in the reader's mind, a series of images can take shape, fantastic images in which the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon fill up, with their dancing body, the whole space surrounding Alice. The sound of words follows the rhythm of their moves. The pace eventually slows down as the Mock Turtle begins to sing a very slow and sad song, but the creatures continue to dance, this time more solemnly. Alice is then asked to tell her own story and, as she tries to recite another famous poem (she has informed the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon about her memory problems), the lines of the poem get mixed up with the words of the Turtle's song. Rhythm, sounds, words, and moves all blend up in this passage, generating within the fiction a very strange, vibrating space.

The Trial Room: "Who Stole the Tarts?"

The cycle of the dance is once again broken when Alice is informed that they all have to attend trial. In the courtroom, the Judge (who, Alice notices, is the King) has taken place and the jurors are sitting in their box, already taking notes even though the trial has not yet begun. The Knave of Hearts is accused of having stolen the Queen's tarts but the tarts are sitting on a big table in the middle of the room, uneaten. Alice is beginning to grow larger again, though this time, her

transformation takes place *à l'air libre*, without having been induced by food or drink (unless the very smell of the pies has triggered something). She debates whether she should leave the court, but on second thought decides to stay, "as long as there [is] room for her."

In the episode of the trial, all the characters of the story are present in the same room for the first time: the Hatter, the Hare, the Cook are all called in as witnesses. The setting of the courtroom (a symbol of order and justice), as well as the gathering of all characters, may lead the reader to think that the enigma is about to be solved, connecting the various threads that run throughout the book. However, as one might guess, this will not be the case. The whole trial, based on the rather limiting exegesis of a text—an unopened letter found in the Knave's papers—only adds more layers of antagonistic meanings. The letter is opened during the trial, read out loud by the White Rabbit and interpreted, rather violently, by the King, who assigns fixed meanings to passages that are obscure and, most importantly, not related to the matter at hand. The limits of interpretation become apparent in this passage—it generates, in the mind of the reader, a reflection on Carroll's text as a whole, emphasising how exhaustive exegesis becomes problematic when a priori judgements from the part of the reader are not accounted for.

Alice is called as a witness but, since she knows *nothing* about the matter, the King invokes an obscure rule concerning size to have her leave the courtroom. "*All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.*" Even though Alice has grown

quite big, she refuses to leave. When the Queen insists that they should have “sentence first – verdict afterwards,” Alice protests. The Queen shouts: “Off with her head!” Alice, who has grown back to her full size, ravages through the courtroom with the effect of sending all cards, animals and creatures flying up in the air like a *real* pack of cards that then fall all over Alice’s body. It is at this very moment that she wakes up and finds herself sitting by her sister. The shift from dream to reality happens through a similitude in perception: a dead leaf has fallen onto Alice face while she was sleeping.

In the first *Alice* book, space is folded upon itself, everything happens for Alice and around her. It is a space of extreme interiority that is primarily expressed through Alice’s perception. Because this space is somehow cut away from an *elsewhere*, from the idea of space as something that *goes on*, Alice’s sense of self is altered. By putting emphasis on the aspect of space that is malleable, and by staging a series of absurd – paradoxical – situations that result from this premise, Carroll obliquely addresses the problem of considering space only from the point of view of the individual, without acknowledging another important aspect of space, the fact that it is also experienced and understood as an extended geometric entity that can be measured, that possesses an order and a stability. As I will show in the following chapter, the second *Alice* book deals with the other incarnation of the concept of space.

chapter three

translations and volte-face

L'immensité est, pourrait-on dire, une catégorie philosophique de la rêverie. Sans doute, la rêverie se nourrit de spectacles variés, mais par une sorte d'inclination native, elle contemple la grandeur. Et la contemplation de la grandeur détermine une attitude si spéciale, un état d'être si particulier que la rêverie met le rêveur en dehors du monde prochain, devant un monde qui porte le signe d'un infini.¹⁰⁵
Gaston Bachelard, "L'immensité intime."

It is the nature of the copy that it has no other task but to resemble the original. The measure of its success is that one recognises the original in the copy. This means that it is its nature to lose its own independent existence and to serve entirely the communication of what is copied. Thus the ideal copy would be the mirror image, for its being can effectively disappear; it exists only for someone who looks into the mirror, and is nothing beyond its mere appearance. But in fact it is not a picture or a reflection at all, for it has no separate existence. (...) For in the mirror image what exists appears in the image so that we have the thing itself in the mirror image.¹⁰⁶

—Hans Goerg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*

Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There came out six years after the first Alice story, in 1871. This second fairy-tale will be read here as another experiment, another hypothesis on the problems of language, and knowledge, in relation to one's experience of things. In this story, Carroll further explores the relationship of movement to time, but in this case, the concept of time takes on a different shape, a shape that will have another series of consequences on the notion of space as it is experienced by Alice and understood by the reader. I propose to read the second *Alice* book, sieving it through another conceptual

¹⁰⁵ Gaston Bachelard. "L'immensité intime." In *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 168.

¹⁰⁶ Hans Goerg Gadamer. *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1975), 122.

framework: in this case, time will be understood as an *indivisible continuum* and movement from the point of view of its other incarnation—as *translation*.

In the preface, Carroll provides the reader with clues concerning the structure of the fiction: it is constructed around the series of moves in a game of chess. In order to help the reader to follow the plot, a diagram of the chessboard appears, coupled with a list of the moves as they unfold in the story. Thus, the development of the narrative is stated at the beginning: Alice starts out as a pawn and progressively moves towards the edge of the board, eventually becomes Queen and wins. Alice's understanding of her own progression through the Looking-Glass world is also clarified early on in the story. Already in the second chapter, she is informed by the Red Queen of what awaits her:

“While you're refreshing yourself,” said the Queen, “I'll just take the measurement.” And she took a ribbon out of her pocket, marked in inches, and began measuring the ground, and sticking in little pegs in here and there.

“At the end of two yards,” she said, putting in a peg to mark the distance, “I shall give you your directions (...), [at] the end of *three* yards I shall repeat them—for fear of you forgetting them. At the end of *four*, I shall say good-bye. At the end of *five*, I shall go!”¹⁰⁷

Alice and the Red Queen quickly start moving along the pegs. When they reach the second one, the Queen gives Alice her directions:

“A pawn goes two squares in its first move, you know. So you'll go *very* quickly through the third square—by railway, I should think—and you'll find yourself in the Fourth Square in no time. Well, *that* square belongs to Tweedledum and Tweedledee—the Fifth is mostly water—the Sixth belongs to Humpty Dumpty

¹⁰⁷ Lewis Carroll, “Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There,” in Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, intro. and notes Martin Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 211.

(...) –the Seventh Square is all forest—however, one of the Knights will show you the way—and in the Eight Square we shall be Queens together (...)."¹⁰⁸

Alice knows where to go and how to proceed. Apparently, the other characters are also aware of her venture, as if the story was the re-enacting of a game that already took place—they know who she is and will be guiding her through.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, it becomes *very* difficult to remain in the same location. Alice constantly follows lateral movements—translations—in a space that exists first and foremost in a representational mode, as a flat surface, both in terms of spatiality and temporality. Somehow mimicking the Baroque ideal,¹⁰⁹ space is projected behind the mirror and literally becomes an unlimited extension, a *grid* in the Cartesian sense. But it is a grid that has to be looked at through the mirror, a projected grid. Carroll provides the reader with a description of the Looking-Glass *landscape*.

For some minutes Alice stood without speaking, looking out in all directions over the country—and a most curious country it was. There were a number of *tiny* little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground between was divided up into squares by a number of little green hedges, that reached from brook to brook.

"I declare it's marked out just like a large chess-board!" Alice said at last.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 212.

¹⁰⁹ Mansard and Le Brun's Gallerie des glaces in the castle of Versailles can be seen as the ultimate embodiment of that ideal. On one side of the long room, windows open onto the geometrised garden, while on the other, a series of mirror project this perfect geometrical space towards infinity.

¹¹⁰ Carroll, "Through the Looking-Glass," 207.

Alice's intuition concerning the nature of the land will be confirmed by the Red Queen, who informs her that if she wishes to participate in the game, she can be a White Pawn.

Moves from one square to the next are quite simple: Alice jumps over the little brooks that divide the ground. Within each square, her movement is slowed down but never really comes to a state of rest. Remaining in the same place in the realm of the Looking-Glass is rather difficult, if not entirely unthinkable. "Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running you can to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."¹¹¹ This gives the reader a hint of how movement is problematized once Alice passes through the mirror and finds herself in a space in which things are reversed, a space in which time is also qualitatively different.

In the regulated realm of the game, in which each of Alice's translations are already known from the beginning, events will take place within the series of squares that Alice will momentarily "occupy." As was the case in *Alice's Adventures*, Alice's conversations with the characters she meets will give qualities to the rather neutral context of the chess-board-land. This time, Alice's identity will not be threatened in the same way—she knows who she is. However, as she follows the prescribed series of moves of the game, she faces the danger of disorientation—she has to be careful to remember her name. When, with the Red Queen, she reaches the third yard, her Majesty is supposed

¹¹¹ Ibid, 210.

to repeat Alice's directions but, in her reiteration, the words get altered. The two protagonists have been moving and the words have changed: "Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing—turn out your toes as you walk—and remember who you are!"¹¹²

The Queen last advice "remember who you are" will allow Carroll to stage a reflection on the process of denomination inherent to language, a reflection that permeates the whole story. The discussion concerning the importance of the name of things begins with Alice's conversation with the large Gnat about Looking-Glass insects. Alice tells the Gnat that she prefers insects when they can talk. Where *she* comes from, none of them do, and so, she is rather afraid of them. However, she offers to tell the Gnat the names of some of the insects she knows.

"Of course they answer to their names?" the Gnat remarked carelessly.

"I never knew them do it"

"What's the use of their having names," the Gnat said, "if they won't answer to them?"

"No use to them," said Alice; "but it's useful to the people that name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?"

"I can't say," the Gnat replied. "Further on, in the wood down there, they've got no names—"(…)¹¹³

After having enumerated a few Looking-Glass species, the Gnat asks Alice: "I suppose you don't want to lose your name?" "No indeed" Alice answers, anxiously. The insects that the Gnat describes do not exist where Alice comes from (the Bread-and-Butter fly, the Snap-Dragon fly, etc.). But within the story, in

¹¹² Ibid, 212.

¹¹³ Ibid, 222.

the realm of fiction—through the extensive description provided for each one by the Gnat—such insects acquire a *reality*. Language—the faculty of naming—is not limited to the objects of experience. However, once a thing is given a name, it is stabilized. The name of the thing cannot be changed if communication is to remain operant. Names are perhaps arbitrary but they nonetheless form a regulated system that, within a linguistic community, allows for communication to take place.

Following this conversation, Alice will indeed reach the wood “where things have no names.” Wondering what will happen to her own name as she goes in, she enters further into the cool and shady forest. There, Alice can no longer remember what a “wood” is called. The names of things have already begun to fade in her mind. This phenomenon will only pertain while Alice remains in the thickness of the woods. There, neither the Fawn nor Alice can remember what and who they are. As they approach a clearing, the names resurface: “I’m a Fawn!” “And, dear me! you’re a human child!” the Fawn exclaims in a voice of delight. In the thickness of the woods, the most “natural” or least “human” of places, language loses its grip on experience. Things acquire an “otherness” that is greater than usual and the movement back to oneself, which allows for denomination to take place, has momentarily ceased to operate.

Similarly to *Alice’s Adventures*, this fairy-tale possesses a strong allegorical dimension and, this time, the unreality of Alice’s voyage is even more clearly stated. In the opening chapter, Alice is sitting in a large armchair, “half talking to

herself and half asleep." In is in this state of daydreaming that she wonders about how things may be on the other side of the Looking-Glass. In the fourth chapter, Tweedledum and Tweedledee insist that Alice is only a character in the Red King's dream. The passage goes like this:

"He's dreaming now," said Tweedledee: "and what do you think he's dreaming about?"

Alice said "Nobody can guess that."

"Why, about *you!*" Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly "And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?"

"Where I am now, of course," said Alice.

"Not you!" Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. "You'd be nowhere. Why you're only a sort of thing in his dream!"

"If the King was to wake," added Tweedledum, "you'd go out—bang!—just like a candle!"¹¹⁴

Alice protests: "I *am* real!" She begins to cry. "You won't make yourself a bit realer by crying (...) I hope you don't suppose those are *real* tears?" In her own dreamy adventures, Alice has become a thing in someone else's dream. In chapter eight, the unreality of her encounter with the Lion and the Unicorn leads Alice to wonder if she could have been dreaming about them. "So I wasn't dreaming after all," she says to herself, "unless—unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's *my* dream and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream."¹¹⁵ Alice is dreaming about the king who is dreaming about her dreaming, and so on. Through a kind of mirroring effect, the dream image is projected and bounces back, indefinitely.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 238.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 293.

Dream is a dominant theme in Carrollian writing. It is given a high degree of reality; sometimes weakening the real, overcoming it. Dream state gets mixed up with daydreams and waking moments; a contamination, an interplay occurs and they become intertwined. As the experience of dreaming is common to all, each reader can somehow identify to the internal logic of what goes on in the narrative, even though a lot of the situations are, indeed, grotesque or absurd. This identification process is similar, to some extent, to the more ancient notion of catharsis as it was experienced in Greek theatre: because the observer can identify with the protagonists of the action, he or she becomes a participant.

In opposition to Wonderland, Alice is no longer exploring the depth of the underground or the perceptive depth of a single interior space, rather, in *Through the Looking-Glass* events take place at the surface of things, as if in this space of vision in extension, in this space of the mirror image, events were reflections of light. The mirror image entertains, with the space that "produces" it, a complex relationship. The mirror allows one to recognise one's own absence: the space behind the mirror is a fictitious space into which my own shadow is projected, providing me with knowledge of my own visibility. But the mirror is also a real object. Through a kind of back and forth movement, "the mirror image reminds me of where I am not, as it makes me think of where I could be,"¹¹⁶ of the space that is surrounding me, while, simultaneously, "it sends my own gaze back to where I stand now, into this space that I have to occupy for the

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," in *Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1575. My translation.

mirror image to be created. The mirror thus renders space real—interconnected to everything around it—and unreal, having to pass through this virtual point behind it in order to appear for me.”¹¹⁷ The space of the mirror also emphasises the limitedness of one’s perception: in it, I cannot see the back of my head or the things that my own body occludes, I can only “believe” they exist. The space of representation and the space of the real touch in the infra-thin surface of the mirror, a surface that turns into mist as Alice passes through. Once on the other side, she can see the back of things, she has somehow acquired the gift of ubiquity. In the realm of the mirror image, back and front collapse, past and future are one and the same. Beginning in the Looking-Glass house and progressively moving further, into the garden, the valley, the forest, etc., Alice explores the visual perspective of the mirror image.¹¹⁸ This premise allows Carroll to stage a series of reversals, but as these reversals somehow take place in a space that is primarily visual, geometrised, the two sides of any given thing have a tendency to collide, as if they occupied the two sides of a non-dimensional geometric surface.

Left and right, front and back

¹¹⁷ Ibid. According to Michel Foucault, the mirror image is both an utopia, a space that is “other” in that it exists nowhere, and an heterotopia, a space that is outside of space but that is nonetheless real, entertaining with the space of experience a special relationship that qualifies it.

¹¹⁸ Even though Alice’s movements in the Looking-Glass world are primarily translations, the size of objects and things does not seem to be completely fixed. However, changes in size seem to relate to the notion of scale: the characters she meets appear bigger or smaller through a kind of visual relationship—depending on their position, in relation to Alice, within the perspective depth of space understood as a grid.

The first reversal has to do with orientation. In the mirror image, an object held in the right hand appears to be in the left hand of the “person” in the mirror. The notions of left and right are inverted in the mirror image, and so are the notions of front and back. When moving towards the mirror, the mirror image is also moving towards it but, for the “person” in the image, movement takes place in the opposite direction. However, and this is somewhat paradoxical, supposing that a person was to be on the other side of the mirror for *real*, what is perceived as the left hand in the mirror image would actually be, in relation to that person’s body, the right hand. The same holds true of movements that take place perpendicularly to the surface of the mirror. In order to move away from the Looking-Glass house, Alice somehow has to aim for the opposite direction, that is, she has to walk towards the house, towards the Looking-Glass itself. This is evidenced by the following passage. Whenever Alice tries to move away from the house in order to explore the garden, she inevitable ends up facing the front door.

So resolutely turning her back upon the house, she set out once more down the path, determined to keep straight on till she got to the hill. For a few minutes all went well, and she was just saying “I really *shall* do it this time—” when the path gave a sudden twist and shook itself (...) and the next moment she found herself actually walking in at the door.

“Oh, it’s too bad!” she cried. “I never saw such a house for getting in the way! Never!”¹¹⁹

Alice will need the help of the Live Flowers to figure out how to orient herself.

When she decides to go and meet the Red Queen, the Rose promptly intervenes:

“You can’t possibly do that.” She has to walk in the opposite direction to be able

¹¹⁹ Carroll, “Through the Looking-Glass,” 200.

to face the Queen. The Red Queen will provide her with additional clues concerning movement in the Looking-Glass world.

Running faster than fast

A second reversal has to do with speed. In order to remain in the same place, under a big tree, Alice and the Queen have to run *very* fast. The two start running hand in hand and the Queen keeps crying out “Faster! Faster!” to the point that their toes are barely touching the ground as if they were floating in the air. Alice notices a very strange phenomenon: everything around then remains exactly the same. Though they are apparently moving quickly, it is as if the things surrounding them were following. Alice is puzzled: “I wonder if all the things move along with us?” When their running finally comes to an end, they find themselves under the very same tree. In another passage, Alice is discussing with the White Knight several strategies that can be used in battles with other Knights. The Knight is recounting how it took several hours for him to get out of a tricky situation and says: “I was as fast—as lightning, you know.” Alice objects: “But that’s a different kind of fastness.” “It was all kinds of fastness with me, I can assure you,”¹²⁰ is the Knight’s reply. Not only are slowness and fastness interchangeable, they are somehow equivalent.

A poor kind of memory

In the “Wool and Water” episode, Alice’s encounter with the White Queen is instructive on another reversal. The Queen’s outfit is so untidy that Alice offers

¹²⁰ Ibid, 303.

her help in fixing it. The Queen confesses to being in need of a lady's-maid and offers the job to Alice: "Twopence a week, and jam every other day." Alice doesn't want to be hired and, she adds, she doesn't care for jam, at least not today. The conversation that follows is rather interesting. I choose to reproduce the passage entirely:

"You couldn't have it if you *did* want it," the Queen said.
 "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never jam *to-day*."
 "It must come sometimes to 'jam to-day,'" Alice objected.
 "No, it can't," said the Queen. "It's jam every other day: to-day isn't any other day, you know."
 "I don't understand you," said Alice. "It's dreadfully confusing!"
 "That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first—"
 "Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment.
 "I never heard of such a thing!"
 "—but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."
 "I'm sure mine only works one way," Alice remarked. "I can't remember things before they happen."
 "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards."¹²¹

Alice then enquires about the sort of things that the Queen is able to remember before they actually happen. The Queen's example constitutes an intertext that relates to the other *Alice* book—to the preventive detention of the Hatter in the episode of the trial of the Knave. It sends the reader back—outside the present story—and serves as a reminder of Alice's resistance to having a trial before a crime is perpetrated, of having a sentence pronounced before a verdict of culpability is reached. In *Through the Looking-Glass* however, this *problematique* becomes generative of potentials. Past and future are given a status of equivalence and so memory and imagination coincide. Things thus take place in

¹²¹ Ibid, 248.

a temporality that is inherently abstract, in a time that is not exactly the present, a time that can rather be seen as a linear, undividable continuum in which everything is simultaneously past *and* future.

Alice is a fabulous monster

In such conditions, the notion of history perniciously conditions everything. For the Unicorn, Alice is a fabulous monster. For Alice, it's the other way around. The two come to an agreement: "Well, now that we *have* seen each other, (...) if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?" the Unicorn asks. "Yes, if you like" is Alice's answer. The hierarchy that existed between Alice and the Gryphon (and, to some extent, the Mock Turtle) in Wonderland, the latter possessing some sort of experience and knowledge, ceases to operate. If time is only a linear extension devoid of the unexpected quality of the present, what lies on the two sides of this missing instant is rendered equivalent, it's always already there in its entirety. In such conditions, Alice can hand out the plum cake first and cut it afterwards.

This reversal/equivalence of time brings another series of consequences. The relationship of cause and effect is shattered. The White Queen starts screaming and shaking her hand, "My finger's bleeding! Oh, oh, oh, oh!" When Alice asks the Queen what the matter is, wanting to know if the Queen pricked her finger, the latter answers: "I haven't pricked it yet (...) but I soon shall – oh, oh, oh!" And she does soon after, while Alice is trying to warn her that she's holding the pin of her shawl incorrectly. "That accounts for the bleeding, you see," says the

Queen with a smile. "Now you understand the way things happen here."¹²²

Another reversal has to do with affects: when Alice tells the red Queen that she is thirsty, the Queen offers her a very dry cookie to quench her thirst. Very loud sounds are also expected to be perceived as whispers, or vice-versa.

Unless you have eyes at the back of your head

This brings me to discuss the question of perception in relation to things as they are presented in *Through the Looking-Glass*. In the last sequence of the "Wool and Water" episode, Carroll stages two transformations—two movements—that stand out from the general condition of movement as translation that takes place in *Through the Looking-Glass*. The Queen is trying to convince Alice that it is indeed possible to believe impossible things. They both cross a little brook and move into another square. The Queen fixes her shawl again and this time, she doesn't hurt herself. Proud of her achievement she exclaims, using her favorite word: "Oh, much better!" and goes on "Much be-etter! Be-etter! Be-e-e-etter!" From the Queen wearing a woollen shawl that she was a moment before, the Queen has transformed into a sheep, and now wool is all around her. Once again, as in the case of the baby/pig transformation in *Alice's Adventures*, the transformation takes place through a shifting in sonorities—from *better* to *be-e-e-ter* to *be-e-e-eh*.¹²³ The sheep is knitting and the two characters are now standing

¹²² Ibid, 250.

¹²³ Such passages in which sounds accompany a drastic transformation of character seem to allude to a phenomenon that often occurs as one is dreaming. Loud sounds surrounding the actual body of the dreamer (like, for example, the ring of an alarm clock or telephone, the cries of a baby, the

in a kind of watery shop. This is the first alteration that takes place in *Through the Looking-Glass*. The second alteration happens at the end of the same sequence, as the egg that Alice just bought starts to grow bigger and quickly turns into Humpty Dumpty. Between these two alterations, Alice experiences perception in its most hallucinatory form. The sheep asks:

“What is it you want to buy?” (...)

“I don’t *quite* know yet,” Alice said very gently. “I should like to look all round me first, if I might.”

“You may look in front of you, and on both sides, if you,” said the Sheep; “but you can’t look *all* round you—unless you’ve got eyes at the back of your head.”¹²⁴

Alice begins to look around, with the only pair of eyes she’s got, and a strange phenomenon occurs.

The shop seemed to be full of all manner of curious things—but the oddest part of it was that, whenever she looked hard at any shelf, to make out exactly what it had on it, that particular shelf was always quite empty, though the others round it were crowded as full as they could hold.¹²⁵

Things are flowing about, escaping her gaze, and as she tries to capture one of these things by following it up all the way to the ceiling, it simply passes through the ceiling, very quietly, “as if it were quite used to it.” Alice soon finds herself sitting in a little boat with the Sheep. She notices beds of scented rushes on the shore but whenever she tries to lean over to pick some, the “prettiest are always further.” Alice is experiencing things through a kind of delay, as if

voice of a person, etc.) quickly get integrated into the narrative of the dream as signs of a completely different reality. This allows the dreamer to go on dreaming, thus resisting to the calls of the waking world in order to stay asleep.

¹²⁴ Carroll, “Through the Looking-Glass,” 252.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 253.

Carroll was magnifying the slight lapse of time that is at the heart of one's perception of things—the gap that exists between language and perception is somehow brought to life. The rather unconscious process of recognition that is usually called perception is brought to the level of consciousness and somehow ceases to operate.

Following the “Wool and Water” episode and the dual metamorphosis that I just described, words will acquire the utmost importance. Alice passes through a threshold again, though this time, the passage is made of an empty slot, a blank. This empty slot—the shelf in the shop of the sheep on which things can never be grasped—is at the heart of the relationship between words and things, it conditions the way one experiences things and, at the same time, the way one attempts to stabilise this experience through language. As I have discussed earlier, events and meanings are interconnected—they are incorporeal instances that are given shape, though language. Once expressed or uttered they take the shape of propositions. Links are thus traced between events throughout the relationship, inherent in the very structure of language, between propositions. Throughout Carroll's work, the difference between, on the one hand, *events* and, on the other, *things, states of things* and *beings*, is also magnified. An event subsists within the proposition that expresses it, while it also takes place through things and at their surface, that is, outside of being. In that sense, the event can be said to happen in the future by the proposition, but it is nonetheless the task of the proposition to somehow state the event as past—as expressed.

The particularity of Carroll's work is that, within the text, the two levels are presented simultaneously: an event is stated in the proposition while it is actualised in the text—it takes place within the narrative flow of the story. The event is thus presented *twice*. This doubling can also lead to the construction of a new proposition in which meaning itself becomes the object at hand. If, on the one hand, what is said does not exist outside of the proposition that expresses it, its meaning being precisely what is expressed, on the other hand, once it is said, what is expressed does not vanish completely but acquires an objectivity of its own. Meaning is inextricable from language that way. It is always presupposed as one begins to talk—one does not (usually) say the meaning of what one is saying as one is saying it. But it is always possible to take meaning as the object of a new proposition, to talk about it, once again without telling the meaning of what one is saying but making it the object of another proposition, and so on.¹²⁶ Such a process can thus lead to the most paradoxical of series, to an unlimited regression. Placing meaning at the centre of a new proposition, this could be what Carroll meant when he had the Duchess tell Alice she should “take care of sense.” In such conditions, new propositions can proliferate, one leading to the next, and in them “the sounds will take care of themselves.”¹²⁷ The last part of the episode entitled “It's my own invention” is devoted to another long song. Before the White Knight begins to sing, Alice inquires about the song's title.

¹²⁶ See Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, series two to six.

¹²⁷ According to Deleuze, it is through such proliferation processes that Carroll adequately stresses the relationship between the logic at work in the production of meaning and questions of ethics, of morale or morality. See Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 44.

"The name of the song is called '*Haddocks' Eyes*.'"

"Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, trying to feel interested.

"No you don't understand," the Knight said, looking a little vexed. "That's what the name is *called*. The name really is '*The Aged Aged Man*.'"

"Then I ought to have said 'That's what the *song* is called?'" Alice corrected herself.

"No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The *song* is called '*Ways And Means*': but that's only what it's *called*, you know!"

"Well, what *is* the song, then?" said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered.

"I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really is '*A-sitting On A Gate*' (...)." ¹²⁸

In the story, the Knight is sitting on a gate, singing the song to Alice. The song is about an aged man who, when asked about his ways and means in life, says he hunts for haddocks' eyes. Such propositions indeed proliferate throughout Carroll's work and are interconnected—they form series. If, for example, a first series contains the proliferations of signifiers, another one is put in relation to it and contains the signified. As the series are in constant formation, they can never be equal, there is always an excess on one side and a missing element on the other. Two series can also be connected by a double-sided word—a word with more than one meaning—that circulates between the two and enables a passage from one to the other through a mirroring effect. In the shop of the sheep, the empty shelf and the object that Alice tries to follow belongs to two interconnected series. This episode, caught in the mist of two unusual transformations, gives the reader a clue of how the text is constructed. Carroll's

¹²⁸ Ibid, 306.

writing generates a poetic image—a physical manifestation—of how meaning is complexified within the text itself.

On a very narrow wall

The episode that follows is centred around Alice's conversation with Humpty Dumpty. Alice is moving towards the large egg who has gotten more and more human and, she is certain, the egg is no longer just an egg, it is Humpty Dumpty—"as if his name was written all over his face." As one may recall, Alice enters into a convoluted dialogue with Humpty Dumpty who is sitting on a very high, narrow wall. This is a rather precarious situation for him, primarily due to his shape. Humpty Dumpty is always about to fall, and, in some sense, has always already fallen since the words of the nursery rhyme hover all around him. Alice is whispering the nursery rhyme to herself:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall:
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's Horses and all the
King's men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty in his
place again.¹²⁹

The discussion on words begins with Humpty asking about Alice's name. Alice's answer does not satisfy the egg-shaped character, who asks about the meaning of her name. Unlike Humpty Dumpty's, Alice's name does not refer to her shape, it does not provide her interlocutor with an idea of who she is—there isn't usually a meaning attached to proper names. In the case of Humpty Dumpty, there isn't the same ambiguity. His name directly refers to what he is and how he appears.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 262.

This leads Humpty Dumpty to approach all words, common names or proper names, with the same literality and to claim a kind of mastery over words:

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what *I* choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is”, said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is”, said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.” (...) “They’ve a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they’re the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole of them! Impenetrability! That’s what *I* say!”¹³⁰

Alice then asks him what he means by impenetrability. Humpty diligently answers: “I mean by ‘impenetrability’ that we’ve had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you’d mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don’t mean to stop here all the rest of your life.”¹³¹ Alice, thinking that this is quite a lot to have one word mean, nonetheless decides to take advantage of Humpty Dumpty’s ability to *explain* by asking him to decipher the poem “Jabberwocky.” In the opening chapter of the book, Alice had found the poem, written backwards, in the memorandum book of the White King and she had read the text by looking at it in the mirror. After reading the poem, she had said, slightly puzzled: “It seems very pretty, (...) but it’s *rather* hard to understand!” (...) “Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don’t exactly know what they are! However, *somebody* killed *something*, that’s clear at any rate—”¹³² Alice’s first understanding of the poem isn’t complete. However, it speaks about

¹³⁰ Ibid, 269.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid, 97.

something important in how one relates to language in a somewhat embodied, corporeal manner.

Even though Lewis Carroll's work expresses almost everything through nonsense, that is to say even though, quite often in the texts, there is no apparent common-sense meaning, the spatial-rhythmic quality of his writing nonetheless conveys some sense to the reader. As Octavio Paz notes in *The Bow and the Lyre*, such way of writing takes shape in the readers mind through a rhythmic sequences of images¹³³. The reader is continuously recreating these images, following the rhythm of the poem (and this is also true of Carroll's prose) that not only invokes his imagination, but puts his whole body into a different posture—a dancing movement. According to Paz, this enables the space of the book to emerge into the world. We comprehend it, we are comprehended by it.¹³⁴ If the construction of the story is good, it calls for a real participation of the reader-speaker who builds, in a rhythmic and corporeal manner, a meaning.

¹³³ See Paz, *The Bow and the Lyre*.

¹³⁴ Merleau-Ponty uses this sentence from Pascal *Pensées*: "Je comprend le monde et le monde me comprend." In the English version I am referring to, the translator uses the word understanding: "I understand the world ... it understands me." The French meaning of the word is double: it can mean understanding, in an intellectualised way, but it can also mean 'to comprehend,' in a physical way, that is, 'to circumscribe.' I use this passage in relation to the space of the book, in order to show the link between the bodily postures involved in the rhythm that is created while reading of a story, and the rhythmic aspect of one's perception of spatio-temporal fragments. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 408.

If Carroll's nonsense is to be understood not as an absence of meaning but, rather, as a surplus of sense, that is a combination of opposite directions and meanings that coexist, the limit between these opposites—may it be a point, a plane, a body or a certain Humpty Dumpty sitting on a *very* narrow wall—is *in between* and therefore cannot be fixed; it moves, it transforms itself, or else it appears to be fixed, but only for a certain *time* (witness Humpty's tragic end). Humpty Dumpty's wall may be extremely narrow, it is nonetheless on its edge that meaning appears to be "in control," but the apparition remains temporary and Humpty Dumpty's oscillating manners while trying to keep his balance speak about the fragility of such apparition. Meaning is unstable and undeniably escapes as one enters into a dialogue and tries to express ideas—to communicate. It quickly falls back to its plural nature and opens onto interpretations.

Moreover, as Plato emphasises in his *Phaedrus*, meaning does not really exist outside of the act of communicating—one enters into a dialogue (at times with oneself) in order to reactivate the words of a written text and, in so doing, reawakens its potential meanings.¹³⁵ "Jabberwocky" is perhaps the most famous piece of nonsensical poetry and probably the farthest imaginable opposite to a conventional philosophical exposition, the two protagonists can nonetheless enter into a dialogue concerning its meaning. Here is the object of their discussion, the first verse of the poem:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogoves,

¹³⁵ See Plato, "Phaedrus," *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 521.

And the mome raths outgrabe.¹³⁶

As he explains the first line, Humpty Dumpty informs Alice of the existence of what he calls *portmanteau* words. "Well, 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' Lithe is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are tow meanings packed up into one word."¹³⁷ In his preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*, Carroll expands on this notion:

This also seems a fitting occasion to notice the other hard words in that poem. Humpty Dumpty's theory, of two meanings packed into one word like a portmanteau, seems to me to be the right explanation for all.

For instance, take the two words "fuming" and "furious." Make up your mind that you will *say* both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and *speak*. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards "fuming," you will say "fuming-furious"; if they turn, by even a hair's breath, towards "furious," you will say "furious-fuming" ; but if you have the rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say "frumious."¹³⁸

Encouraged by Humpty Dumpty's attempts at explaining words, Alice ventures to give a definition of the word *wabe*. "And 'the wabe' is the grass-plot round a sun-dial, I suppose?" she says "surprised of her own ingenuity." Humpty adds: "Of course it is. It's called 'wabe,' you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it—" To which Alice adds, "And a long way beyond each side." The definition of the word, the grass-plot surrounding a sun-dial, seems rather arbitrary. Any sentence with the combination of the word *way* followed by

¹³⁶ Carroll, "Through the Looking-Glass," 270.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 271.

¹³⁸ Lewis Carroll, "The Hunting of the Snark," *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), 678. My emphasis.

a word beginning with the syllable *be* would have been equally satisfying. However, the one suggested by Alice and confirmed by Humpty Dumpty ties into the immanent logic of the work—the definition reaffirms the quality of the space in which the story takes place as an unlimited extension.

Even though Alice's first encounter with the difficult poem is through its written form, Carroll provides her with an interlocutor and together they can engage in the process of re-activating its meanings. The dialogue form allows for the two sides of any given problem to be approached, simultaneously. This provokes, in the mind, a movement, an inclination. In Carroll's work, this inclination occurs through the bodily experience of some characters as well, especially to those who do not come in pairs¹³⁹ or whose pair has been broken—Humpty Dumpty and the White Knight are struggling to keep their balance.

In the episode entitled "It's my own invention" Alice and the White Knight have another dialogue on the problem of meaning. In this case, Carroll plays with a colloquial expression: in the story, the White Knight is not very skilled at riding his horse, he keeps falling off, riding head down, that is, his *horse-sense* (good sense) is rather poor. The Knight is constantly falling from his horse, in front of it, behind it and sideways. At one point he gets projected into the air and falls right onto his head. Whenever he falls, Alice just picks him up and puts him back on

¹³⁹ In the case of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the struggle for balance happens as the two symmetrical twins enter into a senseless fight, enacting the words of another nursery rhyme. The same holds true of the Lion and the Unicorn. The red King's messengers, Haiga and Hatta, also form a pair, one messenger's purpose is to fetch, the other's is to carry.

his horse. All this is happening as the two are discussing all sorts of things—the Knight’s inventions—that are supposed to come in handy and account for all possible situations. Of course, all the inventions are rather absurd, though they all derive from a logical reasoning. Alice is puzzled by the fact that the Knight seems to be able to speak quietly even when he is standing upside down on his head. Apparently, the Knight tells her, this is the best way for inventing things, all the ideas thus come down to his head. His invention for an easier way of getting over a gate goes as follows:

“You see, I said to myself ‘The only difficult part is with the feet: the head is high enough already.’ Now, first I put my head on the top of the gate—then the head’s high enough—then I stand on my head—then the feet are high enough—then I’m over, you see.”¹⁴⁰

As Alice acknowledges the logical soundness of his idea, she worries that it might actually be difficult to execute, to which the Knight replies: “I haven’t tried it yet, (...) so I can’t tell for certain—(...)” For the Knight, up or down, left or right do not seem to matter much, as if his body could occupy any position in extension. In a way that echoes a passage in *The Vision of the Three T’s*, the force of gravity does not seem to have grip in the three dimensional grid of the Looking-Glass (Cartesian) space.

In the last sequence of the story, Alice has reached the last square, the edge of the board and has become Queen. Alice, not used to wearing a big crown, is walking with some difficulty. But she comforts herself, saying: “and if I really am A Queen, (...) I shall be able to manage it quite well in time.” As she is

¹⁴⁰ Carroll, “Through the Looking-Glass,” 302.

saying this, she finds herself seated between the two other Queens. The three Queens are having a little discussion on Alice's knowledge, trying to assess her ability to govern. Alice opens the conversation: "Please, would you tell me—" but the Red Queen promptly interrupts her:

"Speak when you are spoken to!"

"But if everybody obeyed that rule", said Alice, who was always ready for a little argument, "and if you only spoke when you are spoken to, and the other person always waited for *you* to begin, you see nobody would ever say anything, so that—"

"Ridiculous!" cried the Queen. "Why don't you see child—" ¹⁴¹

The Queen broke off there, and suddenly changed the subject, asking Alice what she meant when she said "If I really am a Queen." To which Alice replies: "I only said 'if'!" The conversation suddenly takes over and Alice can hardly control the turn it's taking:

"She *says* she only said 'if' —"

"But she said a great deal more than that!" the White Queen moaned, (...) "Oh, ever so much more than that!"

"So you did, you know," the red Queen said to Alice. "Always speak the truth—think before you speak—and write it down afterwards."

"I'm sure I didn't mean—" Alice was beginning, but the Red Queen interrupted her impatiently.

"That's just what I complain of! You should have meant! What do you suppose is the use of a child without a meaning? Even a joke should have some meaning—and a child's more important than a joke, I hope. You couldn't deny that, even if you tried with both hands."

"I don't deny things with my *hands*," Alice objected.

"Nobody said you did," said the Red Queen. "I said you couldn't if you tried." ¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 318.

¹⁴² Ibid, 318-19.

Conversation has a way of leading the interlocutors who partake in it. It has a pace of its own. Despite the fact that language is generally understood to be an organised, regulated system, one's experience of language (or one's experience *in* language) does not take place in a fixed, immutable system.

In that sense, the non-linguistic (*le dehors du langage*) is somehow always already present in any given language, which remains in constant formation and transformation.¹⁴³ As Jean-Jacques Lecercle tells us,

nonsense is a literary genre that expresses a contradiction inherent in the way one relates to language. On the one hand, a language needs to be regulated and ordered, but the ordering process can only remain incomplete; the speaking subject needs to master his or her language, but such mastery can never be achieved. Nonsense dwells at the frontiers of language, where the grammatical and the ungrammatical meet, where the (always partial) order of language reaches the (never complete) disorder of its beyond.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ On this constant process of learning and forgetting involved in any language, and on what makes communication possible (importance of interpretation, distinction between immediate utterance and situated experience) see George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1975). On the idea of a constant interaction between formal language and the "childhood of language," see Giorgio Agamben, "Enfance et histoire: essai sur la destruction de l'expérience," in *Enfance et Histoire* (Paris: Payot, 1989) 17-82, esp. 64-82.

¹⁴⁴ "Le *nonsense* en tant que genre littéraire est l'expression de cette contradiction : il faut ordonner la langue, mais on peut jamais y parvenir ; il faut que le sujet locuteur soit maître de sa langue, mais il en peut en aucun cas l'être...Le *nonsense* campe aux frontières de la langue, là où le grammatical et l'agrammatical se rejoignent, là où l'ordre (toujours partiel) de la langue rejoint le désordre (jamais total) de son au-delà." See Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "Linguistic Intuitions: Lewis Carroll and 'Alice au pays des merveilles,'" *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle*, 1990, v. 68, no. 736, 58. My translation.

The relations between human beings, whether inclusive or exclusive, take place in a language-based world in which communication is desirable and sometimes possible. Moreover, language always operates according to rules that are more or less restrictive. In *After Babel*, George Steiner presents a series of principles associated with language communication, which include the following: (1) all forms of communication, even those that take place within the limits of language, are subject to a translation process; thus neither transmission, nor reception takes place in ideal conditions; (2) language is not necessarily oriented toward the other and occasionally communication operates first with itself. This means that the monologue (interior or aloud, depending) is one of the bases of communication. Human beings, according to Steiner, are thus constantly in communication with themselves.¹⁴⁵ It is not as simple as it first appears, however. The monologue cannot be, in terms of a language or discourse, unique and unidirectional; the *self* of one's self is always plural and unstable as well; it may also become lost, damaged, worn and transformed.

Moreover, and this is a central aspect of this research, human communication frequently happens in a-grammatical, a-syntactic or orthographically incorrect conditions. Examples of this form of communication, where meaning is exchanged in spite of poor linguistic conditions, can be found in everyday speech. Someone will say something that is grammatically confusing and yet, the interlocutor will understand what this person means even before reflecting on

¹⁴⁵ See George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

their incorrect usage of language (*ref. LeCercle*). When such instances are presented to a reader, in the written form of literature, one enters the realm of the poets, the *littérateurs* and the *logophiles*; of writers who approach language as a material that can be altered, enlarged and, partially, destroyed; of writers who operate a transmutation of language from within.¹⁴⁶ Evidently, this sort of process implies the inherent danger of all work about limits: the danger of straying too far to the other side, such that the monologue becomes the incomprehensible and oppressive background noise of alienation. The dividing line is *very* thin and in order to avoid the fall, one has to keep a certain balance.

As Giorgio Agambem proposes in *Enfance et histoire*, languages are in fact constantly being learned, acquired and developed, even in the case of one's mother tongue. In that sense, languages are never completely mastered, that is, their acquisition, at individual, cultural and historical levels, constitute continuous processes. For human communication to take place, it was necessary to create more or less arbitrary categories, to agree on signs and on the meaning attached to these signs. But, as Merleau-Ponty emphasises:

What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning from itself and other signs (...). The prior whole which Saussure is talking about cannot be the explicit and articulated

¹⁴⁶ The formation and reception of meaning just outside of language will not be of interest in and of itself (when it only minds its own business). What occurs at the limits of a phenomenon, or within the liminal spaces between categories, always relies on phenomena and on how thoughts are framed through such categories of knowledge. The in-between exists in a co-dependent manner with what it separates/connects.

whole of a complete language as it is recorded in grammars and dictionaries (...). The unity he is talking about is a unity of coexistence, like that of the sections of an arch which shoulder one another. In a unified whole of this kind, the learned parts of a language have an immediate value as whole, and progress is made less by addition and juxtaposition than by the internal articulation of a function which in its own way is already complete.¹⁴⁷

Unlike Humpty Dumpty, one can never restrain the words' plurality of meaning; words will always evoke much more than what one wants them to say—or much less. Like Alice, the speaker is bound to remain at the level of the ground, facing the wall, unable to get this overview and control upon words that Humpty Dumpty's position allows for.

One's mind always oscillates between the two sides of an opposition and in that sense, the paradoxical dimension inherent to how meaning appears creates a space: the limit that separates the two opposites is set in motion through nonsense, it circulates, like an empty box or an inaccessible item. Carroll's writing magnifies the gap, thus creating the adequate conditions for the infra-thin space that travels between syllables, words, sentences, to inflate, opening up the necessary room for reflection and the potential formation of an understanding, a knowledge. Because the movement happens in both directions simultaneously, the limit becomes thick, the line that the nonsensical particle follows becomes a circle, a cycle. The paradox brings about, to borrow Borges's expression, "tenuous labyrinths of time." Opposite notions coincide, in

¹⁴⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," in *Signs*, tr. Richard C. McCleary (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 39-40.

fragments of time that engender an oscillating movement. Such a coincidence takes place in an interstice – the space between the realm of ideas and the world of experience – that Plato is referring to as *chora*.¹⁴⁸

In *Through the Looking-Glass* the labyrinth of time is opened up, stretched in both directions – it is, to borrow Borges's expression "the labyrinth made of a single straight line which is indivisible, incessant."¹⁴⁹ In such conditions, history is thus approached in the sense of Nietzsche *supra-history*, the protagonists can seize the whole continuum of time at once and step out of the present, somehow looking at events from the outside, through a kind of twice removed discourse in which what they say and the meaning of what they say becomes equivalent. Carroll's poetic *mise-en-scène* thus reveals the problem of isolating time as an abstract concept, the problem inherent in negating that the historical condition of living on a day-to-day basis. By showing the inherent absurdity of living in supra-historical time and homogenous space, Carroll's work opens up a reflection on how the very understanding of space, and time, is at the centre of one's experience of things.

¹⁴⁸ In his *Timaeus*, Plato emphasises the importance of introducing a third category that allows to connect two opposite realms: the realm of experience (flux, becoming) and the realm of ideas (stability, being). The mediating category, which he names *chora*, is the space of human communication and making. See Plato, "Timaeus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 1176.

¹⁴⁹ The ancient labyrinth is a vivid demonstration of this union of time and space. It is circular and is bound to the space created by the dance and its rhythm. There is an entry and an exit, a beginning and an end, but it expresses the constant "being lost" of life itself. The modern labyrinth can be imagined as an infinite line, as is admirably described in Borges's Fictions. See Borges, "Death and the Compass," in *Labyrinths*, 87.

If, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, space was presented from the inside, as the space of raw perception which develops along the twirls of an ever-present surrounding fullness of matter,¹⁵⁰ in *Through the Looking-Glass*, space is represented as an outside, as an unlimited void in which the grip on material elements is impossible. Both works function, partially, as logical games on/in language, games in which the reader is invited to enter. Carroll's work alludes to the inherent problem of making sense of things in *our* world, outside of the story and sheds light on the dual nature of movement as well as on the fallacy of approaching space, or time, as pure ideas detached from the complexity of experience.

In his study of the relationship between architecture and the body, Henri Maldiney speaks about the importance of the rhythm created by one's own breathing in how one relates to the world. Respiration, the rhythmic passage of air through one's body that allows for this same body to exist in a constant state of exchange with the surrounding elements addresses, perhaps in its most basic form, the question of the inside and the outside. Inside and outside are not two distinct regions but exist precisely through the tension of being that opens them both to the other. I agree with Maldiney, this phenomenon can immediately be transposed to architecture as it encompasses the whole relationship of inside and

¹⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that for both Descartes and Leibniz, space is full, it does not account for the idea of emptiness, of void. See Renée Descartes, "Météores," in *Discours de la méthode* (Paris: Garnier: Flammarion, 1966), 168; Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1973) 82-91.

outside, and of what separates them. A notion of place is forged when a specific space is put into tension with space as a whole. A notion of horizon has to appear from the point of view of the centre that the individual represents, while, at the same time, the very idea of an *elsewhere* has to momentarily disappear for one to be able to name this place as *here*. It is through this rhythmic movement – this rupture and juxtaposition of the inside with its outside – that space is qualified. In that sense, the idea of an emptiness, of a void is necessary for one to imagine space as something that extends further away, further than what can immediately be perceived through the body, with one's eyes – for one to *wonder* about what lies beyond.¹⁵¹ As will be discussed in the coming chapter, one's experience of the world thus becomes an inclination towards knowledge, towards meaning.

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of the links between the human body and space and architecture, see “Mises en perspective philosophique : rencontre avec Henri Maldiney,” *L'Architecture au corps*. Brussels: Ousia, 1997.

chapter four discoveries and love

Que la littérature de nos jours soit fasciné par l'être du langage,—ce n'est là ni le signe d'une fin ni la preuve d'une radicalisation : c'est un phénomène qui enracine sa nécessité dans une très vaste configuration où se dessine toute la nervure de notre pensée et de notre savoir. Mais si la question des langages formels fait valoir la possibilité ou l'impossibilité de structurer les contenus positifs, une littérature vouée au langage fait valoir, en leur vivacité empirique, les formes fondamentales de la finitude. De l'intérieur du langage éprouvé et parcouru comme langage, dans le jeu de ses possibilités tendues à leur point extrême, ce qui s'annonce, c'est que l'homme est « fini », et qu'en parvenant au sommet de toute parole possible, ce n'est pas au cœur de lui-même qu'il arrive, mais au bord de ce qui limite : dans cette région où rôde la mort, où la pensée s'éteint, où la promesse de l'origine indéfiniment recule.¹⁵²

Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*

Carroll's long poem *The Hunting of the Snark: An Agony in Eight Fits* was first published in 1875. The author's initial intention was to include the text in his two-volume novel *Sylvie and Bruno* but as the poem was taking shape, it acquired a life of its own that led Carroll to publish it separately. In a pointed analysis of the text, Lecercle writes: "In 1874, when Carroll began working on the *Snark*, English poetry mainly revolved around one name, that of Tennyson, and one genre, the long narrative poem."¹⁵³ The influence of the great romantic poet in the middle of the Victorian era is undeniable and Carroll can be counted

¹⁵² Michel Foucault. *Les mots et les choses*, 395.

¹⁵³ Jean-Jacques Lecercle. "Une case en avant, deux cases en arrière," in *Lewis Carroll* (Paris: Édition de L'Herne, 1987), 43.

among his most fervent admirers.¹⁵⁴ Poems written in a neo-epic style abound in that period of exacerbated Romanticism and hark back to the long epic tradition that stretches from Homer, or rather, Lecercle suggests, from Beowulf, to Milton and Tennyson.¹⁵⁵ Carroll's poem follows the general structure common to the genre (the voyage of a hero organised around a quest) and addresses similar themes (the theme of the night, of the void and of nothingness). This being said, it is important to remember that akin to all of Carroll's writing, *the Snark* is most famous for its proclivity towards the absurd. Though it is indeed written following the neo-epic style, *The Hunting of The Snark* nonetheless belongs to the realm of caricature, of parody, and as such, its place within the tradition of epic (or neo-epic) poetry remains minor.¹⁵⁶

Unlike the Alice books, *The Hunting of The Snark* is not directly concerned with language—words and their meaning do not become direct objects of discussion within the work. However, as Lecercle has shown, the construction of the poem—its threaded structures—operates as a game of/on language, a play that reveals language's structural fragility. This becomes apparent as one begins to detect, within the work, three different structures that interact with one another.

¹⁵⁴ Carroll considered himself very lucky to be able to photograph the poet and to spend evenings conversing with him.

¹⁵⁵ See Lecercle, "Une case en avant, deux cases en arrière." The first part of the present chapter is a brief summary of Lecercle's analysis of the structural complexity of the poem.

¹⁵⁶ Within the more modern literary genre of the "absurd," the text is obviously seen as a *major* work; the poem is held by many critics as the ultimate piece of Carrollian nonsense (Sewell, Holquist).

The first structure has to do with the grammatical (syntactic and lexical) aspect of “normal” language. In the poem, Lecercle insists, this structure is completely transparent. Carroll does not directly play with words themselves or with their polysemic quality—the play takes place at another level. In effect, most words used in the poem come from common usage, except perhaps those that refer more directly to the Snark (or to equally fantastic species like Boojum, Bandersnatch or Jubjub) which are words of Carroll’s own invention. But since these invented words are directly related to the object of the quest and do not serve to describe the crew’ voyage, the epic itself, they do not threaten the grammatical structure. In this regard, the style of the poem is “correct” and therefore reassuring.

Lecercle refers to a second structure: the formal poetic structure of the text. In this case, Carroll’s poem becomes intentionally perplexing. To achieve this, the author uses two interconnected processes. On the one hand, he pushes the rigor of the versification to an extreme, rendering it more rigid than what the reader is generally accustomed to in English poetry while on the other hand he unexpectedly breaks this rigor by, at times, omitting a rhyme. This does not happen in a random manner: the rhyme is always “broken” at the same place in the verse, which creates a kind of expectation (and rhythm) that serves to emphasise the forced rigidity of the poetic structure. Carroll’s careful use of hemistich and alliteration contribute to the creation, within the text, of a sort of roaring rhythm—words are used recurrently and form series—that emphasises

the classical nature of the poem's composition. According to Lecercle, this contributes to the parody effect of the text: the poem is perhaps *too* beautiful. The careful, predictable rigor of its structure calls attention to itself; it is itself parodied and encourages the reader, once again, to reflect critically on the genre.

At first glance, from the "outside," the poem carefully follows a classical composition. As the subtitle informs the reader, the agony is divided into eight "fits," or chants (an archaic definition of the word "fit" in Old English connects it to the divisions of a poem into songs). Each fit is rigorously organised. The central theme of the poem—the theme of the hunt or quest—develops at a regular pace throughout the poem and can easily be followed by the reader. At the beginning of several fits, a recurrent stanza is used, always followed by "And then...."

They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care;
 They pursued it with forks and hope;
 They threatened its life with a railway-share;
 They charmed it with smiles and soap.

Lecercle calls attention to the prevalence of the grammatical structure in such lines. The words "They," "with," and "and" are repeated and what comes in between, somehow filling the blanks, seems almost secondary. The whole poem is apparently constructed that way. It is here that the third structure becomes apparent, and interacts with the canvas created by the two other structures.

The third structure thus forms itself through Carroll's specific mode of playing with the assumed connotations of words in common language. Carroll's

nonsense allows him to engage in, within the work, a destruction/re-configuration of language. The parody is not only concerned with the genre, it threatens the very organisation of common language as such.¹⁵⁷ By bringing together words that don't obviously belong; by introducing common expressions and revealing their arbitrariness; by placing more emphasis on the fact that one is speaking rather than on what is said, etc., Carroll calls attention to how language relies on conventions—on accepted games of language—that can easily cease to operate. Carroll's own commentary on the genesis of the poem seems to confirm his mode of generating nonsense. The poem somehow began by itself, from the top down, as the last line came spontaneously to Carroll's mind and served as a foundation for the series of fits that followed. In the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno*, he writes:

As the years went on, I jotted down, at odd moments, all sorts of odd ideas, and fragments of dialogue, that occurred to me—who knows how?—with a transitory suddenness that left me no choice but either to record them then and there, or to abandon them to oblivion (...)—but they had also a way of occurring, *à propos* of nothing—specimens of that hopelessly illogical phenomenon, “an effect without a cause.” Such, for example, was the last line of *The Hunting of the Snark*, which came into my head quite suddenly, during a solitary walk, and such, again, have been passages which occurred in a dream.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ For Wittgenstein, the ambiguity inherent to natural languages constantly brings into question the fixed quality of the linguistic games that are used in day-to-day communication. According to him, a sentence becomes absurd or strange because one can imagine, in it, a different language game than the one in which it is commonly used. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: ,1963), 195.

¹⁵⁸ Lewis Carroll, “Sylvie and Bruno,” in *The Complete Works*, (London: Nonesuch Press, 1939), 255.

In the same preface, Carroll invites the reader to identify, within his long novel *Sylvie and Bruno*, which parts are absolutely necessary and which parts can be seen as “padding” (ironically referred to as “litterature”), as material used to fill in some gaps left open within the structure of the text, that Carroll carefully constructs. Nonsense can thus be seen as the result of the judicious combination of these fragments – emphasis is on the connections, rather than on the isolated parts. Meaning momentarily appears, becomes almost palpable, incredibly close while, at the same time, it dissolves, conceals itself again. It gives of itself while resisting capture.

In the case of *The Hunting of The Snark*, the nonsensical aspect of the poem does not completely foreclose its narrative dimension.¹⁵⁹ The poem is *also* an epic; it recounts a journey that the reader can follow. It is more than an epic, being at the same time a play on the genre and on language, and less than one, as it omits or condenses elements that usually serve to create the genre. As Lecercle also shows, the epic *topoi* are multiplied to such an extent that they somehow become representations of themselves, which further contributes to the parody. In that sense, as was the case for the *Alice* books, the allegorical dimension of the *agony* is strong: the enigma invites interpretation and, once again, the text has led to

¹⁵⁹ As I have mentioned earlier, “Jabberwocky” is perhaps Carroll’s most extreme nonsensical poem and, as one might recall, Alice’s (or the reader’s) impression after reading the text remains rather limited (*somebody* killed *something*). In the case of the *Snark*, because the reader can follow the unfolding of the epic, the enigma acquires a more powerful allegorical dimension. The reader is taken along the journey, an expectation builds up, and the deception caused by the impossibility to clearly identify what the *Snark* alludes to is, in the end, stronger.

many interpretative attempts.¹⁶⁰ The game on/of language—the game of a fine logician—impairs any exhaustive interpretation while, at the same time, as it invites participation from the reader, it contributes to the experience of the literary artefact.

Other elements also contribute to the parody effect of the work. Carroll chooses the members of the crew so that their appellations—their trades—form a series of word beginning, somewhat arbitrarily, with the letter B: a Bellman, a Boots, a maker of Bonnets and Hoods, a Barrister, a Broker, a Billiard-marker, a Banker, a Beaver, a Baker and a Butcher. Within this group, it becomes difficult for the reader to identify the hero of the epic. The Bellman, who could be seen at first to fulfil this role, soon loses any sort of credibility. He appears much more as a sort of anti-hero and in that sense, the epic possesses the kind of critical self-reflectivity typical of modern literature. The way the hunt is organised is also inherently modern. The search for the Snark follows a process—a methodology—evocative of that of modern scientific research. I will approach the text with focus on the relationship between the spatial qualities of the land in which the story takes place and the process of research that the crew is undertaking.

¹⁶⁰ For Morton Cohen, the *Snark* is the expression of Carroll's sorrow caused by the loss of his godson Charlie Wilcox. For Elisabeth Sewell, Carroll's Snark is an allegory of what lies beyond systems: "nothingness." See Morton N. Cohen, "Hark the Snark." In *Lewis Carroll Observed*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976 and Elisabeth Sewell, "'In the midst of his laughter and glee': Nonsense and Nothingness in Lewis Carroll." *Soundings* 82, 3-4 (1999): 541-571.

In western culture, spaces associated with sea travel and discovery have always had strong evocative powers. Epics such as Homer's *Odyssey* not only speak about the wanderings of the hero as he finds his way in lands never before explored; they also served to found an understanding of the world, of its nature, genesis and history. According to Foucault, the space of the ship—the space of the journey at sea—represents, in the western context, the strongest most evocative heterotopia. Such spaces—essentially spaces of the *outside*—point to an ultimate elsewhere, and in that sense, they possess a sacred dimension. The Galilean revolution—the transformation of space into a neutral, unlimited extension in which the position of an object is seen as an arrested moment in its movement—did not completely rid space of its sacredness.¹⁶¹ As I have already emphasised in previous chapters, space as one experiences it—the space of daily life and human interactions—is inherently heterogeneous. In that sense, even in the current context in which the *problematique* of space has taken the shape of a problem of positioning, of *emplacement*, the relationship between identifiable “points” and less familiar places remain crucial to one's understanding of space in general. Carroll's *Snark* takes place in such heterotopic territories; the search for the Snark unfolds through the poem's series of fits, as the hunters venture further into the space of discovery.

The first fit, “The Landing,” introduces the hunting crew. The poem opens as the ship reaches the land where the Snark is expected to be found.

“Just the place for a Snark!” the Bellman cried,

¹⁶¹ See Foucault, “Des espaces autres,” 1573.

As he landed his crew with care;
Supporting each man on the top of the tide
By a finger entwined in his hair.¹⁶²

The crew is thus guided by the Bellman, who organises the hunt. His role is to sporadically remind everyone of their duty by ringing his bell. In the opening stanza, the reader is led to believe that the Bellman possesses the necessary heroic features, the strength to lead the crew towards a successful hunt and the capture of a Snark. The members of the crew – the series of Bs – are presented to the reader. Three characters stand out from the group as they will play a specific role in the search: the Baker, the Butcher and the Beaver. The idea that, once they are all involved in a common search, the name of each participant becomes irrelevant – each participant is referred to by his title – is reinforced by the following passage concerning the Baker.

There was one who was famed for the number of things
He forgot when he entered the ship:
His umbrella, his watch, all his jewels and rings,
And the clothes he had bought for the trip.

He had forty-two boxes, all carefully packed,
With his name painted clearly on each:
But since he omitted to mention the fact,
They were all left behind on the beach.

The loss of his clothes hardly mattered, because
He had seven coats on when he came,
With three pair of boots – but the worst of it was,
He had wholly forgotten his name.¹⁶³

The Baker's name was left behind (literally, on the side of his boxes left at shore) as he decided to venture after the Snark. This passage echoes how, in *Through the*

¹⁶² Carroll, "The Hunting of the Snark," 680.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 681.

Looking-Glass, the name of things vanishes as Alice and the Faun enter the otherness of the woods. Both the space of the journey—the ocean—and the hunting ground for the Snark are unknown territories, spaces that are essentially “other.” In such a context, the Baker’s real name becomes irrelevant. In the same vein, neither his lack of intellectual skills nor the fact that his skills as a Baker are useless to the search (he can only bake Bridecake) seem to matter much. What matters is that the Baker comes equipped with an obsession for the Snark (it being the only idea he ever had) and perfect courage.

Another character’s over-specialisation turns out to be more problematic. Once at sea, the Butcher confesses that the only animals he can kill are beavers: the Butcher is a beaver-butcher. The Beaver’s journey had thus been one of worry and sadness. The two manage to avoid each other as much as possible, but once the crew lands and begins the hunt, they are forced to work together. In such an important search, divergence of opinion or approach has to be left aside.

The nature of the land on which the crew just set foot is rather mysterious. The place does not seem to have a name; its inhabitants, if they exist, are not mentioned; no information is provided concerning the location of the land in relation to the starting point of the journey (which is also unnamed). As the reader will find out in the second fit, the crew’s journey at sea has been one of disorientation. In the poem, the description of the hunting ground is limited to

its topography. The land they reach is composed only of "chasms and crags"¹⁶⁴ – to the great dismay of the hunters. How then is it the perfect place to find a Snark? The second stanza clears up the matter:

"Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:
That alone should encourage the crew
Just the place for a Snark!" I have said it thrice:
What I tell you three times is true."¹⁶⁵

The land is perfect for the hunters to fulfil their duty because the Bellman said it was so three times.¹⁶⁶ The territory on which the crew has landed is completely unknown; it is essentially "nowhere." But, through the reasoning process of abduction, the hunters have appropriated it and will soon begin their search. This notion of how "truth" is generated by the triple reiteration of a concordant reasoning permeates the whole poem. In "Fit the fifth," the Butcher exclaims after having heard a loud scream:

¹⁶⁴ "Yet at first sight the crew was not pleased with the view / Which consisted of chasms and crags." Chasm can mean an abyss but also a limit, a frontier. A crag is set in opposition to a valley, it is a hill or a mountain. It can also mean an accident, a sudden break in the topography of a terrain.

¹⁶⁵ Carroll, "The Hunting of the Snark," 680.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), Carroll's contemporary, was at the time promoting English pragmatism in scientific circles; his notion of the *triad* was generally accepted. In his *First principle of Pragmatism*, he states: "one's concept of the effects of a thing are equivalent to one's concept of the thing itself." This maxim is the methodological basis of *Conceptual Analysis*. The eventual analysis of these concepts (intellectualized consequences of action) can be confronted with reality through experience (intellectual and practical experimentation); this reasoning is called *Abduction*. Pierce formulated the *triadic* relation of the sign to its object, where every conception of being is mediated through the intellectualization of the interpreting consciousness. In the end, truth is stated by a community of scientists, after careful abductions and verification through experiments (three concordant experimentations can lead to a conclusion). See Charles S. Pierce, *Collected Papers*. Vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 1, 90-93, 186.

“’Tis the voice of the Jubjub!” he suddenly cried.
 (This man they used to call “Dunce.”)
 “As the Bellman would tell you,” he added with pride,
 “I have uttered that sentiment once.”

“’Tis the note of the Jubjub! Keep count, I entreat.
 You will find I have told it you twice.
 ’Tis the song of the Jubjub! The proof is complete,
 If only I’ve stated it thrice.”¹⁶⁷

The three-fold repetition once again generates truth and is used as a means of proving an assertion. Carroll’s parody of triadic reasoning echoes Humpty Dumpty’s claim that he can master words, though this time, it is not the meaning of words that concerns Carroll but the truth value given to a proposition in relation to a formulated hypothesis. Another passage reinforces the idea that accuracy and truthfulness are important for the search process to be successful. In the second fit, “The Bellman’s Speech,” the reader finds out about the tools available to the crew in their quest. Issues of precision in representation are at the forefront. The episode of the Map of the Ocean is telling in regards to the mode of representation chosen by the Bellman to orient the search.

He had bought a map representing the sea,
 Without the least vestige of land:
 And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
 A map they could all understand.

“What’s the good of Mercator’s North Poles and Equators,
 Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?”
 So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply,
 “They are merely conventional signs.”

“Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
 But we’ve got our brave Captain to thank”
 (So the crew would protest) “that he bought *us* the best –
 A perfect and absolute blank!”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Carroll, “The Hunting of the Snark,” 691.

The map is completely accurate in that it is always a direct representation of the closest part of the ocean surrounding the ship at sea. The Bellman's knowledge of navigation—his experience of sailing in a more concrete sense—is limited. The poem recounts a difficult journey. In the preface to the *Snark*, Carroll chooses to clarify, apparently at random, the following line of the poem "Then the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes." His explanation is as follows:

The Bellman, who was almost morbidly sensitive to appearances, used to have the bowsprit unshipped once or twice a week to be revarnished; and it more than once happened, when the time came for replacing it, that no one on board could remember which end of the ship it belonged to. ¹⁶⁹

The members of the crew, Carroll adds, are well aware that it is no use asking the Bellman about it; the captain's only resource is to refer to a section of his Naval Code and read it in the most monotonous of tones. "Instructions which none of them had ever been able to understand—so it generally ended in its being fastened on, anyhow, across the rudder (...) and no steering could be done till the next varnishing day. During these bewildering intervals, the ship usually sailed backwards."¹⁷⁰ In *Sylvie and Bruno*, Carroll sets up a similar reflection on modes of representations of the real. The German professor entertains the children with the story of the map of his town onto which *everything* is marked down. The map measures one mile on each side, and reading it is quite problematic since the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 683.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 677-678.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

map, when totally open, casts a shadow over the farmers' crops. To solve the matter, the town people have decided that the land itself would serve as a map.

The second fit thus recounts the convoluted sailing journey that has brought the crew to their current position. The Bellman's function as hero of the epic is already put into question. The means of representation and orientation, on which the hunters are bound to rely, are stated. All the attributes of the genuine Snark are also stated in order. The Bellman enumerates five general qualities that allow for proper identification of the Snark and form the hypothesis of what the hunters are looking for. The nature of what they might encounter is made clearer as another piece of important information concerning the Snark is revealed by the Bellman:

For although common Snarks do no manner of harm,
 Yet I feel it my duty to say,
 Some are Boojums – The Bellman broke off in alarm,
 For the Baker had fainted away.¹⁷¹

The crew's diligent care brings the Baker back to his senses, and he offers to tell his fellow hunters the story behind such a sudden, unexpected reaction on his part (he whose courage was praised by all). The Baker begins by evoking his own origins, speaking about his family history, but is frequently interrupted by the Bellman's "Skip all that!," which reminds the crew that not a minute shall be wasted. The Baker proceeds, skipping some forty years and going straight to the heart of the matter. Though constantly interrupted by the Bellman's impatient interventions, he manages to recall how a dear uncle of his once remarked that

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 685.

even though most Snarks are harmless, some indeed represent a real danger. The uncle's tale not only confirms the warning issued by the Bellman concerning Boojums; it also gives a rather troubling and precise description that goes as follows:

" 'But oh, beamish nephew, beware of the day,
If your Snark be a Boojum! For then
You will softly and suddenly vanish away
And never be met with again!' ¹⁷²

The Baker, who "engage[s] with the Snark—every night after dark—[i]n a dreamy delirious fight," appeared at first to be the perfect candidate for the hunt. As he heard the word "Boojum," he suddenly recalled his uncle's warning and momentarily lost his strength. The fainting of the Baker occurs right in the middle of the Bellman's speech, in the midst of the statement of the hypothesis preparing the crew to begin the search. This new piece of information threatens the unfolding of the hunt—it points to the possible failure of the experiment, to its limitations, revealing a potential crisis. The Bellman's reaction is to question the Baker's ethics. Why didn't the Baker mention this before getting onboard?

"It's excessively awkward to mention it now —
As I think I've already remarked."
And the man they called "Hi!" replied, with a sigh,
"I informed you the day we embarked."

"I said it in Hebrew — I said it in Dutch —
I said it in German and Greek:
But I wholly forgot (and it vexes me much)
That English is what you speak." ¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ibid, 687.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 688.

The objectivity and straightforwardness of the research is put into question by issues of language, by problems of communication. The hunters share a goal but come at it with different personal backgrounds and a priori. They also share a more or less common historical and cultural background that inevitably resurfaces: the uncle's story produces a strong effect on the crew because it evokes a legendary feature of the Snark that, even though it has not yet been confirmed or proved, has to be taken into account. The Snark is not just another species belonging to the natural realm; it is a rare, fantastic creature and as such, it has the power to generate a fear greater, darker than usual—the fear of the unknown. This is confirmed by another passage in which the Barrister, who had fallen asleep, is having a nightmarish dream about the Snark. In his dream, which recalls once more the problematic conducting of a trial, the Snark appears as the defender of a Pig accused of deserting its sty.¹⁷⁴ The Snark, with great eloquence and a powerful presence, literally takes over the unfolding of the trial, acting in lieu of both Judge and Jury and pronouncing the verdict himself: “transportation for life.” This passage sends the reader back to the two *Alice* stories. It serves to reinforce the mythical nature of the Snark and to build up the tension—the expectation—that Carroll carefully constructs throughout the whole poem. More and more, the object of the hunt is taking control over the participants.

As each individual comes in with different skills, the method or strategy that each will develop in order to reach the common goal varies. I have mentioned

¹⁷⁴ Notice the mysterious recurrence the word “pig.”

earlier that in the fifth fit, the Beaver and the Butcher are brought closer to each other. This *rapprochement* is the result of two concurrent phenomena. On the one hand, it somehow happens by chance, as the two hunters simultaneously and unknowingly come up with identical strategies for hunting the Snark. On the other hand, they are brought closer together by the specific spatial quality of the path they have chosen to explore: a narrow valley. They slowly begin to notice each other's problematic proximity:

Each thought he was thinking of nothing but "Snark"
 And the glorious work of the day;
 And each tried to pretend that he did not remark
 That the other was going that way.

But the valley grew narrower and narrower still,
 And the evening got darker and colder
 Till (merely from nervousness, not from good will)
 They marched along shoulder to shoulder.¹⁷⁵

It is then that they hear a frightening scream that reminds the Beaver of the effect produced by a pencil squeaking on a slate. The Butcher is convinced that the sound is produced by a Jubjub. In order to prove to the Beaver that this is actually the case, he uses the triadic argument earlier discussed, insisting that the Beaver keep count, because of the utmost importance of the number of reiterations implied in the success of the proof: the statement has to be made *three* times, no more, no less. The poor Beaver counts very carefully but loses heart through the process and cannot be sure the last statement is indeed the third.

"Two added to one – if that could but be done,"
 It said, "with one's fingers and thumbs!"
 Recollecting with tears how, in earlier years,
 It had taken no pain with its sums.

¹⁷⁵ Carroll, "The Hunting of the Snark," 691.

"The thing can be done," said the Butcher, "I think.
The thing must be done, I am sure.
The thing shall be done! Bring me paper and ink,
The best there is time to procure."

The Butcher proceeds:

"Taking three as the subject to reason about –
A convenient number to state –
We add Seven, and Ten, and then multiply out
By One Thousand diminished by Eight.

"The result we proceed to divide," as you see,
"By Nine Hundred and Ninety and Two:
Then subtract Seventeen, and the answer must be
Exactly and perfectly true."

"The method employed I would gladly explain,
While I have it so clear in my head,
If I had but the time and you had but the brain –
But much yet remains to be said.

"In one moment I've seen what has hitherto been
Enveloped in absolute mystery
And without extra charge I will give you at large
A lesson in Natural History."¹⁷⁶

The butcher's lesson exposes all the attributes of the Jubjub in a way that recalls the Snarkian description that was part of the Bellman's speech, contributing to the rhythmic quality of the poem. Through this episode the Beaver and the Butcher realise their affinities and a strong bond is created between the two former enemies. Their common desire to find the Snark, as well as their common fascination with mathematical proofs, leads to a deep fondness for each other. Mathematics seems to serve here as a pacifier, as a way to install some order and boundaries, to transform the space in which they felt constricted into a more familiar place, a space conducive to dialogue. As the mathematical formula is

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 692.

spoken and, at the same time, carefully inscribed on paper for the Beaver to keep, it acquires the status of discourse and as such, contributes to how they can appropriate space, making it into something more inhabitable. The two new friends return to base camp hand in hand, forever inseparable.

At this point in the story, the falling of night is imminent. The growing obscurity only adds to the crew's fear, but at the same time, it reinforces their desire to find the Snark, their urge to go on. The night is one of the main themes associated with Romanticism, a theme that Carroll also parodies: in the poem, night is somehow always about to fall but never actually comes. It is in such a dusky, shadowy atmosphere that the two last fits of the poem take place.

"Fit the Seventh" recounts the Banker's fatal encounter with a Bandersnatch. This fit contains some of the most sinister stanzas of the poem.

But while he was seeking with thimbles and care,
 A Bandersnatch swiftly drew nigh
 And grabbed at the Banker, who shrieked in despair,
 For he knew it was useless to fly.

Without rest or pause – while those frumious jaws
 Went savagely snapping around –
 He skipped and he hopped, and he floundered and flopped,
 Till fainting he fell to the ground.

The Bandersnatch fled as the others appeared
 Led on by that fear-stricken yell:
 And the Bellman remarked "It's just as I feared!"
 And solemnly tolled on his bell.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 697.

The wild creature does not kill the Banker, but his persona is altered in such a way that he is now useless to the search: the Banker has lost his mind. For the Bellman, the Banker's fall cannot be acknowledged if the search is to go on. He is not willing to attempt anything to save the Banker from sinking deeper into complete madness. He once more insists that in order to find the Snark, the focus should be on the object of the search only; no distraction, not even that caused by the loss of one of the participants, is allowed. The Banker's fate—the loss of his sanity—is seen as a mere casualty of, and inherent to, the search process. The desire to go deeper, the desire to find the Snark, is ironically stronger than anything else.

The object of the hunt exerts a fascination that distorts understanding and impairs reason. The falling of night also accelerates this phenomenon; fear and desire literally take over logic and reason. The excitement of the hunters is reaching its peak as they notice one of their colleagues, the Baker—"their hero unnamed"—alone on top of a crag, waving and screaming in their direction. They are convinced he must have found a Snark. But as darkness is falling, they cannot clearly discern what is happening on the Baker's side. In such penumbra, they are bound to rely on sounds—on words—in order to form an understanding of what is going on. Since the last stanzas of the poem are rather hard to paraphrase, it is perhaps most useful to reproduce the entire relevant passage:

Erect and sublime, for one moment in time.
 In the next, that wild figure they saw
 (As if stung by a spasm) plunge into a chasm,
 While they waited and listened in awe.

"It's a Snark!" was the sound that first came to their ears,
 And seemed almost too good to be true.
 Then followed a torrent of laughter and cheers:
 Then the ominous word, "It's a Boo — —"

Then silence. Some fancied they heard in the air
 A weary and wandering sigh
 That sounded like "—jum!" but the others declare
 It was only a breeze that went by.

They hunted till darkness came on, but they found
 Not a button, or feather, or mark,
 By which they could tell that they stood on the ground
 Where the Baker had met with the Snark

In the midst of the word he was trying to say,
 In the midst of his laughter and glee,
 He had softly and suddenly vanished away —
 For the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see.¹⁷⁸

This is the last line of the poem, but this is also how the poem began. The Baker has gone beyond the limit of the experiment, beyond his own limitations, and the prophecy came true: he most certainly has fainted away, literally disappearing as he came face to face with the Boojum. However, as the hunters could not actually see the event with their own eyes—darkness was preventing clear visual identification—a doubt remains and motivates them to look for physical evidence, for proof of the Baker's encounter with a Snark. For the reader, the poem's conclusion is extremely evocative. It provokes a reflection about death, about one's own physical presence, about the danger of being drawn by a desire so strong that it impairs one's reasonable thinking, and so on.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 698-99.

More or less since the Seventeenth century (the great century of *clarté*), opaque modes of discourse that rely on the enigma have been seen as *minor genres*, often reduced to mere “*jeux d’esprit*.”¹⁷⁹ However, in the modern context and especially since the Nineteenth century, such oblique modes of expression have acquired a heightened importance precisely because they serve to question the primacy of *clarté*.¹⁸⁰ Carroll’s work operates within that *minor mode*. The meaning of the *Snark* cannot be uttered in a way that would fix it, restraining its force as an allegory and opening up the enigma. What the *Snark* means cannot be expressed in any other way than through the shape of the poem as whole. The reader understands what Carroll’s *Snark* refers to but is unable to express it in any way that would encompass its scope. His or her knowledge cannot be expressed in discursive form or approached via the methodical analysis characteristic of scientific reasoning. The meaning of the *Snark* is not only resistant to analysis; the creature itself cannot be represented. Carroll actually rejected one of the illustrations—an image in which the Snark was depicted—

¹⁷⁹ The enigma was seen as a mere *divertissement* by many classical writers and theoreticians. However, between the desire for clarity proper to classical thought and the self-reflectivity inherent to modern philosophy and art, the Baroque represents a transition. The idea of approaching things obliquely, through a filter (*un grand crible*) means that both clarity and shadows are acknowledged. For Leibniz, the *crible* serves to transform the chaos of the world into a unity, but this transformation is never complete: chaos (obscurity) remains while the experience of the “one” unfolds. See Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), esp. 103-112.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur argues for the importance of oblique, poetic modes of expression after the disappearance of rhetorical structures in the Nineteenth century. His study discusses the framework of a new rhetoric based on the “uttered” as the central metaphor in discourse. For him, by placing emphasis on sentences or “expressions” rather than on words, the power of fiction to re-describe the real is revealed, thus connecting myths with *mimesis* in the sense proposed by Aristotle. See Paul Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

proposed by Henry Holliday, the illustrator of the original edition. Carroll insisted, the Snark could only take shape in the mind – the imagination – of each single reader. The poem as a whole is the only mode of representation that can allow for this image to emerge in the body/mind of the reader. The Snark *is* the poem and, at the same time, what lies beyond the poem, beyond language itself; it is an ultimate “unlimited,” a poetic utterance that projects the reader into both the origin and end of life. In that sense, the *Snark* is connected to the idea of *apeiron* expressed in Anaximander’s fragment: it cannot be grasped except in the thickness of the present as one acknowledges the abyssal problem of being.¹⁸¹ While the Snark remains an enigma (precisely *because* it remains an enigma), it reveals a profound truth that is somewhat common to all: the undeniable limited nature of one’s life.

Carroll’s *Snark* can be seen as the carefully laid out clash of the methodological approach of scientific positivism and myth. In opposition to discursive philosophy, and, even more so, in opposition to scientific discourse, myths have a peculiar status. This status is not exactly “theory” because the reality referred to by myth is *ultimate*; because the content of the mythological “story” is precisely speaking what cannot be otherwise stated.¹⁸² It is thus possible to infer that such ultimate aspects of reality have been better expressed, historically, through

¹⁸¹ See Martin Heidegger, “La parole d’anaximandre,” in *Chemins qui mènent nulle part* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 387-450, esp. 448.

¹⁸² See Leszek Kolakowski, *Methaphysical Horror* (Oxford, and New York: Basil Blackwell 1988), 88-89.

mythical stories, religion or works of art. However multifaceted, this oblique mode of expression is valid; what cannot be said or depicted may nonetheless be hinted at. The hint conveys a *feeling* of understanding, “a kind of momentary satisfaction which both is valid in cognitive terms and provides a certainty of being ‘in touch with’ or ‘within’ that which is more real than daily life reality.”¹⁸³ This feeling is bound to be momentary; it could only become permanent if its message was translatable into theoretical concepts. The very nature of myths, and of works of art, prevents such direct translation.

This does not mean, however, that the impulse towards truth, the drive to come to a clearer, most precise understanding ceases to operate. Even though it can generally be agreed that Absolute Truth is beyond reach, one nonetheless aims towards it—is inclined towards it.¹⁸⁴ This inclination is not dissimilar to the nature of one’s bodily position in space. To stand up—more or less vertically in relation to a more or less horizontal ground—implies having to keep a balance. As one moves around, one is always about to fall. Body and mind perceive things from an almost imperceptible angle, only a few degrees away from the right angle (there is no such thing as a perfectly right angle in the realm of human experiences and thoughts). It is this slight angle that generates an

¹⁸³ Ibid, 89.

¹⁸⁴ Though, after Nietzsche, philosophy (and art) is no longer concerned with positive Truth as what lies behind appearances, the inclination towards knowledge prevails, especially in the spirit of modern scientific research. What is of interest to me here is rather the idea of an inclination towards knowledge that permeates the way humans tend to approach things—how engaging with things still implies the idea of “wanting to know.”

oscillating movement of both body and mind—a push forward and a pull back.¹⁸⁵ However, the limitedness of one's position—having to approach things at an angle—is also what creates the motivation, the impulse to search.

At first reading, the impression produced by the *Snark* is mixed. On the one hand, a lot of the situations are absurd, even grotesque, while on the other, the story unfolds in a rather straightforward manner. The ship reaches a desolate land; the hunt begins; the Beaver and the Butcher become friends; the Banker falls; the Baker encounters a Boojum-Snark and disappears. The poem is first and foremost a caricature, a parody and as such, its tone is essentially light. However, closer examination of the text reveals the reliance on a genre, a historical framework, and the series of operations carefully applied to it. The complexity of how the text is constructed is an important aspect of the process of caricature, which is not only destructive but serves to reinforce the importance of the model as such. The destruction/reconfiguration process does not completely empty the model of its authority—of its almost sacred quality. Rather, the caricature reinforces the historical importance of the epic *topoi* while, at the same time, it highlights the problem of how one can relate to such a model in the modern

¹⁸⁵ Brian Massumi speaks of the simple phenomenon of walking in terms of “controlled falling.” According to him, to act implies an acknowledgement of this unstable, uncertain quality of one's experience that is generative of potentials. See Mary Zournazi, “Navigating Movements: A Conversation with Brian Massumi,” in *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (New York: Routledge, 2002), esp. 218. In Paul Valéry's “L'Âme et la danse,” a similar idea is discussed. In the dialogue, the soul of man is compared to a beautiful dancer that can only be seen in movement, as she is always about to fall. See Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos, L'Âme et la danse, Dialogue de l'arbre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 145.

context. The carefully threaded structures of Carroll's *Snark* serve not only to generate a critique of the genre, they are also a means of preserving an ancient, highly regulated mode of writing, that of the epic. In that sense, by turning the genre upon itself, Carroll also contributes to its survival through time.¹⁸⁶

For the epic to function, the quality of the space in which it is set is crucial. The reader has to be projected outside of the place where he or she is standing, outside of known territories. One can relate to the experience of the protagonists in the story because of one's own experience of space as "other." In the same way, one's understanding—one's knowledge—of notions like *here* and *there* cannot be dissociated from the very idea of an elsewhere, that is, from the strong

¹⁸⁶ Marc Fumaroli's thesis concerning the transformation, in the modern context, of one of the grounding principles of communication, rhetoric, is insightful. In his extensive study *L'âge de l'éloquence*, Fumaroli notes how antique rhetoric was gradually transformed in the late 18th and early 19th century, systematised into a "*rhétorique scolaire*" and exhausted of its philosophical, political and oratory dimensions tied to eloquence (Aristotle). This systematisation eventually led to the abandonment of the teaching of rhetoric, in the 1880's in France and a little earlier in the context of the English colleges (around 1850). This age-old discipline was, for the first time, viewed as empty and useless. Rhetoric was thus replaced, in school programs, by courses on the history of ancient and modern literatures. However, Fumaroli argues, this does not necessarily mean that rhetoric, as a guiding principle, a mode of regulating literary works, of giving them a specific—eloquent—shape, was abandoned. Rather, it manifests itself very well in the works of many literary writers who invent new, modern ways of framing language into compelling, effective literary works, discursive or fictional. In that sense, it can be said that writers (and Fumaroli mentions, in the French context, such figures as Madame de Stael, Victor Hugo, Proust, etc) have attempted to secure, through their work, the richness of ancient rhetoric, and succeeded in such a way that also contributed to render scholarly rhetoric irrelevant. Ancient rhetoric may have been reduced to a tropology, but this reduction remains incomplete. See Marc Fumaroli, *L'âge de l'éloquence* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), esp 1-16.

mytho-poetic dimension proper to heterotopias The specificity of Carroll's *Snark*, and, to some extent, of all his writing, is that it not only speaks about the relationship of such spaces to discourse, the writing itself effectuates a similar projection. The reader is forced to venture beyond/within the limits of common language, of common sense, into nonsense. The *Snark* provokes a reflection on the limits of language, on the problematic finitude of language inherent to modernity that Foucault describes in *Les mots et les choses*; modern language is folded upon itself and can no longer serve to trace "clear" links between representations and thoughts, between experience and knowledge—between space as lived and a theory of space. But Carroll's *Snark* is *also* a poem, a poetic utterance that, while it might generate a philosophical reflection on the problem of knowledge, manages to open up, albeit momentarily, the necessary space for one to make connections—to know.

chapter five euclid's retreat and achilles' last race

There is one preliminary step, that is absolutely indispensable before the human intellect can accept any Axiom whatever: that is, it must attach some meaning to it. We cannot, rationally, either assent to, or deny, any Proposition the words of which convey to us no idea.¹⁸⁷

— Lewis Carroll, *Curiosa Mathematica*

Euclid and His Modern Rivals was published in 1879, under Carroll's real name, Charles L. Dodgson. Euclidean geometry was at the centre Dodgson's career of mathematical lecturer at Christ Church, where he taught for over twenty-five years. His publications in the field of geometry include, among others, re-
editions of Euclid's Book I, II and V. *Euclid and His Modern Rivals* "is presented in dramatic form," Dodgson explains, "partly because it seemed a better way of exhibiting in alternation the arguments on the two sides of the question." The question he addressed in this literary "experiment" — writing about scientific matters in a somehow humoristic way — was clearly expressed in the prologue to the *drama*:

The object of this little book is to furnish evidence, first, that it is essential, for the purpose of teaching or examining in elementary Geometry, to employ one text-book only; secondly, that there are strong a priori reasons for retaining, in all its main features, and *specially in its treatment of parallels*, the Manual of Euclid; and thirdly, that no sufficient reasons have

¹⁸⁷ Lewis Carroll, *Curiosa Mathematica*, (London: Macmillan, 1888), 68. Quoted in Helena M. Pycior, "At the Intersection of Mathematics and Humor: Lewis Carroll's *Alices* and Symbolical Algebra," *Victorian Studies* 28, Autumn (1984): 163.

yet been shown for abandoning it in favour of any of the modern Manuals which have been offered as substitutes.¹⁸⁸

Dodgson expands on the literary form that he adopted; he writes:

I have permitted a glimpse at the comic side of things only at fitting seasons. (...) Pitying friends have warned me of the fate upon which I am rushing: they have predicted that, in thus abandoning the dignity of a scientific writer, I shall alienate the sympathies of all true scientific readers, who will regard the book as a mere *jeu d'esprit*, and will not trouble themselves to look for any serious argument in it. (...) In furtherance of the great cause which I have at heart—the vindication of Euclid's masterpiece—I am content to run some risk; thinking it far better that the purchaser of this little book should *read* it, though it be with a smile, than that, with the deepest conviction of its seriousness of purpose, he should leave it unopened on the shelf.¹⁸⁹

The drama takes place at midnight, in a College study. Minos, a university examiner who has been commissioned by the ghost of Euclid to criticize the works of his Modern Rivals, and Herr Niemand, a ghostly German Professor who appears as counsel for the authors criticized, carefully go through thirteen manuals meant to replace Euclid's *Elements* for the purpose of teaching elementary Geometry. The authors criticized are,

Legendre—the American writers, Chauvenet, Loomis, and Pierce—the English Writers, Cooley, Cuthbertson, Morell, Reynolds, Willock, Wilson, and Wright—and the Syllabus put forth by "The Association for the Improvement of Geometrical Teaching," together with Wilson's book founded on the Syllabus.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Charles L. Dodgson, *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1879), preface. Italics are mine.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

In 1885, Dodgson published a *Supplement to "Euclid and his Modern Rivals"*, in which another modern rival, M. Henrici, goes through the same critique.

The drama is divided into four acts. In the first act, Minos and his fellow examiner Rhadamanthus are discussing the problem involved in marking papers that rely on proofs from a series of different manuals of Euclid. Faced with a refutable assertion concerning parallel lines, Rhadamanthus asks Minos how he should mark the answer. Minos answers in a tone of discouragement: "Oh, give it full marks! What have we to do with logic, or truth, or falsehood, or right, or wrong? (...)" Minos is overwhelmed by all the different proofs and is willing to mark anything. Rhadamanthus leaves him caught between two huge piles of manuscripts. Minos falls asleep. In his dream, he is visited by the ghost of Euclid who has come to clarify matters concerning the new manuals of geometry and defend himself against his modern rivals. Together, they will carefully go through all manuals, with focus on the arrangement of problems or theorems and on the theorem concerning parallel lines, and eventually reject all modern textbooks.

In the last act of *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*, the ghost of Euclid reappears. Like at the beginning of each act, Dodgson gives a little introduction.

*Scene as before. Time, the early dawn. Minos slumbering uneasily, having fallen forwards upon the table, his forehead resting on the inkstand. To him enter Euclid on tip-toe, followed by the phantasms of Archimedes, Pythagoras, Aristotle, Plato, &c., who have come to see fair play.*¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Dodgson, *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*, 183.

One can wonder who these other philosophers, implicit in the term *et caetera*, might be for Dodgson. In fact, perhaps the whole of Western philosophy is included in the term. In a sense, it can be inferred that for Dodgson, every philosophical moment is concerned with Euclidean geometry and shall not neglect it in favour of other geometries, even though these “new” geometries remain fascinating ways of looking at the world in order to generate thought. He insists on the fact that the non-Euclidean geometries shall not replace Euclid’s principles, especially for the matter of introducing young students to the geometrical realm. “Euclid’s last words” are as follows:

Let me carry the hope that I have convinced you of the importance, if not the necessity, of retaining my order and numbering, and my method of treating straight Lines, angles, right angles, and (most especially) Parallels. Leave me these untouched, and I shall look on with great contentment while other changes are made – while alternative proofs are appended to mine – and while new problems and theorems are interpolated. In all these matters my Manual is capable of almost unlimited improvement.¹⁹²

This is very insightful regarding Dodgson’s position. It seems explicit that for him, the teaching of Euclidean geometry bears more implications than being solely a knowledge that can be applied rapidly and with efficiency by the students. Both from the form of the book and its content, one understands that Euclid’s principles speak about something else than mere ways of finding the most “efficient” proof for a given problem. In the Euclidean text, the logical links between a series of elements, theorems and axioms is then rather *a knowledge about knowledge*. It speaks about a mode of thought, about how ideas are

¹⁹² Ibid, 199.

connected to the perception of the world. Consequently, Dodgson's reaction is not against non-Euclidean geometries per se, seen as other ways of philosophising. Rather, his critique is directed towards a flattening of Euclid's work, a reduction of its implications and its abstraction from concrete experience. Dodgson's critique touches upon something that was inevitably bound to happen. Eventually, Euclidean geometry became a minor geometry within the realm of all possible geometries.

Dodgson insists, the axiom concerning parallels in Euclid is the most important, and the only one that shall remain untouched for teaching the basic principles of geometry. In that sense, though he seems to be open to alterations and transformations to the material present in Euclid's treatise, his position is rather clear. Since the basis for the development of the Non-Euclidean geometries relies precisely on a rejection of Euclid's theory of parallel lines, involving a collapse of the geometrical ideal onto the curvature of the earth, Dodgson's preservation of the parallelism of parallels implies, perhaps in a subtle way for today's reader, but in a manner that would have been obvious to most Nineteenth century scientists, a critique of the Non-Euclidean endeavours. From the point of view of Nineteenth century mathematicians and geometricians, and to some extent, for scientists today, Dodgson's position may indeed appear conservative, if not reactionary. But from the point of view of a reflection on the philosophy of science, it anticipates, among others, the works of Husserl, Gadamer and Bachelard, works that have overtly put into question the relevance and

hegemony of the modern scientific model as an appropriate knowledge of the things of the world.

In the history of the West, there are several different readings of Euclidean geometry and of the importance of its principles – there are, in a sense, more than one Euclid. There is the “original” Euclid, which is the most ancient: Euclid the Greek, who compiled and organised into an ordered whole the numerous fragmentary knowledge existing in Antiquity.

Then, there is Euclid the book – the *Elements* – that eventually reappeared and was revisited in early neo-platonic thought, especially through Proclus’ commentary.¹⁹³ Then started the long Euclidean era, throughout which the book was celebrated and held as one of the founding works of Western philosophical (scientific) knowledge. Euclid remained, for close to two thousand years, the only reference in geometry, as well as in most fields of human affairs, in mathematics and physics but also in politics, in military strategy, in painting, sculpture and, needless to say, in architecture, all through the middle ages and the Renaissance up until the end of the Enlightenment, surviving both the Galilean and Newtonian revolutions.

According to Plato, it is through geometry – through a geometrical way of thinking – that the philosopher is enabled to bridge the gap between the two

¹⁹³ See Proclus, *A commentary on the first book of Euclid's Elements* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

realms, to reveal the order of things in relation to the order of the cosmos. In *Gorgias*, Socrates emphasises the importance of geometry, he tells Callicles:

... that heaven and earth and gods and men are held together by communion [koinonia] and friendship [philia], by orderliness [cosmiotes], temperance [sophrosyne], and justice [dikaiotes]. ... Now you, as it seems to me, do not give the proper attention to this, for all your cleverness, but have failed to observe the great power of geometrical equality amongst both gods and men: you hold that self-advantage is what one ought to practice, because you neglect geometry.¹⁹⁴

"Geometry is the Science of Measuring the Land." In his *Mathematical Praeface to the Books of Euclid*, published in 1570, John Dee gives us a definition of this *Arte Mathematica*. What is the nature of the *land* that geometry measures? Dee refers to remote times and places, and to the wars and injustices that took place when man started to measure and divide the earthly ground, creating frontiers and naming pieces of land that became his property or the property of a nation. "Till, by Gods mercy, and mans Industry, The perfect Science of Lines, Plaines, and Solides (like a divine Justicer) gave unto every man, his owne [land]."¹⁹⁵ John Dee's definitions of both the mathematical and geometric entities reveal the paradoxical interval occupied by Euclidean geometry.

For, these beyng (in a manner) middle, betwene thinges supernaturall and naturall: are not so absolute and excellent, as thinges supernatural: nor yet so base and grosse as things natural: But are thinges immateriall: and neverthelesse, by materiall things able somewhat to be signified. And though their particular Images, by Art, are aggregable and divisible: yet the generall *Formes*, notwithstanding, are constant, unchangeable, untrāsformable and incorruptible. Neither of the sense, can they,

¹⁹⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lanb (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Loeb Classical Library, 1939) 508a.

¹⁹⁵ Dee, *The Mathematical Praeface*, 14.

at any tyme, be perceived or judged. Nor yet, for all that, in the royll mynde of man, first conceived. ... A merveyulous newtralitie have these thinges Mathematicall and also a strāge participatiō betwene thinges supernaturall, immortall, intellectual, simple, and indivisible: and thynges naturall, mortall, sensible, compounded and divisible.¹⁹⁶

The three realms of “things” are different and remain distant, even though they constantly interact. Nonetheless, the position of the geometrical entities is one of neutrality. It is precisely in this “in-between” land constituted by geometry that every man can access the *idea* of infinity.

All Magnitude, is either a Line, a Plaine or a Solid. Which Line, Plaine or Solid, of no Sense, can be perceived, nor exactly by hād (any way) represented: nor of Nature produced: But, as (by degrees) Number did come to our perceivance: So, by visible formes, we are holpen [helped] to imagine, what our Line Mathematical, is. What our point, is. So precise, are our Magnitudes, that one Line is no broader than an other: for they have no bredth: Nor our Plaines have any thicknes. Nor yet our Bodies, any weight: be they never so large of dimensiō. Our Bodyes, we can have Smaller, than either Arte or Nature can produce any: and Greater also, than all the world can comprehend.¹⁹⁷

Geometry does not measure the real earth—the earth that one experiences through the body—and it does not constitute an idea—being greater and smaller than all possible thoughts—that is to say, geometry measures a land of its own which lies in-between these two realms.

Geometry occupies a central position in the development of Western philosophy, both in the way geometry tends to be related to the expression of ideas—its inextricability from language—and to the way one constructs meaning and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 13.

understand these ideas, somehow, in geometrical terms.¹⁹⁸ Virtually, as one speaks, fragments of thoughts are organised, ideas are “shaped.” If I make a point, I follow a line (of thought) and, at times, get caught into a circular argument. In that process, the participation of the geometrical and mathematical realms is implicit. Numbers and geometric figures were understood, from early Greek philosophy until the nineteenth century, as mediators between the world of man and higher instances: they constituted a way to access knowledge. This strange interference of both the geometrical and the mathematical realms in human thinking made the most ancient philosophers believe that man's soul could be a number moving itself.¹⁹⁹

In the modern context, as the concept of knowledge acquired an unlimited quality, the world was also extended to infinity, and once infinity became part of the world—once the realm of geometry lost its position of neutrality—the geometrician sought to describe not only the simple “ideal” figures of Euclidean geometry, but all possible figures in the conic sections between these ideals. In the Seventeenth century, especially with Girard Desargues (1593-1662), a direct relationship was established between the descriptive characteristics of all

¹⁹⁸ According to Michel Serres, geometry remains outside of cultural differences, of dogmas and in the same way, outside of singular scientific moments. In that sense, geometry is common to humanity. But the *logos* it measures remains mysterious and, somehow, original to all origins. See Michel Serres, *Les origines de la géométrie* (Paris: Flammarion 1993), 13.

¹⁹⁹ In this passage, Dee expresses the primordial status of mathematics and geometry in human affairs, he refers to the most ancient philosophers, but unfortunately does not give more precision on the identity of these thinkers. John Dee, *The Mathematical Praeface to the Elements of Euclid (of Megara)*, (London: John Day 1570), 4.

geometrical figures and bodies. Desargues was the first to show that the conic sections (parabola, hyperbola, and ellipse) can be understood as perspective projections of a circle.²⁰⁰ Euclidean geometry was gradually augmented by the development of infinitesimal calculus in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth century.²⁰¹ Yet, until the Nineteenth century, the Euclidean principles, regardless of how paradoxical they may appear to the modern reader, had not yet needed to be proven. The definitions of the point and the line, for example, were “given.” The theorems were deduced from the essence of the geometrical entities; they constituted unquestionable *Truths*. The new discoveries that algebra and infinitesimal calculus represented remained more or less at the level of theory – of ideas and discourse.

²⁰⁰ As Alberto Pérez-Gómez writes: “In the context of Euclidean geometry, such continuity [among all figures and bodies] was never recognised. For each qualitatively different figure, there was a corresponding interpretation and deduction; each geometrical problem was solved according to its specific character.” Even though Desargues’s work was rejected in the context of the seventeenth century philosophical and scientific discussion, “it reveals the full and immediate impact of the epistemological revolution, opening the way to an effective technological domination of reality. See Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press 1994), 99-103. See also Girard Desargues, *The geometrical work of Girard Desargues* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1987).

²⁰¹ Even though infinitesimal calculus was important for the development of non-Euclidean geometries, it remained, until the end of the Eighteenth century, at the level of ideas. The link between infinitesimal calculus and metaphysical notions is explicit in the work of Leibniz. I perceive a kind of transposition, in his work, of the paradoxical notion of time (both linear and cyclical) to a more general notion of space, or, to be more precise, to the perception of space. His work also evidences how ideas create images in the mind: it illustrates how geometry participates in the understanding of complex notions. See Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1973).

At the beginning of the Nineteenth century, a new Euclid, a third incarnation perhaps, was forged by mathematicians. The most radical transformation in the understanding of the Euclidean principles occurred: Euclid's axiom about the parallelism of lines was questioned. What if parallel lines did meet somewhere further than the farthest imaginable distance – somewhere at infinity?

Though this important Euclidean axiom was questioned, the scientific milieu of the Nineteenth century did not entirely reject Euclidean geometry—it was gradually relegated to a small corner of the larger field of the new non-Euclidean geometries but remained at the basis of much of this new knowledge. Euclid was questioned but nonetheless remained the point of departure towards a more global all-encompassing theory that would account for the whole of human experience; it became a particular instrument, one of many, within a broader and more generalised geometry. As Bachelard writes:

[Modern] science is like a half-renovated city, wherein the new (the non-Euclidean, say) stands side by side with the old (the Euclidean). (...) Non-Euclidean geometry was not invented in order to contradict Euclidean geometry. It is more in the nature of an adjunct, which makes possible an extension of the idea of geometry to its logical conclusion, subsuming Euclidean and non-Euclidean alike in an overarching "pan-geometry."²⁰²

In that sense, non-Euclidean geometry developed in phase with modern science in an attempt to reach a more complete understanding of things.

Dodgson's insistence on the preservation of Euclid's axiom concerning parallels points to another problem inherent to the modern context. As Nietzsche notes in

²⁰² Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit*, 8.

Twilight of the Idols, it is rather the passage from the realm of scientific discourses to the world of experience—to practical applications—that has had a series of consequences. For him, modern science has transformed the world into a fable. Through the process, the real world was not only destroyed but, following that destruction, the world of appearances was also abolished.²⁰³ What Nietzsche sees as the destruction of the world and its consequent transformation into an imaginary entity did not happen overnight. The disparity between the world as “reality” and the world as “appearance” had gradually been increasing: it begun with Cartesianism. With Descartes, modern man found a new state of existence as a thinking being and was allowed to step outside of the materiality of the world in order to observe, reason upon and eventually understand the order of things, from a distant point of view. Body and mind were separated in a drastic way, the body was caught in the homogenous space—the space of the *res extensa*—while the mind of the thinking subject could travel outside of this space, freed from cosmological fears and limitations. In the Cartesian view, the mind became a geometrical point—an immobile point—from which the subject was enabled to access the objective mathematical truths in the world.

Hence, there seems to be an insoluble paradox in the modern spirit. The real world was transformed into an ideal version of itself and subsequently, this idealisation was used to create a new reality—a new world that, in turn, was given the status of the *real*. As Nietzsche writes: “it is not the victory of science that distinguishes our Nineteenth century, but the victory of scientific method

²⁰³ Nietzsche, *Crépuscule des idoles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 30-32.

over science."²⁰⁴ The following passage from Bachelard echoes the Nietzschean observation:

Wonderworking reason designs its own miracles. Science conjures up a world, by means not of magic immanent in reality but of rational impulses immanent in mind. The first achievement of the scientific spirit was to create reason in the image of the world; modern science has moved on to the project of constructing a world in the image of reason. Scientific work makes rational entities real, in the full sense of the word.²⁰⁵

There was a shift in what constitutes the purpose of science: from being the expression of a vision of the world—a philosophy—it gradually transformed into a power to decipher, that is to say, a method to frame a relatively fixed knowledge of the world.

The Euclid of today, the fourth one perhaps, was somehow reduced to figures bound to a grid in three-dimensional space.²⁰⁶ Nowadays, Euclidean geometry is too often equated with Cartesian space and, in that sense, the Euclidean principles tend to be misconceived. They are understood as stiff, instrumental and systematised explanations of reality, while non-Euclidean geometries are

²⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 261, no. 466.

²⁰⁵ Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit*, 13.

²⁰⁶ In most current theories in physics and mathematics, Euclid, and to some extent, Newton, may become only specific cases of more wide ranging explanations of the universe, they nonetheless remain valid. Both apparently become inadequate when dealing with the infinitesimally small—the uncertain position of sub-atomic particles, in extremely small amounts of time—and the tremendously large—the position of stars, satellites and black holes in remote galaxies.

seen as new formal realms that describe reality and the universe more accurately.

In that sense, Euclidean space is seen as rigid, uniform and static.²⁰⁷

However, in one's tactile experience, in which hands follow the edges of a table, parallel lines *do not* meet. For the eyes, looking toward the horizon, they *do* appear to meet. For the painter, willing to create an image that would convey a sense of the real, they *do* meet on the canvas. For Euclid, in this *entre-deux* occupied by geometry, parallel lines are parallel. They remain geometrical entities and therefore, they *do not* meet. "But who would need parallel lines to meet," wrote Dodgson in *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*. For the Nineteenth-century new-geometricians, they meet somewhere at infinity, and because infinity has become part of the world, they meet somewhere in the thickness of the trace left by the pen, or at the south pole.

In the history of architectural theory and practice, geometry had a privileged status in relation to embodied experience. To "build" constitutes a way to bring some order, to set boundaries, to transform the apparent chaos of the world into some kind of "place." It is *geo-metrical* in that, through the process, the *earth is measured*. Not only does the construction process imply "measuring" in a practical sense, but it is, similarly to all human making, a way to hint at the unspeakable, a manner of defining our condition as human beings in the world.

²⁰⁷ Though the limitations of a Cartesian vision of the world are generally acknowledged, it seems that, through a very modern twist, Euclid was also associated, merely equated with this central aspect of Descartes philosophy. This may appear as a benign misunderstanding, but it has had important consequences in science, in the arts, and in architecture.

From Vitruvius until the end of the Eighteenth century, geometry is discussed prominently in all architectural treatises. In the modern architectural context, the status of geometry also changes until it becomes a mere instrument of applied technology, as it appears in the work of Durand. As Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier explain in *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*,

“Durand’s *mécanisme de la composition* supported his new rational and specialised theory, free from metaphysical speculations. ... In his *précis*, Durand expressed the notion that architects should be unconcerned with meaning; if the architectural problem was efficiently solved, meaning would follow. ... The aim was to represent the project objectively; the subjective observer we associate with perspective’s point of view was consistently ignored”²⁰⁸

After Durand, geometry is no longer understood as an art—as something that mediated between the human and the divine. In the minds of the engineer-architects who followed Durand’s *précis*, geometry is a design mechanism, an extremely simplified geometrical object: a grid on which plans, sections and elevations could be drawn with efficiency. In the current context, geometry is reduced to the status of a “tool” that the architect can use more or less arbitrarily.

In order to be applied in a practical manner, geometry had to be “mathematised.” Historically from Ancient Greece throughout the Christian West, the passage from the realm of sensible life to that of ideal objects was guided by a series of more or less explicit, more or less systematised rules. The categories of knowledge previously used as mediators—rhetoric, grammar,

²⁰⁸ Alberto Pérez-Gómez, and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press 1997) 298-299.

mathematics, geometry, astronomy, etc.—did not entirely survive the rationalisation movement begun by the Enlightenment's *philosophes*, nor could they withstand the new techno-scientific methodology that developed in Carroll's time. The passage between the two distinct realms, the ideal and the real, gradually collapsed. And so, more or less since the beginning of modernity, the tendency to rid language of all distances or ambiguities represents a central aspect of all scientific endeavours. The scientific tradition shows a general will toward more "literality". The language of science is as wordless as it is possible to do so. As a mode of transmission, the "language-system" of mathematics is much clearer and less ambiguous than any other form of writing or speech. In Dodgson/Carroll's lifetime, the implicit link between science and philosophy (their common rhetorical search for meaning) was broken. The language of science, the abstract language of mathematics, acquired a higher status of truth than the "vulgar" language of everyday communication; in the mind of the scientists, the mathematical formulas became accurate "models" of reality since the whole of creation could be described in algebraic terms.²⁰⁹ This new abstract language was meant to resolve the distance between the words of discursive language and what they describe. Nineteenth-century scientists in newly specialised and autonomous disciplines participated with great enthusiasm in the scientific endeavour; for them, science appeared as the only possible way to find the "true" nature of things. The scientific quest became a means to achieve a

²⁰⁹ Algebra is an absolute language and its signs no longer refer to reality. It is an abstract language in which numbers do not have symbolic values. Even infinity (∞) becomes a number for the mere end of solving mathematical problems.

complete and perfect understanding of the sensible reality that surrounds us. This hegemonic status given to positive knowledge was beginning to weaken other modes of expressing reality. The status of art, of literature and, eventually, of architecture, had to be redefined and remains secondary to this day. Carroll's "care" for words and meaning is interesting once read in that context. In his literary experiments, Carroll effectively stages the principles developed by the non-Euclidean geometers: he pushes space to its limits. Parallel lines are allowed to meet in Wonderland and opposite directions to coincide. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, space literally extends to infinity and movement becomes ideal. Carroll's stories are parodies—the reader's experiences the spatial and temporal qualities of the works as absurd. In that sense, Carroll's stories can also be read as critiques of the new geometries. And yet, the playful quality of the work produces more than a mere critique: Carroll also creates an open field for such geometrical experimentation to take place, through poetic language. The poetic dimension of the works allows for the participation of the reader, provoking a reflection on the limits of geometry, but also, revealing its potential as a mode of thinking, a way of framing knowledge, of understanding.

As I have shown, Carroll's concerns for geometry and logic are always grounded in issues of languages. Throughout his work, he not only emphasises how mathematical equations, geometric notions and, to some extent, the rhetorical structure of a text are inextricable from the ambiguity of words, he also creates a secure ground for such historical mediators to be simultaneously questioned and revisited. In the last section of this chapter, I will briefly take a look at Carroll's

discussion of one of the founding paradoxes of Western philosophy, Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise. This will allow me to further develop the idea, already brought forth in my analysis of the *Alice* books, that an understanding of notions like space and time is bound to words, to language, and therefore entertain a special relationship to nonsense.

Within the tradition of Western philosophy, one of the most famous paradoxes can be revisited in the work of Zeno of Elea (around 490-485 BC.) who was a student of Parmenides. The paradox of "Achilles" was formulated, taking place in a series of arguments, in order to enrich the ideas of Zeno's master; it arose in the middle of the quarrel between Parmenides and Heraclitus concerning the nature of *Being* in relation to human knowledge. On that matter, the two schools of thought were radically opposed.²¹⁰ Yet, both masters were dealing with the same problem; they observed a hiatus between the realm of ideas and that of the

²¹⁰ For Parmenides, the Being which fills everything is unique, immobile and immutable, even though this idea may appear contradictory to one's experience of the world, which seems to be in a constant stage of change. For him, knowledge is perception, through reason, of the immutability of the One; thinking and being are identical; movement is an illusion. On the other hand, Heraclites posits becoming—the constant flow of time and the perpetual flux of things—as the basic principle. He may be seen as developing the first instance of dialectical thinking: he states that everything has to be conceived in relation to its contrary and that the One is, in itself, two-fold. For Heraclitus, movement is the reality of the world which is in perpetual flux, and immobility is only an appearance. The river-image illustrates that conception: "Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow. (...) They scatter and (...) gather (...) come together and flow away (...) approach and depart." This is a very brief summary of the ideas of both thinkers in which I wanted to emphasise how their position can be read as opposites. My explanation is based on the work of G. S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London: Cambridge University Press 1957, 1983) 195, 250-253.

sensory experience of the world. Zeno's aim was to emphasise the immutability of *Being* against the fluctuating nature of *becoming*. He produced a series of four paradoxes or arguments meant to show that the hypothesis of movement understood as a temporal change of "position" leads to a contradiction. In two of these arguments, the idea of time is contradictory.

The first one, the paradox of the "Arrow," goes as follows. If one posits a concept of time as a *succession of distinct instants*, and considers the movement of an arrow (from the moment it leaves the bow of the archer to its final position reaching the target), dividing this movement into an infinite series of positions, it is possible to infer that, in each of these positions—in each of these *now(s)*—the arrow is immobile. It follows that in the infinity of all its possible positions, the arrow does not move and shall never reach the target.

On the other hand, if one posits time as an infinite *continuum*, the paradox of "Achilles" arises. An early recount of it can be found in Aristotle's *Physics*. "The second (of Zeno's paradoxes) is the so-called 'Achilles', and it amounts to this, that in a race the quickest runner can never overtake the slowest, since the pursuer must first reach the point whence the pursued started, so that the slower must always hold a lead."²¹¹ Achilles, the fast and strong Greek warrior, shall never win the race against the Tortoise, the slowest imaginable runner, because the Tortoise was given an advantage and left before him. This is due to the fact that Achilles "has to reach the point from which the Tortoise started, and then

²¹¹ From Aristotle's *Physics*, as quoted in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 272.

the point the Tortoise had reached when he reached its starting point, and so on *ad infinitum*.”²¹²

Consequently, even though the distance between the runners is gradually reduced, it never disappears. Zeno’s main concern may have been to show the illusory aspect of movement, yet the series of paradoxes he formulated has had consequences in philosophy, from Antiquity onwards; philosophers attempts to resolve the problem of the infinite regression are numerous.²¹³ These early paradoxes reveal how time can be imagined simultaneously as a series of instants *and* an infinite continuum.

Lewis Carroll brought the paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise to another level, introducing its protagonists to the problem of language. In *What The Tortoise Said to Achilles*, the Greek warrior “had overtaken the Tortoise” (in *real* life, a strong and fast Greek warrior would catch up with a slow tortoise, even if the tortoise was given the advantage of leaving the starting line in advance) “and had seated himself comfortably on its back.”²¹⁴ The two characters start a conversation.

“So you’ve got to the end of our race-course?” said the Tortoise. “Even though it *does* consist of an infinite series of

²¹² Kirk, Raven, Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 272.

²¹³ In *Avatars of the Tortoise*, Borges puts together a list of those who have formulated explanations for the paradox. The list goes as follows: Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Mill, Rouvier, Goerg Cantor, Gompres, Russell, Bergson. See Jorge Luis Borges, “Avatars of the Tortoise,” in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions Books 1962), 207.

²¹⁴ Lewis Carroll, “What The Tortoise Said to Achilles,” in *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions 1996), 1104.

distances? I thought some wiseacre or other had proved that the thing couldn't be done?"

"It *can* be done," said Achilles. "It has been done! *Solvitur ambulando*. You see the distances were constantly *diminishing*: and so—"

"But if they had been constantly increasing?" the Tortoise interrupted. "How then?"²¹⁵

The Tortoise proposes to tell Achilles the story of such a race-course, in which the distances would increase infinitely. Achilles is quite excited and offers to write down, in his note-book, the successive steps of the race. The conversation goes on:

"That beautiful proposition of Euclid!" the Tortoise murmured dreamily. "You admire Euclid?"

"Passionately! So far, at least, as one can admire a treatise that won't be published for some centuries to come!"

"Well, now, let's take a little bit of the argument in that first proposition—just two steps, and the conclusion drawn from them. ...And, in order to refer to them conveniently, let's call them *A*, *B* and *Z*:

(A) Things that are equal to the same are equal to each other.

(B) The two sides of this Triangle are things that are equal to the same.

(Z) The two sides of this Triangle are equal to each other."²¹⁶

Achilles accepts the logical sequence as valid, but the race is just about to begin and the Tortoise puts him in a rather contriving position, accepting the premises *A* and *B*, yet denying that they automatically justify the conclusion. Achilles is forced to interpolate a hypothetical proposition in order to convince the Tortoise of the logical validity of the conclusion. The intermediary proposition can be called *C*, and goes as follows:

(C) If *A* and *B* are valid, *Z* is valid.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 1105.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 1106.

Achilles writes it down in his book. Having made this brief clarification, the Tortoise accepts the validity of *A*, *B* and *C*, but not of *Z*. Achilles, indignant, interpolates:

(D) If *A*, *B* and *C* are valid, *Z* is valid.

And then, not with a certain resignation:

(E) If *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* are valid, *Z* is valid.

In Lewis Carroll's version of the paradox, the distances do not diminish, they grow.²¹⁷ The Tortoise insists: " 'Until I've granted *that* [referring to proposition (E)], of course, I needn't grant *Z*. So it's quite a *necessary* step, you see?' 'I see,' said Achilles; and there was a touch of sadness in his tone."²¹⁸ A few months later the narrator of the story goes back to recount the race. At that point Achilles is writing down another line. In his note-book, there are one thousand and one of these intermediary propositions.

What the Carrollian conversation between Achilles and the Tortoise reveals is that such notions as time or movement, in order to be understood not only as abstract logical notions, but also as ideas, as philosophical concepts, are bound to words and to the relationship induced by words in reasoning. As Bertrand Russell points out, the infinite argument around the hypothetical proposition has to be made concrete, using a word like "therefore," a word that implies a

²¹⁷ I owe this passage to Borges's "Avatars of the Tortoise." Borges points out that the infinite regression, *regressus in infinitum*, is perhaps applicable to all subject matters, revealing the intricate relationship between logic, words and philosophy. See "Avatars of the Tortoise," 206-7.

²¹⁸ Lewis Carroll, "What The Tortoise Said to Achilles," 1107.

decision of the truth or falsehood of the premises involved in the syllogism.²¹⁹ In that sense, not only does Lewis Carroll acknowledge the insolubility of Zeno's paradox, he stretches it further, illustrating the importance of language and the inevitable ambivalence that results from the problematic aspect of words.

As Borges explains using William James's argument, "not only does the paradox of Zeno of Elea trigger the reality of space, but also that of time which is thinner and more vulnerable. I would add that it puts in a state of emergency the notion of existence within a physical body, the idea of permanent immutability, and the flow of a night in one's life."²²⁰ Borges concludes, giving his personal opinion: "Zeno cannot be contradicted, unless we force ourselves to acknowledge space and time as *ideals*."²²¹

The Nineteenth century was the century of the great reversal of time and the fall into history. It is throughout that period that the concept of time saw its most drastic systematisation. Following the important Kantian reversal, through which the concept of time got isolated from the idea of movement, movement was no longer subordinated to time. In order to express this transformation of the concept of time after Kant, Deleuze writes, using a verse from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*,

²¹⁹ See Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937).

²²⁰ Jorge L. Borges, "La course perpetuelle d'Achille et de la tortue," in *Discussion* (Paris: Œuvres complètes, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1993), 247. My translation.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 248. The translation and italics are mine.

time is out of joint, time is unhinged. The hinges are the axis on which the door turns. The hinge, *Cardo*, indicates the subordination of time to precise cardinal points, through which the periodic movements it measures pass. As long as time remains on its hinges, it is subordinated to extensive movement; it is the measure of movement, its interval or number. This characteristic of ancient philosophy has often been emphasized: the subordination of time to the circular movement of the world as the turning door, a revolving door, a labyrinth opening onto its eternal origin.²²²

Time and movement remain in a close relationship but the roles are inverted. "It is now movement which is subordinated to time." The geometric figure of the concept of time changes or else, it is observed from a different point of view.

Time thus becomes unilinear and rectilinear, no longer in the sense that it would measure a derived movement, but in and through itself, insofar as it imposes the succession of its determination on every possible movement. It ceases to be cardinal and becomes ordinal, the order of an empty time. (...) The labyrinth takes on a new look – neither a circle nor a spiral, but a thread, a pure straight line, all the more mysterious in that it is simple, inexorable, terrible.²²³

Even though the cyclical dimension of archaic time, at a daily basis and through the calendar, can still be perceived, the general concept of time is now linear. Time, as it is generally conceived, is the linear time of modern history. The time line extends infinitely in both directions, but the future remains unforeseeable. With the transformation of the scientific mind-set in the modern era, the concept of time and, consequently, the notion of space tend to be idealised and detached from the reality of experience. With scientific positivism and the Industrial Revolution that took place in the second half of the Nineteenth century, this

²²² Gilles Deleuze, *Essays critical and clinical*, trans. D. W. Smith, M. A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997), 27.

²²³ *Ibid*, 28.

idealisation reached a kind of paroxysm. Within that context, Carroll's subtle position becomes highly relevant. It is indeed a *poor* sort of memory that only reaches in the past, and it may be implied, in the Queen's remark, that "memory" and "imagination" are similar modes of perception; that the mind is able to travel in both directions, that there can only be, in one's experience, a double *reading* of time. Time is both *linear* and *cyclical*, simultaneously. On the one hand, time is a constant repetition of the same present. On the other hand, there is nothing but the past, always subsisting, and the future, always insisting.

For Zeno, movement is only secondary. What comes first is the immutability of the "One." However, in the reality of embodied experience, the arrow will easily reach the general vicinity of the target. It is only when it's trajectory is re-stated through language and submitted to the rules of logic that thinking can be pushed towards its limits and that the paradox can emerge. A paradox can only take place at the limits of thought, in the "unthinkable space"²²⁴ that sometimes finds its way between words and things, as the dual aspect of the real is framed in discourse, through language. Language can be limiting that way. Yet in singular instances such as poetic expressions, works of art, and, I would argue, certain architectural experiences, two opposites can actually be brought closer to the

²²⁴ In his preface to *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault refers to Borge's mention of a Chinese encyclopedia where there are apprehended, in some incongruous and heterogenous way, that is to say according to unconceivable rubrics (for us), things (in this case animals) that by their own charaterisation, could not be encountered anywhere else than in the outside of language, where any common sense of place and name dissolve (*atopie, aphasie*). Borge's encyclopedia opens up an where it is impossible for us to name, to speak, to think — an unthinkable space. See Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 8-11.

point that they no longer appear to be separated. The poetic expression of the paradox produces an ambivalent yet evocative image—a coincidence of opposites in the sense proposed by Paz—that somehow accounts for the complexity of experience.

Constantly throughout his work, Carroll carefully stages commonly accepted ideas and logical rules, only to subvert them through unexpected shifts in direction. His peculiar use of words often reveals the paradoxical nature of meaning and the inescapable coexistence of antagonistic notions, hence creating strange, temporary coincidences that almost invariably provoke laughter. It is this unstable and therefore enigmatic quality of Carroll's nonsense that prevents a clear, complete understanding, always placing the reader in a liminal condition in relation to sense, to meaning. The "event" of recognition that can then take place is at the root of processes of understanding, but, if meaning can resurface thus, this emerging remains temporary, ineffable, fragile. Carroll's nonsense is a mode of writing through which the logical, semantic structure of language—the English language of his time—is, indeed, "endangered." The "violence" inherent to such linguistic processes; it is a necessary condition for making in the context of modernity, a condition which involves a kind of leap forward into the void and the acceptance of chance as necessity; a desire to engage, to play.

Throughout his work, Carroll unravels the idea that time is purely quantitative and space a homogeneous, geometric entity or a combination of co-ordinates. Pushing language to its outer limits, he creates a language of his own to express lingering questions in an indirect and playful manner—through nonsense and humour. Language ceases to be a fixed system but is continuously growing into something else: a language that is alive. Words engage in a dance, they play, and sometimes they devour each other: Snark! In the present study, I have examined how meaning unfolds through the experience of Carroll's literature – insisting on the importance of nonsense in processes of understanding. Focussing on the participation of language in the perception of space, and more especially of built space, that is, of architecture, this study reveals the presence, in Carroll's work, of a subterranean architectural discussion that can be accessed by examining the relationship of space to plays on/of language.

First of all, the study of Carroll's architectural pamphlets brings to light the problem of defining a common ground between architect and observer; it stresses the problematic relationship of language and meaning to one's experience of a work. In the pamphlets, Carroll's critique of the belfry and its architects points to the larger issue of style, and to its limited capacity for generating meaningful built form. The discussion also raises questions concerning the modern paradigm of novelty. The texts emphasise how the symbolic dimension of architecture is tied to its tradition in ways that cannot be

systematised into a simple grammar of forms, but that rather emerges through speech, through the observer's attempts at framing an understanding of the building in words, through language.

Second, the analysis of the spaces experienced by Alice in the two *Alice* books is insightful. In these two stories, Carroll experiments with the notion of space and time by pushing them both to their extreme limits. Through such processes, movement is problematised—it becomes either a pure alteration or an ideal translation. In doing this, Carroll hints at how one's sense of place is threatened once space and time are abstracted from embodied experience, thus becoming entirely "other." Carroll also stresses the participation of language in the perception of things: for Alice, language acts as a grounding element that allows her to navigate through the convoluted spaces of both Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world.

Other observations concerning the dual quality of space as it is experienced can be derived from the study of the Alice books and summarised as follows: on the one hand, space is a stable, measurable quantity (an unlimited extension in the Cartesian sense). However, if understood from this point of view only, space is homogenised; subjects become objects in space. In such conditions, horizontality, verticality and depth are equivalent, with no particular qualitative aspect.²²⁵ This

²²⁵ As Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains in *Phenomenology of Perception*, one's experience of height is very different from that of horizontal distances. Moreover, depth is perceived (in movement), not only through vision, but also through touch, smell, hearing and taste. The link

allows for some of the situations in the *Alice* books to make sense within the logic of the works themselves. However, as I have shown, the feeling of absurdity that these situations generate for the reader points to the problem inherent in conceiving space that way. The concept of space has to be conceived in a dual manner. Space as it is experienced is always “in the making,” that is, constantly altered by one’s perception and in that sense, it is bound, limited. But understanding space from the point of view of its second incarnation only – as a pure interiority – is also problematic, especially in terms of how one can frame an understanding of oneself. The geometric quality of space, the fact that it can be measured and may possess a certain order allows one to imagine an elsewhere into which one can project. Knowing that something exists further away – that space “goes on” – is key for one to situate oneself, to forge a sense of place in relation to “other” places, to find a way to relate to one’s surroundings. There are no neutral spaces. There is always a horizon: something close or something far away, an inside that touches an outside. Space is perceived and constructed through one’s moving body and with one’s eyes. Perception also engages the world in which it occurs; it qualifies space.²²⁶ This means that, in some sense, knowledge develops around and within the centre of one’s perception and, in turn, knowledge conditions perception as it grows. This particularly human way of living in space is intimately connected to how one frames an understanding of “being somewhere.” The cognitive processes associated with perception of space

between perception and reason (body and mind), and between man and the world, involves one’s temporal existence. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 255.

²²⁶ See “Mises en perspective philosophique : rencontre avec Henri Maldiney,” *L’Architecture au corps*. Brussels: Ousia, 1997.

are not deliberate, or even conscious: they represent “dormant” knowledge. The knowledge thus “incorporated” originates from one’s experience of things and is eventually translated—it continuously takes shape in/through language. In *Le visible et l’invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks about the position of the philosopher in regards to the world. He writes:

Il est vrai à la fois que le monde est *ce que nous voyons* et que, pourtant, il nous faut apprendre à le voir. En ce sens d’abord que nous devons égaler par le savoir cette vision, en prendre possession, *dire ce que c’est que nous* et ce que c’est que *voir*, faire donc comme si nous n’en savions rien, comme si nous avions là-dessus tout à apprendre.²²⁷

From the point of view of phenomenology, it becomes apparent that however pre-reflective the perception of sensible reality may be, it remains, first and foremost, linguistic. For Merleau-Ponty, like for Husserl before him, there is no way out of language, just as there is no way out of the human world, out of space and time. For that reason, questions about language are hard to address (they are always addressed from within, through language itself). In that sense, language is inseparable from modes of knowing—it makes possible the formulation, in discourse, of a perceived order in the world of sensible things.

The study of Carroll’s *Snark* reinforces the idea that the exteriority of space is necessary for one to forge a sense of being. The poem also exposes how one’s desire to “know”—one’s impulse towards understanding—is often stronger than the logical processes used to approach any object of research. The text reveals the

²²⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 18.; the italics are in the original.

power of poetic expression in framing knowledge of things. Perception always already takes place in the world—it is already conditioned by a series of a priori experiences, discursive or embodied. Words are always already there behind, or beneath one's encounter with the things of the world. The participation of language in the formation of one's understanding of a place, a building, a room, is undeniable. The experience of things cannot be dissociated from understanding, and vice-versa. In the same way, one's experience does not happen before, or outside of intellectual constructs—there is no such thing as a raw perception. Perception is a discursive category, a concept forged to account for the importance of the body and the senses in one's encounter with things, and in that sense, it can never be isolated from, on the one hand, the things of the world and, on the other, a process of intellectual construction that gives it its weight, that frames it, through language, in order to stabilise one's experience, to put it in *perspective*.

Finally, the study of Dodgson/Carroll's scientific writings points to the crucial status of geometry and logic as mediators between thoughts and experience. The two texts stress the presence of paradox at the core of one's experience while, at the same time, they allow for connections to be traced between the scientific and the artistic—between scientific discourse and poetic utterance—emphasising once more how the very nature of common language always implies the underlying presence of its beyond. The formation of meaning depends on its co-presence with the proliferation of signification proper to nonsense. For Carroll, geometrical notions, mathematical problems, hypotheses and formulas can only

take shape in words, thought processes that involve the desiring mind/body of the observer.

Conclusions can also be drawn from the point of view of the reader's experience of Carroll's work. These relate to the formation of meanings at the limits of language—the participation of nonsense in the formation of sense. Carroll's work shows the importance of the enigma as a mode of keeping things "in the making." For the reader, the works convey the idea of a structure, of a game to be played, of an enigmatic thread to be found and lost. The experience of the work provides one with a sense of "being in touch" that cannot be theorised.

Carroll's own mode of approaching language—his mode of writing—is itself insightful. The logic of "play" inherent to the work in relation to its re-activation by the observer is crucial. Carroll's inner destruction/weakening of language is not an end in itself—the work also engages in a reconfiguration of language. Carroll invites the reader to take care of sense because he has already taken great care with sounds, with words. His writing is carefully structured and constructed following rules that have been historically passed on; he relies on traditional literary genres. Through parody, the genre is both preserved and altered. In that sense, Carroll's work is self-reflective, at times meta-linguistic, but this is not the sole goal of the endeavour. The work reveals a care for beauty, proportion and rhythm that is at the heart of Carroll's mode of writing. Working within the limits of language, precisely at the limits, Carroll carefully sets the meaning of words in motion, thus preserving the ambiguous quality of

language—its inherent poetic potential. His work presents an implicit critique that always travels underground and can only be accessed obliquely. He favours the ambiguity of the “expressed” over the accuracy of representation. Through nonsense, paradoxes are staged; the polysemy of language is celebrated.

If paradoxes can thus be staged through literary experiments and produce poetic images, what are then the mechanisms available to achieve a similar effort through built objects and entire buildings? Can the paradoxical nature of our encounter with the world be stabilised and yet remain free of authoritarian, systematised and control oriented modes of action? What would it mean for architecture—as discourse and building—to embody the paradoxical nature of experience as effectively as certain works of literature? Could such a mode of thinking about architecture allow for an acknowledgement of the complexity of one’s perception and understanding of space? I do not think it is possible to propose a clearly identifiable methodology that could be applied directly in order to achieve such results in architecture. Nor do I wish to suggest any specific architectural examples. What I can propose, however, are some loose guidelines.

As I have emphasised, the experience of architecture can never be reduced to its physical reality as an object that can be measured. The ever-present quality of architecture in modern cities means that it is often understood as a given—as a technological and, at times, artistic artefact relegated to the background of human activities. In that sense, the experience of architecture is never fully

conscious. But architecture does produce boundaries—it delineates, separates and conceals. Architecture also presents something of what lies within. It exposes relationships, hierarchies. Buildings, as well as the organisation of cities and modes of inhabiting, show the inherent order—or disorder—of a given society. In that sense, architecture is never simply an infrastructure; it is always symbolic. Its simple presence in space and time produces in the minds/bodies of those who encounter it and live in it potentially meaningful images.

It is through one's perception that space is created—unfolds—but this unfolding is never fully achieved; a building can never be grasped entirely. In order to avoid "folding the fold" and thus eliminating the possibility of the observer's participation when engaging with a work, the in-between quality of architectural experience cannot be "represented." On the other hand, the basic formal qualities of architecture—its geometric and material presence—are essential for the unfolding of space to actually take place. In that sense, attempts to reject form in order to literally "build" formless spaces are problematic. In the same way, understanding the geometric attributes of the building as "truth" is also reductive. It thus becomes clear that when meaning is rather approached from the point of view of positive truth there is a danger of foreclosing the space of perception, impairing the experience of the work and leading, as was the case for the experience of the belfry in Carroll's architectural pamphlets, to incommunicability.

Works of architecture, like works of art in general, are more or less open to interpretation depending on their nature. In the case of buildings that are approached as touristic landmarks, the level of attention—or insistence towards meaning—is usually rather high. Such buildings, whether they represent timeless masterpieces or fleeting fashion pieces, are generally approached with high expectations and open-mindedness, with a desire to engage with their potential symbolic dimension and complexity. Experienced in their specific context (historical and/or current), it is assumed that these important buildings will reveal something about the society that built them, providing the observer, in an almost archaeological manner, with indications on the modes of living of the members of such a society, their common and individual wealth, political choices or religious beliefs. On the other hand, spaces experienced over and over in everyday life are perhaps less conducive to the production and reception of meaning. The mode of apprehension of such omnipresent architecture as one's house, office building, gym, shopping centre, and so on is sometimes insidious. The experience of day-to-day buildings is primarily embodied and therefore cannot be translated directly, or literally, into discourse. In effect, a large portion of one's understanding of architecture, both major and minor, that is, of the ways one gets to "know" it, is indeed latent. It constitutes itself latently, unconsciously, at the meeting point of embodied perception and discourse, and never makes its way, permanently, into the realm of theory. Space is not perceived in a homogeneous way. One's perception of built spaces evokes the successive retellings of a poem—some stanzas become more familiar while some others remain obscure. The way these "fragments" of perceived depths of spaces are

brought together does not function according to a rational process. It rather follows the logic of nonsense. It is the alternation of “known” territories²²⁸ and less-known spaces that creates a rhythm. Meanings are forged by relationships, through the connections traced between fragments—in this in between zone that is the very site of the action, of events, of the simultaneous disclosure/concealment of meaning. Moreover, the possible meaning generated through the experience of architecture is difficult to verbalise, unless one relies on figures of speech that belong to the realm of poetic, i.e. oblique, expression. If architecture expresses something that can be interpreted, it takes the shape of a transformed, recreated message rather than of a direct, unequivocal transmission. The “sense” conveyed to the observer through the experience of a building may possess a linguistic, even narrative quality, but this quality, and the analogy that can be derived from it, can hardly be approached as a system.

Any attempt to “linguicise” architecture following a prescriptive methodology will not fully encompass the breadth of the architectural experience. There is a very important difference between the language used in poems, in discourse and in everyday communication, and the concept of an architectural “language.” That difference is rarely acknowledged and the building is too easily compared to the book—to a text (or subtext). As Perez-Gomez reminds us,

“our experience of architecture, or of the world in general, is in no way identical to our experience of the imaginary world

²²⁸ It is in such territories that one can walk at night and find one’s way without seeing anything. It is in such space that one happens to know every detail of a wall, every crack in a floor, the very disposition of each object.

opened up by our encounter with the succession of words on a page. The narrative dimension of architecture cannot completely be reduced to a succession of words organised in sentences and which convey, more or less directly and following (more or less depending on the nature of the work, whether it be the Homeric verses or Joyce's disorienting prose) some grammatical, syntactic and semiotic rules."²²⁹

One does not "read" architecture.

For the liminal aspect of architectural space to be productive, it has to be set in relation to its more stable aspect as a physical structure. Understood in its most direct sense, architecture does serve a very simple purpose: it creates physical boundaries. Buildings set limits between the inside and the outside, the up and the down, the left and the right, providing humans with shelter and relative security. As physical objects in a space generally understood as homogenous (i.e. Cartesian²³⁰), buildings stand still as one moves about and around them. One effectively spends most of his or her life going in and out of buildings, more or less easily, depending on one's physical condition, on some authorisation of access, and so on. If one remains outside, one nonetheless travels through spaces that are bound and defined by buildings (streets, parks, public places, etc.). Outdoor spaces are themselves architectural, constructed, limited. The experience of the world is bounded. As one walks out of a place to an exterior

²²⁹ From Alberto Pérez-Gómez, unpublished manuscript, 2003.

²³⁰ Though it is generally agreed that space is more than what the Cartesian understanding provides us with, this understanding nevertheless remains the hegemonic way to approach space in the techno-scientific world.

space, one is somehow hurled out into a space from which one can never really walk out.²³¹

The spaces of daily experience cannot be dissociated from issues of control and power. Foucault's work has shown how mechanisms of visual control condition the way space is understood in the modern context. In recent years, a new phenomenon has been noticed. Mechanisms of control have taken a more insidious form—they have dissolved into a network of checkpoints (tightly linked to capitalism). Control is now operating via the information gathered unnoticeably at each checkpoint, mainly through how one purchases but also as one is transiting from place to place.²³² This new informational aspect of the experience of space does not mean that the space of visual control has disappeared. The two levels actually reinforce one another. In that sense, and this is the last point that I wish to make, the modern dichotomy between inside and outside has to be challenged. Through processes of deception and surprise, which involve the idea of play, the observer can be projected into an elsewhere, and internal exteriority (or an external interiority) that allows him or her to understand what "here" means in relation to an "elsewhere." One's individual sense of place is forged by thinking through the "other."²³³

²³¹ See Georges Perec, *Espèces d'espaces* (Paris: Éditions Gallilée, 1974).

²³² On this notion of boundaries as networks of information, see Zournazi, "Navigating Movements: A Conversation with Brian Massumi," esp. 227-302.

²³³ On the notion of "thinking oneself as other," see Paul Ricoeur, *The conflict of interpretations*.

In that sense, in the current context of urban wandering and global *presence* (rendered possible by the new communication technologies) the position of architecture is interesting. In contrast with the fluctuating and unforeseeable processes associated with the current mode of living, the inherent stability and, to some extent, the clarity with which architecture “occupies” space reinforces its potential to subvert control mechanisms and to put inside and outside in more dynamic relationship. For that matter, the question of its meaning and the exploration of its poetic quality seems even more timely. Even though, as architects, we are bound to acknowledge the difficulty of relating to the architectural signs of our cultural past, it nonetheless remains possible to image an architecture that accounts for its historical background while proposing new modes of inhabiting and living in society. In order for a building to be experienced as an “event,” the richness of the observer’s interpretation has to be accounted for; a space for participation has to be reopened. To do so, the architect can explore the poetic potential of the enigma and the force of parody, approaching sense in relation to its inherent limits—to nonsense, henceforth allowing architecture to momentarily return to a more mytho-poetic mode. Thus, through the experience of a work of architecture, perhaps only for a *very* short instant, the observer could get a sense of being in place.

appendix

an annotated bibliography on Lewis Carroll

This annotated bibliography was initially presented as a review of literature in the first stage of my research. As the project took shape, more entries were added while, at the same time, the scope was narrowed. In that sense, the series of annotations compiled in this bibliography shall not be seen as an exhaustive review of material published on Carroll's work. I have focussed on essays that deal primarily with the literary aspect of his work, more especially with issues of language and meaning. Other chosen topics include: the situation of Carroll's work in the modern context; questions of logic and geometry and, finally; the visual implications of Carroll's production as a photographer. The entries are presented in alphabetical order.

Cohen, Morton N. "Hark the Snark." In *Lewis Carroll Observed*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976.

In the first part of this essay, Morton N. Cohen discusses the biographical setting from which Carroll's poem *The Hunting of the Snark* emerged. After a careful study of all entries from Carroll's diary inscribed over the course of the creation of the poem, the author comes to the conclusion that the specific way in which this poem was created—the fact that the last stanza of the poem "For the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see" came to Carroll's mind in a flash of imagination during a solitary walk by the ocean—is related to an event that took place at the time in Carroll's life: the illness and death of his godson Charlie Wilcox. The second part provides the reader with a compilation of six reviews (four of them previously

unpublished), which came out in 1876 at the time of the first publication of the *Snark*. Morton N. Cohen is Carroll/Dodgson's main biographer and the author of numerous publications on Carroll including, among others: *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*, *Lewis Carroll and the House of Macmillan* and *The letters of Lewis Carroll*.

Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. Ed. by Constantin V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
Logique du sens. Paris: Minuit, 1969.

In his *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze proposes a theory of sense — of meaning — that connects it to paradoxes. Deleuze's book examines ancient and modern paradoxes — in the work of the Stoics and in the fiction of Lewis Carroll — with particular attention given to Carroll's two-volume novel *Sylvie and Bruno* and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*. The paradoxes of sense are organised in series that intersect and inform each other. Deleuze discusses the philosophical implications of understanding sense, and nonsense, in relation to paradoxes, focussing his study on logic and the psychoanalytical implications of confronting one's mind to the pure *devenir-fou* that the paradox brings about. For Deleuze, Carroll represents a new type of writer within the modern literary tradition of the West; Carroll achieves — because he acknowledges and wants to conquer the depth of surfaces — the first great *mise-en-scène* of the paradoxes of sense. Written early in Deleuze's career, this book is still greatly influence by theories in psychoanalysis (mainly inspired by the work of Lacan in the method of working in series and in themes related to sexuality). My focus in reading this book has been on the

logical, linguistic and spatial implications (related to questions of site, place, event and surfaces) of the paradox in the production of meaning.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Lewis Carroll." In *Critique et clinique*. Paris: Minuit, 1993.

In *Critique et clinique*, Deleuze looks at events (the forms and movements of meaning) happening at the limits of language, when language becomes "other." His study goes through the work of many writers. The third chapter focuses on Carroll's work, dealing primarily with notions of depth and surfaces. For Deleuze, the idea is not that the surface possesses less nonsense than depth, but the kind of nonsense they respectively contain varies. The nonsense associated to a surface is like the *radiance* of "pure events," of entities that never cease to come into being while, at the same time, they withdraw from existence. Such entities emanate something incorporeal—a "pure expressed"—that comes out of depth but appears at the surface (*non pas l'épée mais l'éclair de l'épée, l'éclair sans épée comme le sourire sans chat*). The specificity of Carroll's work is that he manages to "play" everything through nonsense, somehow avoiding sense. According to Deleuze, Carroll is able to do so because of the diversity, inherent to nonsense, that accounts for the entire universe, its terrors and glories: depths, surfaces, volumes, surfaces folded upon themselves (*les surfaces enroulées*).

Gattégno, Jean. "Assessing Lewis Carroll." In *Lewis Carroll Observed*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976.

This essay introduces to the collection of essays compiled in this book and, for that matter, it consists in a kind of summary of the major ideas surrounding the literary work of Lewis Carroll, situating it within the tradition of English literature. For Gattégno, Carroll's work participates to more than just one category or field within that tradition, being not exclusively limited to the realm of children literature and yet, not entirely accepted in that of major literary works. Gattégno mainly discusses three aspects or themes that he sees as central to Carroll's work: (1) the way it is concerned to language, and especially the language associated with childhood; (2) the relationship between dreams and reality; (3) the importance of logic, a theme that he connects to the enigma surrounding the Carroll/Dodgson dichotomy. According to the author, a central characteristic of Carroll's work is that it reveals the arbitrariness of human language and communication. Gattégno tends to connect all the themes he wishes to discuss with a single notion, the problem of defining one's identity, alluding briefly and only in passing to the larger philosophical problem of "being."

Gattégno, Jean. "Sylvie and Bruno or the Inside and the Outside." In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982.

In this essay, Gattégno enumerates several aspects that differentiate *Sylvie and Bruno* from the *Alice* books. He briefly analyses both *Sylvie and Bruno* and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, showing how Carroll's aim in writing the novel was to

achieve a “generalised reduction of multiplicity to unity.” The whole essay borrows extensively from Gilles Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense*. In the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno*, Carroll speaks about a “cheapening of literature” and questions the myth of the modern writer and artist. For Gattégno, one of the effects of this new understanding of the work of art is to destabilise the “sacrosanct relation between the reader and the work.” Gattégno writes: “The work of literature, as an artefact, is cheapened: there is nothing left of the grand inspiration (the spirit’s breath, or the unconscious) or of the novel seen as a harmonious unity.” (p. 168) According to him, while in the *Alice* books the narrative follows a logic generally associated with the governing laws of dreams, like juxtaposition, contiguity and the causality of desire, in *Sylvie and Bruno*, dreams and reality are set in a dynamic relationship. As Gattégno emphasises, in opposition to what happens in the *Alice* books, with *Sylvie and Bruno* “fiction disintegrates a little further, desire becomes intellectual or hides behind a urge for knowledge, and the dream becomes science and invites theorising. For Carroll’s aim, both within the text itself and outside of it (in his preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*) is to bring dreaming to the very heart of reality seen as an object of study and experimentation.” (p. 169) Thus, Carroll’s main interest in including the theme of dreams in his work has to do with the fact that for him, dreams are intimately connected to language. Gattégno speaks about two forms of language—the language of children and that of adults—and sees Carroll’s use of both forms of language in the *Sylvie and Bruno* books as an attempt to “raise the bar” between the two. One of these languages—Bruno’s mode of expression as a child—is connected to the realm of dreams. As there are two languages at work in the

books, two different plots also overlap; the counterpart of each character can be found in another character. For Gattégno, this doubling of things is only superficial because, in the end, both sides can be seen as one and the same. Hence, he believes, what seems at first to be a novel about parallel plots, multiplicities and differences, ends up speaking about unity—the unity of Love—in an indirect manner. Though this essay is relevant in summarising a position held by many scholars (Deleuze, Holquist, Sewell), I find its conclusion to be somewhat reductive and misleading.

Huxley, Francis. *The raven and the writing desk*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

This book proposes to understand Carroll's nonsense as a game between author and reader. Huxley's book emulates the styles of both Carroll's fiction and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. As an attempt to situate writing at the very limit of thought, it is interesting and crafty. However, a lot of things are asserted or implied concerning Carroll's work and life in a way that borders on the hermetic.

Lecerle, Jean-Jacques. "Linguistic Intuitions: Lewis Carroll and 'Alice au pays des merveilles'." *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle* 68, 763 (1990): 56-62.

In this essay, Lecerle discusses the presence of what he calls "linguistic intuitions" in Carroll's writing. According to Lecerle, Carroll intuitively—never

explicitly acknowledging that he is doing what he's doing—takes advantage of the vagueness of a rule in the Victorian English grammar and transgresses it (leading to the only solecism of the *Alice* book: “Curiouser and curiouser!”). Throughout this essay, Lecercle shows how similar intuitions (some linguistic, others more pragmatic or based on logical principles or poetic attitudes) testify to the existence of what he refers to as a *frontière* or border; a limit between what is grammatical and a-grammatical within language (English language understood as a “natural” language). For him, nonsense resides precisely at this limit, when the rule becomes vague, opening up possibilities to play with it, and with language. According to Lecercle, Carroll could have such an intuition because of his position as a logician—as someone who could be slightly irritated or intrigued by the changing quality of natural languages. Lecercle insists, the initial linguistic intuition is (almost always) coupled with another intuition that is more pragmatic and has to do with how Carroll stages the resulting solecism. The reader understands what Alice is saying before he or she actually realises (or is reminded by the narrator) that what she says is not proper English. In that sense, the pragmatic intuition is as follows: communication sometimes happens outside of grammar if circumstances allow for it. These two intuitions may suggest two opposite concepts or understandings of language: (1) in terms of the linguistic intuition, the grammatical rules are essential to language and should be followed. Because the rules are not absolute—because gaps tend to open up within the grammatical itself—they can also be played with. (2) In terms of the pragmatic intuition, there is no need for grammatical rules; communications can happen anyhow and this makes way for a certain kind of linguistic libertinage,

that eventually leads to linguistic chaos. But, Lecerclé remarks, this apparent dichotomy turns out to be fallacious because as one ventures beyond the rule, beyond the grammatical, one nonetheless remains in language. Lecerclé is aware that even though the opposition described above can be conceptually resolved, it may, in fact, return at all times. Alice may adopt the position of the logician and try to simplify the rule – to fix it – but the danger of falling from the grammatical into the a-grammatical remains.

In Lecerclé's view, the frontier is a place where constraints become liberation, and where liberation (willingly) leads to more constraints. Hence, he writes: "*Le nonsense, à cheval sur les frontières de la langue, est un genre révolutionnaire-conservateur.*" (p. 60) He sees the character of Humpty Dumpty as the perfect image for the position of nonsense. But then, he asks, why did nonsense, as a genre, chose to dwell in that place, and what's on the other side? On the other side of the frontier, outside of the grammatical, is what remains of language (*le reste de la langue*), what is non-serious about language but still produces meaning, or else what is diachronically excluded, no longer, or not yet, a part of it. This "remainder" of language tends to come back (*faire retour*) and can be constitutive of language again. It is the task of the poet to allow for this remainder to return. For Lecerclé, "*le reste est le lieu langagier du poème.*" (p. 61) Thus, nonsense choses to settle itself in the unstable site of the frontier because it is there that the poem emerges (*là surgit le poème*).

See also: Lecerle, Jean-Jacques. *Philosophy of Nonsense*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994. The essay summarised here constitutes the introduction to *Philosophy of Nonsense*. The central argument presented in this book is discussed above. Lecerle examines Carroll's work in terms of the linguistics of nonsense, its pragmatics, the idea of a philosophy or a mode of thinking through or with nonsense and, finally, its polyphonic qualities.

Marret, Sophie. "Metalanguage in Lewis Carroll." *Sub-stance* 71, 7 (1993): 217-227.

In continuation with Lecerle's work, Sophie Marret discusses another Carrollian intuition which she formulates as follows: "the distinction between language and metalanguage does not go without saying." According to her, Carroll was intuitively—since his knowledge was not formulated but rather hidden under/within the surface of his writing—questioning the very premises in the idea of a metalanguage, that is, of a language that serves only to speak about problems of language. In Carroll's work, the dynamic relationship between form and meaning is always at play and his intuitions are located at the limit of discourse, pointing to the limits of formalism in logic. According to Marret, Carroll's relying on fantasy stands out as another mode of exploring a problem already dealt with on a purely logical level in the case of Zeno's paradox (see *What the Tortoise said to Achilles*). For her, "what is inscribed in the literary work and which reappears in the guise of a logical paradox invalidating the Aristotelian theses, is the logician's intuition of the chaos which threatens him

and ruins his constructions—that is, the intuition of the function of the subject and of the arbitrary nature of the Law as a limit to logic and to ontology.” Hence, she believes it is in Carroll’s recourse to fantasy, in his fiction work, that the question of the subject is raised in a radical way, questioning even the foundation of formalism.

McGarrity Buki, Ann. “Lewis Carroll in *Finnegans Wake*.” In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982.

In this essay, the author reveals some inter-textual connections (which can be at times quite direct, but remain more often than not rather loose) between Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* and Carroll’s work and life. The aim is to show that Carroll’s work is anchored in modern literature, that he was an important source of inspiration for Joyce, and one of his predecessors. In the case of *Finnegan’s Wake*, she sees Carroll as an inspiration for the book as a whole. For her, “Lewis Carroll was able to abuse and twist the laws of logic and mathematics so amusingly because he was an expert in those fields. Joyce had at his command a thorough knowledge of several languages. (...) Both writers knew the importance of the sounds and rhythms of words.” (159) According to McGarrity Buki, several themes connect both works: the theme of forgery and falsification; the themes of dreams, insomnia, daydreaming or dreamlike states of artistic inspiration, etc. She writes: “*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking-Glass* and *Finnegan’s Wake* are all books of the night; Joyce followed Carroll in founding an entire dreamworld with similar freedoms of movement, association, and

metamorphosis." (161) According to the author, "there is a blurring of reality in *Alice* akin to that in *Finnegan's Wake*; sleeping and waking states are confused and are often used interchangeably." (p. 162) The author connects the theme of dreams with others themes, which are once again developed by both Carroll and Joyce, like the suspension of time, the changeable quality of space, or the weakening of one's sense of identity. For her, time, understood as a cyclical movement—a cosmic movement having to do with opposite yet closely linked notions like death and the birth of humanity—is a dominant aspect of both works. For example, she claims that "each book of *Finnegan's Wake* covers a Viconian cycle of human existence, yet within each, all eras are simultaneously contained. This total action takes place in a dream of one day and night that is an eternal "set" of days and nights (...)" (p. 164) As a manner of conclusion, she touches upon the notion of intentionality, saying that both authors were trying to erase traces of themselves from their writing and to let the words stand on their own or speak for themselves. She believes that both Lewis Carroll and James Joyce managed to do so in similar ways.

Morgaine, Manuela. "Dimensions et surfaces du genre humain." *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle* 68, 736 (1990): 81-84.

This short text questions, in a very brief and creative way, the notion of human scale and the representation of women and young girls as miniatures in literature. The author quotes from several novels and short stories, connecting them to Carroll's *Alice* stories. From a series of personal observations, the author

points to the importance of dream world, emphasising the presence of sexual metaphors, in a literature of fiction that plays with the size and geometrical quality of the human body.

Remy, Michel. "Surrealice: Lewis Carroll et les surréalistes." *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle* 68, 736 (1990): 123-136.

This essay analyses the difference in opinion between the French and the English Surrealists in regards to Carroll's work. The author carefully goes through the major surrealist texts which mention Carroll in various ways: André Breton, Aragon, Salvatore Dali, Pierre Mabille, for the French; Herbert Read and Hugh Sykes Davies as the main English representatives of the movement. Remy also compiles a list of works, paintings, collages and illustrations that refer to or involve *Alice* or Carroll: Max Ernst's and Dali illustrations of Carroll's books, etc. For the French, Carroll is mainly a model and a precursor. His work is seen as achieving the anaesthesia of rational faculties, subverting static forms of language and giving its due importance to dream phenomena—to the limit between dreams and awaken life but, also, between sanity and madness. For the author, Carroll's "surrealism" is, for the French, happening at the level of discourse, in Carroll's questioning the notions of identity and origin, which are discursive questions. Carroll's writing is caught between identity and "otherness," revealing the ultimate blank awaiting a formal structure once meaning is (temporarily) suspended from it. The French also understood his work in the realm of mathematics, geometry and logic as essentially poetic

because the writing takes place at the limit of the tangible with, on the one hand, the mathematical and, on the other, the ephemeral. The English reception of the work, on the other hand, is less enthusiastic. For most of the English Surrealists, Carroll was essentially conservative and partaking in the Victorian bourgeois ideals. Though they recognise the poetic quality of his work, which they refer to in order to rehabilitate the rebel side of the English literary tradition, his morality and conventional life coupled with what they see as his voyeurism and fetishes, prevented him from ever achieving a "true" surrealist liberation of imagination. For Remy, these two approaches to Carroll's work are always interconnected and allow for a better understanding of both the scope and limitations of his work. I would add that his reading also throws light on the same aspects within Surrealism itself.

Sewell, Elisabeth. *The field of Nonsense*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1952.

Elisabeth Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense* has been extensively referred to and quoted from in most Carrollian scholarship that I've come across. She first recognised nonsense as a literary practice and proposed to approach Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear's nonsenses as being, in themselves, systems, that is, self-consistent sets of orderly relations observed in or attributed to a particular field or class of terms. For her, though systems tend to be autonomous and self-sufficient, different systems can illuminate each other. For example, the following systems might throw light on Carroll's work: logic, mathematics, or the

analytical process of the mind, etc. In her book, she chooses to dwell on the system or field of "games" as the "most helpful analogy to nonsense." Understood as a system which is analogous to that of games, nonsense can thus be seen as an autonomous enclosed field, governed by absolute rules, isolated in time and space and from which other systems are excluded: emotions, all synthesising tendencies such as those of imagination, dreams, sympathy, love, poetry, all great issues that make us humans, experiences such as sorrow, beauty and God, etc. According to Sewell, given the separated units in the field, the action depends on manipulative skill, on detachment; on controlling and not being controlled. For her, the game of nonsense may, then, consist in the mind's employing its tendency towards order to engage its contrary towards disorder, keeping the latter perpetually in play and so in check. The apparent disorder in the nonsense world may be the result of such an encounter. Hence, Sewell views Carroll's nonsense as a game that gives delight while limiting emotion to that generated by the game itself, resisting intrusion and allowing the mind a clearly defined field in which to carry on the activity proper to the game in hand.

The author also proposes a reading of Carroll's personality that questions the assumed thesis of split personality or clinical schizophrenia. She suggests that the split between Dodgson and Carroll is only an apparent dichotomy, quickly resolved if one sees that there is a common pursuit at the core of both works. She sees this potential link as a quest for order which Dodgson/Carroll sought in mathematics and logic, in his strictly ordered life as an Oxford scholar, in his proper and severe participation in Victorian societal affairs and finally but most

interestingly, in the writing of nonsensical fiction. For Sewell, it is in nonsense that Carroll's striving towards order found its most perfect expression.

Sewell, Elisabeth. "In the midst of his laughter and glee': Nonsense and Nothingness in Lewis Carroll." *Soundings* 82, 3-4 (1999): 541-571.

Sewell's essay opens with a sentence from her book *The Field of Nonsense*: "[n]onsense is how the English chose to take their *poésie pure*." For the author, nonsense literature and late nineteenth century *poésie* in France bear direct connections. Her study is based on Carroll's work and that of French poet Mallarmé, mainly on the latter's text entitled *Un coup de Dés*. Sewell's main thesis is that both Mallarmé and Carroll were trying to push language to its very limits. For her, once the barrier of language is crossed, the writer and the reader have to confront nothingness. She creates this argument backwards, starting from the fact that both Carroll and Mallarmé created poetry from sentences that came out of "nothing" and which flashed into their minds in strange manners (*The Hunting of the Snark*).

Stern, Jeffrey. "Lewis Carroll the Pre-Raphaelite 'Fainting in Coils'". In *Lewis Carroll Observed*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976.

Throughout this essay, the author's aim is to *prove* that not only was Lewis Carroll in contact with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, but that he was, in fact, a Pre-Raphaelite himself. Three aspects of Carroll's work are discussed in order to

reach that conclusion. (1) A constant female figure, referred to by Stern as the representation of the Jungian concept of "anima," emerges constantly in the works of both Gabriel Dante Rossetti and Arthur Hughes. This female figure is ideal, pure, virginal—a woman-child representation. According to Stern, that figure is also present in Carroll's work, mainly through *Alice*. Carroll's own drawings for the manuscript of *Alice's Adventure Underground* (made especially for Alice Liddell) strangely resemble Rossetti's drawings and paintings (which Carroll was photographing at the time of the production of the MS). (2) Hughes painted a tableau for Carroll entitled "The lady with the Lilacs," that Carroll owned. In this picture, the woman-child depicted is strangely similar to one of Carroll's drawings for the *Alice* MS. According to Stern, the painting by Hughes must have been an inspiration for Carroll. (3) For Stern, most of the Pre-Raphaelite images also embody the idea of death, decay, the loss of purity or the passage from childhood to adulthood. He sees these same themes as recurrent in Carroll's writing and life. For the three reasons mentioned above, he concludes that Carroll was a Pre-Raphaelite.

Stern Jeffrey, "Lewis Carroll the Surrealist." In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982.

This essay by Stern makes several connections between Carroll's work and the work of many members of the Surrealist movement. His interest is to study what is Surrealist about Carroll's work, and what is Carrollian about Surrealism, comparing the two in a synchronic manner, which inevitably lead to a flattening

of both works. First, Stern sees Surrealism mainly as a rebellion against bourgeois society and common sense. For him, Carroll and the Surrealists “reacted in similar ways to similar things.” (p. 133) For him, Wonderland and the “world” through the Looking-Glass “are, even in their names, both vitally concerned with breaking down fences of convention (...) and even ideas of space (...) and time.” (p. 133) It is unclear exactly how the titles can achieve that. Stern acknowledges that a major difference exists between Carroll and the Surrealists and involves questions of intentionality. For the Surrealists, the “*choc*” – to provoke or shock the viewer with the intention of triggering his or her unconscious mind in order to destabilise it and set it in motion towards new modes of thought – was at the centre of their artistic processes. Carroll’s approach was more subtle and his intentions less clearly defined (he wrote very little about them, except perhaps in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno*). Having pointed out to that difference of approach, Stern then focuses on what he sees as similarities between the two. (1) “[The attention given] to what the phenomenon of the dream had to offer. (2) “[The exploration of] the idea of inspirational creation that bypasses the censoring reason of consciousness.” (3) “[A questioning of] the validity of so-called reality through probing the nature of language, space, and time.” (p. 135) Stern understands logic, and sense, as opposed to nonsense. Having said that, he can then connect automatic writing and Dada to Carroll’s work for, he writes: “like the surrealists, [Carroll] not only had a belief in inspiration but also a total trust in it and listened to and valued its findings whether they were coherent or not.” (p. 141) The author is obviously referring to the last sentence of *The Hunting of the Snark*: “For the Snark was a Boojum, you see!” that suddenly came to

Carroll's mind and guided the creation of the entire poem. But Carroll's (and the Surrealists) relation to artistic creation is far more complex and involves "conscious" attempts at ordering and structuring—working with logic and sense—that would need to be accounted for. It is this link Stern perceives between Dada, automatic writing and Carroll's nonsense that allows him to claim (rightly so I believe) that both the surrealists and Carroll were questioning language. For Stern, the process of collage as an alchemical transformation of things allowed Carroll and the Surrealists to seek ways that celebrate the "ambivalent, paradoxical nature of reality." Again, he says, the Surrealist saw, early on in their experiments, that the most potent and provocative method by which to attack the common sense world and "selective conclusions attempting to proclaim that the universe is only this or only that" was to deliberately juxtapose alien elements—as they are, for example, in 'Jabberwocky' or in Magritte's paintings." Stern sees both attitudes towards language and meaning as having to do with a complete rejection of the system. He writes: "For the lack of a system (where such a system would necessarily mean the censorship of conflicting notions and the rejection out of hand of other possibilities of approach) was, on its own account, a championed surrealist cause. For if formulae are abandoned, then the whole experience of life can be seen as having value if viewed by unconditioned eyes." (p. 148) For Stern, there is a "fundamental shared conviction central to the ideas of both Carroll and the Surrealists was that thought, ideas, and feelings do not have to be comprehensible consciously, rationally, or logically in order to be communicated." (p. 150)

Sutherland, Robert D. *Language and Lewis Carroll*. The Hague: Mouton, 1970.

This book analyses the nature or scope of the linguistic interests of Dodgson/Carroll in order to determine the basic assumptions he may have had regarding the nature and functions of language. This study attempts to be exhaustive and tries to disclose the true range of Carroll's concerns for language as well as the sophistication and perceptivity of his linguistic insight. Though this book came out almost at the same time as Deleuze's *Logique du sens*, it offers a very different approach to Carroll's complex "use" of words. Sutherland's point of departure is the realm of linguistics and he seeks to identify Carroll's relationship with language, focusing on language's nature and function. Some interesting aspects to this book include compilations of Carroll's personal library, his interest in reading and the entries from his diary where he mentions and comments on books, his mastery of different languages, etc.

Wolfreys, Julian. *The rhetoric of Affirmative Resistance: Dissonant Identities from Carroll to Derrida*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

This wide ranging study offers close reading of films, novels and poetry in order to draw attention to the ways in which texts appear to resist acts of reading by seemingly performing their own idiomatic and resistant identities. The study proposes a new understanding of what the author calls "dissonant identities"

through rather unpredictable acts of interpretation which draw from the theories of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Heidegger, etc. Proposing the rhetoric of affirmative resistance as a way of approaching dissonant identities, his first chapter looks at Carroll's work in terms of what he calls its "anarchitecture." The problem I find with the author's view is that he tends to equate architecture with clearly defined and perceptible things/objects/structures, while proposing the idea of anarchitecture as a more flexible understanding of Carroll's writing.

On modernism and Lewis Carroll:

Henkle, Roger B. "Carroll's Narratives Underground: 'Modernism' and Form." In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982.

This essay situates Carroll's work within the tradition of the novel in English literature. The aim of the author is to show the strange and unusual participation of Carroll's fiction to what is usually referred to as "modernism" or avant-garde movements in literature. His argument is that the participation of Carroll's work within that movement differs slightly from the general tendency proper to the avant-garde which consists in a rejection of old moral and social values and bourgeois materialism. For the author, Carroll's fiction embodies a questioning of morality and social action that is expressed indirectly, through a subterranean analysis of the element of rationality present in the making and carrying out of ethical and personal decision. The author connects such mode of thought with Henry Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, which came out in 1889. Hence, Carroll's

fiction expresses, underneath the surface of the discourse itself, in what Henkle refers to as a "dialogical" manner (a classic mode associated to Plato) many, sometimes inconsistent positions and psychological states of being that are not necessarily harmonised to a central theme. In that sense, Carroll's work represents another source of novelistic variation besides the self-conscious avant-gardism of the late nineteenth century.

Holquist, Michael. "What is a Boojum? Nonsense and Modernism." *Yale French Studies* 96 (1999): 100-117.

In this essay, Michael Holquist proposes to look at Carroll's *The Hunting of The Snark* as the most nonsensical and, consequently, as the most modern of Carroll's nonsense writings. Holquist believes that nonsense is not about chaos or the absence of meaning but rather, that it is about a very specific kind of logic or order proper to a unique and closed system. That system is not the English language but, according to Holquist, a hermetic system governed by logical principles. He sees the work of Carroll as participating to a "larger body of literature often called modern or post-modern, but which is probably most efficiently expressed in a list of authors: Joyce, Kafka, Beckett, Nabokov, Borges, Genet, Robbe-Grillet..." (p. 100) Though the literary production of these authors is certainly not homogenous, one can find something common between them in relation to past literature. Within that body of literature, the work of Lewis Carroll was "among the first to exemplify what is perhaps the most distinctive feature of modern literature, [and] it did so more openly, more paradigmatically

than almost any other text one knew. That is, it best dramatized the attempt of an author to insure through the structure of his work that the work could be perceived only as what it was, and not some other thing; the attempt to create an immaculate fiction, a fiction that resists the attempts of readers, and especially those readers who write criticism, to turn it into an allegory, a system equatable with already existing systems in the non-fictional world." (p.102) Holquist proposes to outline this "pattern of resistances" as it exists in *The Hunting of The Snark*. For him, the poem is its own system of signs that gain their meaning by constantly dramatising their differences from signs in other systems. Thus, the meaning of the poem is to be found in the strategy that "insures its hermetic nature against the hermeneutic impulse." (p.103) In that sense, he can then carefully study the text "for what it is," a method that is for him helpful in order to understand other, more complex attempts to do the same thing in modern literature. Holquist is reacting against the numerous allegorical interpretations of Carroll's work. For him, it is important to examine more carefully the inner structure of the text itself, because it is within that very intricate structure that the meaning of the work can be found. Thus, he attempts to isolate it from other systems of reference, seeing it as a system that, like the system of the English language, can eventually be learned. Though I tend to agree with Holquist that *The Hunting of The Snark* is very much following the logical system he describes, I cannot reduce it to being a completely autonomous system that bears no connection whatsoever with other systems. In the end, what this interesting essay reveals is that all systems always exist in relation to larger or even antagonist systems. Nonsense, as a system or as a new language, is connected to learning

processes that take place in the larger system of the English language and to cultural and social contexts. The following passage might actually constitute an unconscious slip in Holquist's methodological reasoning: "And that is the value of it (Carroll's creation of a system of nonsense that means something because it can be learned): it calls attention to language. Carroll's nonsense keeps us honest; through the process of disorientation and learning which reading him entails, the reader is reminded again that language is not something one *knows*, but something alive, in process—something to be discovered." (p.114)

Rackin, Donald. "Blessed Rage: Lewis Carroll and the Modern Quest for Order." In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982.

For Donald Rackin, Carroll's work is the result of the personal struggle of an obsessively ordered and religious man with the chaos and disorder of the "natural" world as it is formulated in nineteenth century theories of evolution, more especially in the work of Charles Darwin. Rackin main's argument is that Carroll needed art—writing and poetry—in order to deal with the surrounding chaotic and morally unstable realm of human affairs. Apparently, Rackin is not the only critic who sees in nonsense a hidden quest for order (the position is present in Sewell (1952) and, to some extent, in Holquist (1999)). Rackin's approach, though intuitively accurate, seems to me to be fallacious in that it relies mainly on biographical information and on psychological (and posthumous) interpretations of Carroll's personality.

On logic, mathematics and language:

Abeles, Francine. *The Mathematical-Political Papers of C. L. Dodgson*. In *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982.

In this essay, the author discusses the mathematical implications in Carroll/Dodgson's political papers and in his essays dealing with the rules of games and tournaments. Her argument is that these papers and pamphlets published from 1871 to 1885, contain some of Dodgson's best and most creative mathematical work. She writes: "it is reasonable to suggest that Dodgson was mathematically creative when he was doing mathematics, not for its own sake, but for some other purpose—the whimsy of the *Alice* books, for example, or the academic business of Christ Church. In either case, Dodgson did his best mathematical work in this indirect and hidden way." (p.199) According to the author's study, Dodgson's main concern in the case of voting methods was to avoid the phenomenon of cyclical majority, to reach a fair representation of electors and to protect the opinion of minorities. According to Abeles, Dodgson had come quite far—in a mathematical sense—in his thinking about the selection of candidates or issues in a voting or committee process. For her, he showed in such papers an amazingly creative mind, inventing equations and formulating quotas in ways that was not yet common in the realm of modern statistics.

Alexander, Peter. "Logic and the humour of Lewis Carroll." In *Journal of the Leeds Philosophical Association* (1951).

Peter Alexander wishes to show how much of the humour found in the *Alice* books has a logical basis and how its success primarily depends on its use in a particular sort of setting which a logician is best fitted to provide. Throughout his work, Alexander says, Carroll exploits the inconsistencies and logical fallacies of everyday speech and, for that matter, his training in logic was crucial in the development of his fiction work. Alexander sees nonsense as obeying certain rules, the purpose of which is to express, in an indirect manner, the fact that language—as a vehicle for knowledge and the matter in which form is embodied to communicate—cannot be understood only in terms of a display of “logical” form. Hence, throughout his work, Carroll questions the convention based aspect of language—ordinary and scientific—showing its arbitrariness. In doing so, the author says, he raises problems at several other levels: the mind-body problem, the problem of personal identity and the question whether the existence of a thing is impossible because inconceivable, thus questioning the notion of scientific “universals” in relation to the rather chaotic nature of everyday life.

Bennafla, M. “Euclide et ses rivaux modernes.” *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle* 68, 736 (1990): 117-122.

The author situates Carroll/Dodgson’s *Euclid and His Modern Rivals* within the context of the late nineteenth century developments in mathematics and geometry. She provides the reader with a brief summary of the book, discussing both its form and content: a humoristic piece of scientific writing that takes the form of a theatrical play. The play or drama involves a series of characters (a

professor, an examiner, Euclid himself and a few philosophers from the past) in the choice of a manual for the purpose of teaching geometry to beginning students. According to Bennafla, Carroll's play may represent "the vestige of a self-destructive battle, the fight of someone who still understands mathematics in the classical sense of mathesis — of the last mathematician who could not question the validity of Euclid's postulate of parallel lines."

Borges, Jorge Luis. "Avatars of the Tortoise." In *Labyrinths*. New York: New Directions Books, 1962, and "La course perpetuelle d'Achille et de la tortue." In *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1993.

In those two essays, Borges offers a careful study of Carroll's take on Zeno of Elea's paradoxes of time. For Borges, Carroll's text points to the impossibility to understand notions like space and time as ideals. Carroll's *What The Tortoise Said to Achilles* speaks about the complex problem of language in relation to formal and symbolic logic.

Coumet, Ernest. "The Game of Logic: A Game of Universes." In *Lewis Carroll Observed*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976.

In this essay, Carroll's work as a logician is put in relation to his fiction work, showing how Carroll was, in his treatment of paradoxes and in his conception of symbolic logic, anticipating discoveries that came later in modern logic. Coumet's main thesis is to show Carroll's position concerning the question of

logical "universes of discourse" in symbolic logic and to see if Wonderland or the Looking-Glass world can be understood as representing such logical universes. The theories of Augustus De Morgan, John Venn and George Boole are discussed in relation to Carroll's views.

Engel, Pascal. "La logique peut-elle mouvoir l'esprit?" *Dialogue-Canadian Philosophical Review* 38, 1 (1998): 35-53.

This paper attempts to take a new look at the famous text by Carroll on Zeno's paradox of movement, *What the Tortoise said to Achilles*. It examines the connections between Carroll's regress argument for logical inferences and a similar regress argument for practical inferences. The Tortoise's point of view is espoused: no norm of reasoning or of conduct can in itself "make the mind move," only the brute force of belief can. The essay discusses and questions several positions concerning the inherent 'truth' of logical proposition and the relationship between the human mind, language and logic (Hume, Pierce, Wittgenstein, etc.). This thorough and challenging essay is, like Carroll's text, set in the form of a dialogue between the Tortoise and the Greek demigod.

Pycior, Helena M. "At the Intersection of Mathematics and Humor: Lewis Carroll's *Alices* and Symbolical Algebra." *Victorian Studies* 28, Autumn (1984): 149-70.

The author claims symbolic algebra to be at the roots of Carroll's nonsense and that his aim may have been to stress mathematics structure over meaning. She sees Carroll/Dodgson's rejection of the developments happening in his time in the field of symbolic algebra as a well informed, yet essentially conservative position. For her, Carroll's attitude towards language prevents him from accepting algebra and the problems of symbolic logic as based on a use of signs that are devoid of "meaning." For Pycior, Carroll's fiction is primarily exhibiting meaninglessness and for that reason, it embodies more progressive views. In that sense, his work of fiction can be set in opposition to his more traditional views in the real of mathematics. This interesting argument seems to fall short once the complexity of nonsense, understood like *Lecerle* in terms of a ruse, is acknowledged.

On Lewis Carroll's photographs

Dimock, George. "Childhood's end: Lewis Carroll and the image of the rat." *Word & Image* 8, 3, July-September (1992).

This essay looks at the relationship between image and text in the work of Carroll. The first part discusses a specific drawing by Carroll that can be found in the manuscript version of the first *Alice* story, *Alice's Adventures Underground*, while the second part looks at his numerous photographs of little girls in relation to the poems that often accompanied the pictures. This study is mainly based on psychoanalytical views and tries to "explain" Carroll's artistic practice in such terms, linking what the author sees as Carroll's own neurosis to one of Freud's

famous cases, the Rat Man. Despite the obsessive psychoanalytical bias, this essay is interesting in that it acknowledges some obscure connection between Carroll's writing and his artistic endeavour in drawing and photography.

Edwards, Susan H. "Pretty Babies: Art, Erotica or Kiddie Porn?" *History of Photography* 18, 1, Spring (1994).

This essay examines photography from the past and how it has been categorised, in different contexts, as art or erotica, in an effort to clarify current distinctions among these genres and pornography. The focus of the author is on nude images of children. Her aim is to establish the position that the structure of sexuality within visual imagery is as much a social factor as a human one. Edwards looks at Carroll's photographs of little girls that she sees as "among the most arresting images in the history of photography." For her, it is evident that Carroll's attraction to little girls was not paedophilic. Yet, she acknowledges the ambiguous quality which emanates from Carroll's pictures, especially the photographs he took of Alice Liddell: "as a photographic subject, Alice Liddell is eternally the picture of a woman-child and eternally the object of Carroll's voyeuristic pleasure." (p. 40) According to the author, the case of Carroll is only one of many in the tradition of visual arts and photography. She goes through several other examples (Thomas Eakins and Wilhelm von Gloeden's homoerotic images, Robert Mapplethorpe's highly suggestive sexual photographs, and the art of women photographing their own children nude like Ellen Brooks, Cynthia MacAdams, etc.) In relation to these examples, the author criticises the re-

enforcement, by the American government, of the law surrounding pornographic material in photography. For her, what is most important is to generate a constant reflection and debate surrounding the question of how, as members of society, we relate to our own body and sexuality, rather than applying harsh censorship to artistic practices, hence restraining the possibility for of such debates to take place.

Guiliano, Edward. "Lewis Carroll as Photographer: A Series of Photographs of Young Girls." In *Lewis Carroll Observed*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976.

This essay introduces a series of Carroll's previously unpublished photographs of young girls. The author begins by tracing back the discovery and reception of Carroll's work as a photographer and then outlines the more recent critical acclaim that his work has received in the field. In the second part of the essay, Guiliano offers a brief historical account of the development of amateur photography in Victorian England and situates Carroll's practice with that context. The author also speculates on the origin of Carroll's interest for the medium and on his choice of subject that included mainly little girls and famous individuals or families.

Prose, Francine. "Alice in Wonderment." *ARTnews*, February (1999).

This essay proposes to look at one of Carroll's best-known photographs, the picture of young Alice Liddell posing as a beggar girl. For the author, the photograph does not record an action but rather "a state of being—an emotional one produced by the external transaction between the photographer and the subject." The author acknowledges and explains the usual assertions questioning the nature of Carroll's relationship with the children he photographed. Unlike many critics who believe that Carroll had a problematic (repressed or not) sexual impulse towards little girls, she supports the thesis of an idealised romantic devotion for the child as a pure, unspoiled creature of God. She believes that the strength of the connection between Carroll and Alice—a chaste one—emanates from the picture, "like another chemical into which the plate has been dipped—another element added to whatever we have imagined as the formula for love."

Smith, Lindsay. "'Take Back Your Mink': Lewis Carroll, Child Masquerade and the Age of Consent." *Art History* 16, 3, September (1993): 369-385.

In this essay, the author questions the relationship between Carroll's photographs of little girls and the textual content of the numerous letters he wrote in the context of his practice of photography. For the author, most criticism surrounding Carroll's photographs of little girls fails to acknowledge what she sees as the central motivation for this aspect of his artistic practice, namely, a visual 'interest' in the little girl as spectacle. Her argument is primarily based on Freudian concepts and modes of interpretation. For her, Carroll's desire was one of miniaturisation—the object of his desire had to remain within a certain size.

The photographic image coupled with the process of “dressing up and down” involving a complex use of costumes and garments, would allow him to *shrink* the rapidly growing child. For Smith, the fact that Carroll would have a specific piece of clothing tailored to fit several little girls, each varying in sizes, confirms his fetish for smallness. The author then connects this desire (a strictly visual one) with what she sees as deceitful elements in his letter writing. For her, the numerous letters sent to parents and children surrounding the photographic sessions all function according to a certain logic, which she claims is a ruse: to get the consent of the child herself while rendering his visual compulsion and desire invisible because readily absorbed by the social and legal discourses on of his day on the theme of childhood and the age of consent.

Smith, Lydsay. “Lewis Carroll: Stammering, Photography and the Voice of Infancy.” *Journal for Visual Culture* 3, 1 April (2004): 95-105.

In this essay, Smith argues for the importance of considering Carroll’s speech impediment—his stammer—as a way to illuminate his photographic practice. For her, Carroll’s problematic relationship to speech—his hesitancy and imperfection in pronouncing words—allowed him to explore new conceptual possibilities in his writing. In a similar way, she sees his photographs as another way to embody—through representation—fictional constructions. The photograph represents a temporal delay—a silence or pause—that fixes the photographed subject into an ideal version of itself; the little girl in the picture is forever young. Carroll saw the medium of photography as a magical process that enabled one to bring closer different temporalities. In that sense, Smith argues

that Carroll's fascination with the medium is both as a result of, and a way to cope with, his own imperfect performance as a speaker.

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