Lewis Carroll on the Problem of Architectural Meaning[1]

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Abstract

In the work of English author/mathematician/logician Lewis Carroll (Charles L. Dodgson), questions of language and meaning constantly lurk beneath the surface. As a literary genre, Carroll's nonsense has been shown to address changing theories of language in the specific context of the nineteenth century. This essay identifies how Carroll's architectural criticism, exposed in his short pamphlets on architecture and in The Vision of the Three T's (1873) in particular, connects issues of architectural meaning to changing understanding in the propriety and usage of language. Those changes were brought about in the context of Oxford by scientific positivism and approaches to language such as the German-influenced New Philology. The aim is to unveil how such philological themes are chosen targets for several of Carroll's jokes in the architectural pamphlets. I argue that Carroll's position is grounded in a broader enquiry on the theme of architecture's significance and questions of interpretation in that specific context.

Discussing the mechanisms that govern the production of social space in our modern societies, Henri Lefebvre briefly invokes Lewis Carroll's nonsensical explorations. For Lefebvre, Carroll's work, and more especially his pieces on mathematics and symbolic logic, conveys relevant philosophical reflections on the language-based dimension inherent to the formation of a certain kind of space—social space. Carroll's entire corpus effectively brings forth the complex and intricate mechanisms that govern our relationship to space; using literature as a malleable tool, his work interrogates the means by which we understand,

represent and inhabit the world through the mediation of "words, signs, doubles and shadows, and games". [2]

However incongruous the situations found in the *Alice* books, the reader intuitively senses that there are spatial issues at stake. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for example*,* the story takes place in unsettling underground spatial conditions where the order of things as we "normally" understand it is blurred. Notions such as *inside* and *outside*, *top* and *bottom*, *here* and *there* are tangled. The tale tells us how young heroine Alice struggles to navigate through such conditions. Interestingly, this struggle involves the loss and progressive reclaiming of a linguistic ground, one that will allow Alice to interact with a colourful series of characters.[3] *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* proposes an equally disconcerting yet logically distinctive spatiality.[4] Looking from afar like the regular grid of a chess game, the land behind the mirror also obeys peculiar, *out of this world* rules. For instance, contrary to our experience, movement is a precondition in the abstract—absolute—space of the *Looking Glass* world: in order to stand still, one has to "run faster than fast".[5] As a writer, Carroll plays with the reader's assumptions on the relationship between space, time and movement, constructing his literary jokes around the fact that our knowledge of such notions is bound to be expressed in words, and in a way that can never be transparent. The fiction bears a didactic intent: after all, our everyday experience in what we call the *real* world can at times be as puzzling as Carroll's imaginary universe. And although we rely on language to give shape to this experience, the realm of words and discourse is always one step removed from the immediacy of our perception.

Not only do Carroll's tales trigger a reflection on our condition of being in space, the *way* by which the tales are told is also crucial in this regard. Carroll's nonsense, understood here as a literary genre, is a self-conscious process that emphasises how our condition of existence is first and foremost a linguistic one. Marina Yaguello aptly points out that Carroll's verbal delirium brings into light the nature of language, the ways by which meaning is constructed, and our relationship as speakers (*locuteurs*) to language.[6] Carroll's inherently critical attitude towards writing is grounded in the specific context of the second half of the nineteenth-century, a context marked by two opposite impulses. On the one hand, the proponents of scientific positivism advocated the explicative authority of scientific reasoning, mathematical models and experimental observation over other forms of knowledge production. On the other, romantic intellectuals, artists, writers and architects wished to challenge what they saw as a formulaic classicism and rationalist impulse inherited from the Enlightenment: they attributed the dehumanizing effect of the Industrial revolution to positivism and held the advance of the Natural Sciences responsible for an objectification of nature. Their critique was essentially conveyed by revisiting medieval and early Renaissance themes and by giving priority to the ambiguity of human emotions over the clarity of scientific reason.

Carroll's nonsense emerges from the contradictions and potentialities inherent to such a context: it addresses a series of shifts in our understanding of language as a vehicle for knowledge. Along this line, Jean-Jacques Lecercle identifies how Carroll's specific way of placing issues of logic and language at the core of his stories induces a strong critical dimension within the works, a critique that, apart from being

a playful commentary on literary fiction, is also directed at the way language is commonly understood, and used.[7] James A. Williams establishes how language theories in Victorian England, and especially the new philological approaches of the mid-nineteenth century, were recurrently targeted by Carroll's jokes. Williams also shows how the position of Oxford star-philologist Friedrich Max Müller on the "autonomy of words" sparked some of Carroll's humorous critiques.[8] Carroll's nonsense thus serves to unveil a number of expectations regarding language and meaning, pointing towards the question of linguistic *usage* as a means of mediating our relationships to our surroundings.

This essay shows how similar *topoi* are at play in Carroll's short pamphlets on architecture, and in *The Vision of the Three T's* (1873) in particular. The aim is to unveil how Carroll's architectural criticism is informed by his appraisal of the new science of language that was being popularized at Oxford at the time. I will argue that philological themes are targeted in several of Carroll's jokes in *The Vision*, connecting questions of architectural meaning to changing theories of language.

Scientific Philology Unravelled in Carroll's Fiction

When Lewis Carroll joined Christ Church College, Oxford, as an undergraduate in 1851, comparative philologist Friedrich Max Müller had recently begun his professorship and, as James A. Williams pertinently states, it is very likely that Carroll, with his early interest in writing processes, attended some of Müller's lectures on language.[9] The German philologist had by then acquired an undisputed renown.[10] Müller upheld a rather novel position regarding language in the Victorian context of the mid-nineteenth century, one influenced by new scientific approaches in philology.[11] This New Philology would gain in strength over the following decades. As Williams points out:

> Oxford philology stood at a crossroad: on the one hand, there was the inherited English approach, a blend of amateur antiquarianism and philological-etymological speculation (a tradition including John Locke and John Horne Tooke), easily regarded as a branch of humanistic philosophy. On the other, there was the party of "Germanizers" who wished to introduce into England the professional, scientific 'New Philology' pioneered by Franz Bopp and Jacob Grimm in Germany and Rasmus Rask in Denmark.[12]

The Victorian context thus witnesses a shift from language understood as the voice of a people to an understanding that progressively separates language from communities and human agency.[13] As Williams notes: "The new science of language (…) insisted that languages develop in accordance with abstract and remote morphological laws, beyond human control."[14] To summarize it briefly, Müller's theory posits a phonetically traceable source to language: all words find their origins in a limited number of sounds—or rings—that emanate from the natural world. He also advocates that words somehow precede human

thought processes or, to put it more simply, that "it is words that give man his thoughts," reinforcing the recently developed idea that words actually possess *a life of their own*, detached and autonomous from the day-to-day community-based practice of language.[15] The new scientific philology thus contributed to problematizing the nineteenth-century understanding of language in England, putting into question the assumed connection between words and meanings as well as the accountability of users in the production of sense. As it got diffused outside the circle of specialists, notably through Müller's lectures in the context of Oxford, this understanding created a certain malaise amongst the general public, resulting in what has been identified as a growing cultural anxiety about language in Victorian society.[16] On the one hand, the economy and propriety of language, tied to positivism and the developing discipline of scientific philology became a central concern. On the other, a more traditional acceptance of the inherently ambiguous nature of language withstood and was re-qualified through nonsense literary experiments such as Carroll's.[17] As Williams pointedly argues: "one of the things that nonsense writing can help us to remember is that a cultural anxiety can find a form and a balance in humour".[18]

Williams' investigation shows how several passages from the *Alice* books unveil Carroll's critical views on scientific philology. Through a series of jokes, absurd linguistic situations and poetic experiments, Carroll's nonsense unveils the inherent absurdity in a notion of language holding that words would be imbued with the capabilities proper to organic life and could somehow *act* on their own. In the opening episode in *Through the Looking Glass* for example, Alice's interaction with the White King revolves precisely on the question of agency over words. It stages the King's struggle with a pen that seems to be moved by invisible forces (Alice's hand). As he tries to write down his *own* feelings regarding a recent traumatic experience, the words appearing on paper end up being quite foreign to his thought: from the point of view of the King, the pen (as a symbol and tool for writing) Williams notes, does seem to possess *a life of its own*. As Williams emphasises, this theme reoccurs several times in the Alice stories, highlighting the question of human control over words in conjunction with questions of identity. The idea that words can govern one's thoughts and utterances is also staged in the Alice-Mabel dilemma in the opening part of *Alice's Adventures*. As Alice tries to recite a previously memorized poem, the words seem to "come out wrong," leading her to infer that she must have become someone else over night.[19] As Williams points out: "Carroll's nonsense worlds permit, with no contradiction, the unsettling idea that language could take on life and speak through his characters: in so doing they stage popular ideas of scientific philology and spoof them, in a manner pregnant with implications of divided personality."[20]

A crucial passage deals with another implication proper to scientific philology: the problematic privilege given to the sonic aspect of words over their role within sentences (enunciations) in the production of meaning. In the famously grotesque dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty, we find the rather arrogant egg-shaped character seated high on his wall in a symbolic position of power, claiming mastery over words. Humpty Dumpty not only speaks about words as protagonists themselves—living beings under his employment and subjected to his whim—, he goes further and concludes by making

an apology against communication: "Impenetrability, That's what I say!" As Williams notes, Carroll's Humpty Dumpty embodies the perfect caricature of the scientific philologist's posture. Humpty Dumpty's claim of control over the behaviour of words comes with a downfall: Williams remarks, Alice constantly demands clarification in order to be able to understand what is being said. We would add that the reader's knowledge of the traditional nursery rhyme's finale—Humpty Dumpty's great fall and the impossibility of putting the pieces back together again—implicitly raised through the episode, infuses the joke with a critical stance: treating words as *living* entities to be regimented at will and favouring sound effects over the transmission of meaning is, outside the realm of nonsense, a dangerous business. Carroll's tale thus points towards the idea that in everyday communication processes, words cannot solely be understood as autonomous, self-sufficient entities, nor can specific meanings be assigned to them outside of a set of commonly accepted rules that govern their usage, thereby emphasizing the prevalence of human agency in language-based communication processes.

Williams' concluding argument, which I will only briefly summarise here, dwells on Carroll's nonsense poem *Jabberwocky*. From Carroll's publication of the first stanza of the famous poem using a mock-Anglo-Saxon font in 1855, to the prominent place given to the entire version in *Through the Looking Glass*, and through its reception and "Germanization" by Victorian philologists, Williams reveals how Carroll's famous nonsense verses push the notions implied by scientific philology to their limit.[21] The poem serves to make apparent some of the New Philology's inherent fallacies: "Just on the edge of comprehension, [the language of the poem] seems to be living out its private life as a subtle, playful interpretative removed from the reader".[22]

If *Jabberwocky* can indeed be seen as this curious, almost autonomous literary creature, the poem concurrently reveals another central feature of human communication, and one crucial to Carroll's practice as a writer: the fact that language is essentially geared towards the production of meaning(s). As linguists have stated since, human communication processes are rarely straightforward: misunderstanding is quite often the norm, while clear comprehension remains the exception. As we speak, meaning is produced through convoluted paths. This production usually requires several rounds of interpretation, enquiry, and clarification. This notion is embedded in Carroll's critical stance towards the New Philology: despite the extreme obliqueness of the *Jabberwocky* stanzas, meaning nonetheless emerges. Even though she finds the poem rather difficult to understand, Alice confesses: "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—".[23] It is this ambiguous yet semantically productive quality of language that Carroll essentially plays with. In the end, the Duchess' advice to Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* can be seen to summarize Carroll's critical position on scientific philology: "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves."[24]

Positivism, Language and Architecture's Meaninglessness

A similar concern for the possibility of conveying meaning can be found in Carroll's architectural pamphlets, *The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford* and *The Vision of The Three T's*. Within Carroll's imposing and polymorphous corpus, the two texts stand at the margin: published more or less anonymously at Oxford, in 1872 and 1873 respectively, they were widely circulated in that context. [25] These two pieces constitute Carroll's most direct discussion on the theme of architecture.[26] In terms of their tone and structure, the pamphlets are in line with Carroll's nonsense writing: they are anchored in the tradition of the satire, where wit and humour are central to conveying the author's critique. *The Vision of The Three T's* particularly focuses on the relationship of architecture to language, hinting at the limits of scientific positivism while mocking several themes dear to proponents of the New Philology.

The architectural transformation under scrutiny in Carroll's pamphlets is the construction of the new bell tower, or Belfry, at Christ Church College (1872-1879). Commissioned by Dean Henry Liddell in the early 1870's, the project was designed by controversial Gothic-revival architect George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878) and executed by his former student George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907). It was seen as an important milestone, one that would end a 350-year process of building at Christ Church. As it touched upon the most pristine parts of the building, altering the physical appearance of the college as it was experienced from the main quadrangle, Tom Quad, as well as its relationship to Christ Church Chapel and to the town, the proposed transformation was from the very beginning extremely controversial.[27] Central to the intervention was the new bell tower planned at the junction of two major interior elements, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey's impressive Hall of c1528-29 and the fan-vaulted ceiling above the main staircase of c1640.[28] The superimposition of this new piece on top of the existing college necessitated the interruption of the parapet above the Hall, a gesture that Carroll and his colleagues at Christ Church referred to as the *trench*. The transformation also included a new access to Christ Church Cathedral through the east wing of the college, where two narrow vertical apertures with pointed arches were cut through the façade. It is this double opening to a new passageway that Carroll satirically mentions as the *tunnel*. Already completed as Carroll was writing *The Vision*, these two stages of the project are discussed as two of the "t's". The third "t"—the *tea-chest*—refers to a temporary aspect of the project: a cubic wooden scaffolding meant to shelter the construction site of the future Belfry.[29]

When writing the *The Vision*, and in order to make his critique readily accessible to the widest possible range of readers, Carroll has recourse to a well-known model that he adapts: the pamphlet constitutes a shorter, parodied version of one of the most famous and widely reprinted treatises inherited from the Renaissance, *The Compleat Angler*, by Isaak Walton.[30] Rediscovered in the late eighteenth century, this Renaissance treatise on fish and the art of fishing was amongst the most widely circulated books in nineteenth-century Victorian England. In a dialogue taking place over the course of several days, its three characters, Piscator (a fisherman), Venator (a falconer) and Auceps (a hunter) discuss and commend their

respective activities. Angling (fishing) is celebrated as the most conducive to contemplation and therefore most suited to the wise and honest man: fishing is posited as a means to enhance intellectual faculty, guide social conduct, and educate in the realm of ethics. If *The Compleat Angler* is a rather cheerful celebration of fishing, *The Vision of the Three T's*, as the subtitle "a threnody" announces, has a slightly different tone. It constitutes a complaint, a nostalgic mourning.[31] Apart from making this change in tonality, Carroll borrows extensively from Walton's text: two of the characters, Piscator and Venator, come straight from Walton's book, the style of writing and the structure of the dialogue are extremely similar. When the pamphlet came out, most readers would have been familiar with *The Compleat Angler*: they could very quickly identify it as the source and experience the efficacy in the title's word play (Three t's/Treatise). The choice of this well known Renaissance work as model serves another practical purpose: the dialogue form allows Carroll to easily stage opposite views on the project.

Much shorter than the original, Carroll's parodied version is organised into three chapters and takes place over the course of one afternoon. *The Vision* opens with the two sportsmen arriving at their fishing site, admiring the perfect geometry of their surroundings and noticing some recent architectural transformations. 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?"[32] Piscator confirms the novelty of the three "things". Following this rather expedited introduction, meant primarily to invoke Carroll's source, the two main protagonists enter into three different conversations/interactions with passers-by. The first and last are eminent college scholars, while the second, Lunatic, turns out to be the architect responsible for the project. All three scholars carry their own series of assumptions as to the meaning of the architectural interventions. As we shall see, much like in the Alice books, several jokes are aimed at the implications held by scientific philologists.

The passage of the first Collegian interrupts the protagonists' conversation. Regarding the "tunnel," Piscator enquires: "we would ask the cause for piercing the very hearth of this fair building with that un-comely tunnel, which is at once so ill-shaped, so ill-sized, and so ill-lighted." After having made sure that both his interlocutors do not speak German, the Professor of Natural Sciences answers: "Warum nicht?"[33] He insists: "For nowadays, all that is good comes from the German. Ask our men of science: they will tell you that any German book must needs surpass an English one. Aye, and even an English book, worth naught in this its native dress, shall become, when rendered into German, a valuable contribution to Science!"[34] Motivated, Venator seeks explanation concerning the "trench", which he describes as this "ghastly gash above us, hacked, as though by some wanton school-boy, in the parapet adjoining the Hall."[35] The Pro-fessor replies, once more in German: "Wie befinden Sie Sich?"[36] Finally, when asked about the "unseemly box that blots the heavens above"—the tea-chest—the answer provided by the scholar, which he delivers in English this time, is nonetheless 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!" [37]

Behind the apparent gibberish of the whole conversation, Carroll's joke can be seen to question the possibility of applying positivist approaches, here represented by the Professor of Natural Sciences, to provide adequate explanations for architectural artefacts. It also pranks the higher value given to German in such scientific approaches, while it invokes the New Philologists' praise of sounds (and especially German sounding words) as self-evidently carrying meaning. It finally somehow connects the box-like shape of the project with the formalism inherent to such scientific attitudes.

Those themes reoccur several times in the pamphlet, notably through the interaction between the two sportsmen and a third interlocutor, Tutor, who not so surprisingly turns out to be a professor of ancient languages and "unknown tongues." Providing his own "expertise" on the architectural interventions, Tutor bases his argumentation on a satirical verse found in the work of first century B.C. Roman poet Horace: *Diruit, aedificat, mutat quadrata rotundis.* Horace's satirical verse, originally published in his *Satires and Epistles*, targeted the monetary cost of architectural works. It is correctly translated by Tutor as "It teareth down, it buildeth up, it exchangeth square things for round," but unlike as seen in the case of the Roman poet, where the verse is infused with irony, Carroll's Tutor uses it literally as a means to celebrate architectural transformations. Tutor does not acknowledge the origin of the line in Horace's work. Rather, he refers to it as the motto of the Governing Body in pursuing the project, and as a trite example to illustrate a rule in a Latin grammar. When asked by Venator about the relevance of using a grammatical rule as motto, Tutor replies: "Sir, if we are not grammatical, we are nothing!"[38] Carroll's joke, which here seems to be aimed quite directly at philologists such as Müller, revolves on the literalness of Tutor's translation and misuse of the ironic verse.[39]

Finally, in order to bring light onto the twin arches (c.f. the tunnel) and to justify the presence of a heavy pier at the centre of the archway, the scholar uses yet another rule, but this time it is a mathematical one. In accordance with the mathematical theory of the non-harmonic mean he asserts, "the pier" is analogous 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 both rules, the grammatical and the mathematical, as if these were self-evidently leading to an understanding of the architectural interventions. Surprisingly, both rules also seem to bear equal value in the philologist's value system. Once again Carroll's joke targets the tools offered by positivist language theorists, suggesting how these might fall short when it comes to acknowledging our everyday experience of architecture.

Already a year earlier, when writing a first pamphlet on the topic, Carroll had aimed his critique at philological themes along with the methodology proper to positivism, and more especially to the Natural Sciences: the shape given to *The New Belfry* is a mock-monograph, the chief discursive genre favoured by nineteenth-century natural scientists. In a highly satirical manner, Carroll's monograph aims at presenting the most exhaustive and objective attributes, or characteristics, and at producing the most comprehen-

sive knowledge of a new architectural species: the Belfry of Christ Church. Such attributes range from the "etymological" to the "moral," including such notions as "style," "origin," "architectural merit," and so on. Each category, or "treatment," is defined in the most direct—pseudo-objective—manner. According to Carroll, the "true origin of the new Belfry" is 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 Lexicon should in any way 'embody' the names of the above illustrious individuals."[40] The idea of embodying the names of the project's patrons, Carroll finally tells us, could not be reduced to a working form: they both had to leave the site of construction and could not therefore be 'embodied' by the work. Jeeby (an acronym of Goerges Bodley's initials), the wandering and insane architect, thus came to the site as a replacement. He is said to have found his inspiration for the building while contemplating a box of fake Chinese tea.[41]

The figure of the mad wandering architect is reintroduced by Carroll in *The Vision*, along with the problem of a work's origin and the theme of artistic inspiration processes. In passing by and then engaging in conversation with the main protagonists, Lunatic quickly claims authorship of the disputed architectural transformations:

> 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. (...) My heart 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.[42]

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", some slight changes were made. "Oh, the ecstasy," he says, "when yesterday the screen was swept away, and the *Vision was a Reality*!"[43] Carroll's architect finds inspiration in a piece of Stilton cheese, doing so in a dreamlike drunken flash of insanity.

However complete Lunatic claims his vision to be, Carroll playfully balances it with another equally ecstatic yet much darker one. The observer's "vision" is presented in Piscator's dream as the dramatic—sublime—coming into being of the three architectural interventions. Central to Piscator's vision is the figure (or ghost) of Cardinal Wolsey. The original patron of Christ Church appears, surrounded by a myriad of other spirits howling and making loud noises. His words are grave, and final:

(...)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![44]

The story ends abruptly after this passage: Piscator awakens; the sportsmen see a fish and hook it. Carroll brings the quasi-religious ecstasy of the "maker's" vision down to colloquial, earthly concerns, contributing to the humorous effect produced.

The two visions, the vision (inspiration) of the architect and the vision (ecstatic revelation) of the observer are analogous, yet antagonistic in their explanation of the architectural interventions. Both visions occur in a kind of intense, dream-like situation, and portray both artistic creation and the experience of a work of art as mystical experiences. Utterly detached from the considerations of the world, from social, economical or material concerns but, most importantly, from questions of architectural significance, Lunatic's retelling of his vision leads to the production, in Piscators's dream, of a vision of horror.

Carroll has moved the discussion at the opposite end of a spectrum that ranges from the authority given to scientific method to the mechanisms of artistic inspiration. Although his take on the nineteenth-century notion of artistic genius would have to be further explored, we can infer that, for Carroll, both approaches fall short in explaining the architectural production of his contemporaries. His pamphlets highlight the difficulty for a nineteenth-century observer, given the interpretative tools at his disposal, to extricate meaning from an architectural experience.

Mourning Architecture's Lost Expressivity?

In his journal entry of March 12th 1853, Carroll had made a to-do list of topics to pursue, amongst which we find "Scripture History, Church architecture, Anglo-Saxon, Gothic".[45] Although it is quite possible that the notions of Gothic and Anglo-Saxon alluded to in this list relate, as Williams suggests, to linguistic inquiries, our contention is that the terms announce a dual line of interest pursued by Carroll, one that navigates between the architectural and the linguistic.

Carroll's diary entry was written in the mid-1850's, a few years after the publication of John Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*. A colleague and acquaintance of Ruskin at Oxford, Carroll most certainly found interest in the work of the art and architecture critic.[46] In "The Lamp of Obedience" Ruskin writes: "Architecture never could flourish except when it was subjected to a national law as strict and 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*."[47] Ruskin's claim takes place in the context of his reflections on Gothic architecture, an architecture that he sees, at a time marked by historicism and Romanticism, as the most appropriate stylistic approach to building. However nuanced Ruskin's position may be, and we shall not address the complexity of his work here, this claim nevertheless spotlights an analogical relationship between architecture and language that entails several ramifications. First, architecture, like language, is in need of being regulated. Second, this regulation process is subordinate to civic life, to the structure and influence of cultural and social institutions. Finally, Ruskin's position emphasises the co-dependency between architecture and language as modes of cultural and societal expression.

Ruskin's demand for an *established* and *universal* architecture—akin to language—coincides with the anxiety-ridden shifts in the understanding of language brought about by scientific philology. The development of the New Philology, with its emphasis on Gothic and Anglo-Saxon origins, finds an echo in the nineteenth-century search for architectural origins in medieval, early renaissance ideals. Nineteenth-century Victorian architecture is thus marked by a comparable contradiction: on the one hand we find the idea that a chosen *style*—the High Gothic of the late Middle Ages for example—functions somewhat *autonomously* and inherently carries the most appropriate meanings, detached from processes of interpretation. On the other, a striving for architecture's eloquence endures, that is, for buildings to universally convey, as Ruskin emphasises, the social, political and religious values of a given society. As the understanding of language progressively detaches language from community-based practices, the problem of architectural interpretation also gets severed from questions of collective agency and usage.

Although the protagonists in *The Vision* often refer to their newly transformed surroundings as *ghastly*, *ill-shaped*, or *ugly*, Carroll does not directly aim his critique at the stylistic choices of the architectural intervention, concerns that were at the forefront of architectural discussions in Victorian England. Rather, the entire dialogue staged in *The Vision of the Three T's* constantly emphasizes problems of miscommunication and the impossibility of balancing the uneasiness caused by one's experience of a place with any explanation, rational or ecstatic, that could lead to an understanding.

For instance, although he does criticise the bluntness of the shape displayed by the temporary wooden scaffolding—its box-like aspect—Carroll's chief problem with the "tea-chest", as much as with the "tunnel" and the "trench," is essentially their lack of eloquence and the fact that for some unsuggested reason the meaning of the interventions remains concealed. Carroll thus shifts the debate away from the dominant architectural issue of his time—the question of style—and brings into focus the possibility for architecture to signify and to be interpreted and explained through language. In so doing, Carroll's jokes recurrently and somewhat indistinctively target nineteenth-century scientific approaches, blurring what we would now see as clear boundaries between, for example, mathematical and grammatical concerns, or approaches proper to the Natural Sciences and logico-mathematical reasoning.

The fact that Lewis Carroll would ground his reflexions on architecture in questions of language is not surprising. As we have seen, the problematic nature of language communication constantly lurks

beneath the surface of his writing, conferring to his literary experiments the kind of self-consciousness usually associated with later avant-garde literary and artistic movements.[48] However, as we have seen, Carroll's literary jokes and critical stances towards both linguistic and architectural issues are often fashioned on the foundations of early modern themes, exemplified in part, in the case of *The Vision*, by his specific choice of model. The presence of the two architectural pamphlets within Carroll's corpus not only testifies to his interest in architectural questions, but highlights a specific region of his work, revealing a concern for space, for time, and for that special kind of encounter with space and time fostered by architectural environments and formulated in words, through the dialogical play of conversation. Carroll systematically favours the ambiguity of the *expressed* over the accuracy of transparent representation.[49] As he emphasises the limits of architecture's expressivity and the problem of its reception under specific linguistic, scientific and artistic conditions, Carroll touches upon a most relevant question: He posits an architecture encountered through dialogical exchange, an architecture experienced while being physically appraised, used and, most importantly, framed into discourse. Such language-based conditions remain at the core of today's processes of cohabitation, and crucial to the formation of semantically productive social spaces.

Notes

1   This essay is a work in progress. It is part of a wider research project that examines the connecti
        between language theories and architectural discourses around a series of nineteenth-century
        scientific and artistic shifts, with focus on the notion of usage in collective space-making
        processes.

2   See Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford:
        Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 297.

3   The episode entitled *A Caucus-race and the Long Tale* is exemplary in this regard. See Carroll,
        Lew is "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," in *The Annotated Alice*, intro. and notes Martin
        Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 29-36.

4   On spatial conditions at work in Carroll's nonsense literature see my *Running Out of Place:
        The Language and Architecture of Lewis Carroll*, PhD thesis (Montreal: McGill University,
        2005), especially chs. 2 and 3.

5   Carroll, Lewis, "Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There", in *The Annotated
        Alice*, intro. and notes Martin Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 164.

6   See Yaguello, Marina, *Alice au pays de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 150.

7   See Lecercle, Jean-Jacques, "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. See also, Lecercle, Jean

Jacques, *Philosophy of Nonsense: Intuition in Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994).

8   See James A. Williams "Lewis Carroll and The Private Life of Words", *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 64, No. 266, pp. 651-671. Williams' analysis serves as point of departure for the present essay.

9   See Williams, "Lewis Carroll," 652.

10   Linda Dowling comments on the popularity of the philologist, who was commonly referred to as the "Head Authority on Languages." See Dowling, Linda, "Victorian England and the Science of Language," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 97 (1982): 160.

11   The initial understanding of philology, inherited from the Greek *philologia*, describing a love of learning (*philos*), of literature as well as of argument and reasoning (*logos*), was narrowed to the study of the historical development of languages (historical linguistics) in the context of nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon language theories. The late nineteenth, early twentieth century context would, however, see a return of the original sense and scope of the discipline, notably in the philosophical work of Friedrich Nietszche. On this notion see Foucault, Michel, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), especially 314-318.

12   Williams, "Lewis Carroll," 652.

13   Ibid., 653.

14   Idem.

15   See Williams, 653.

16   As Williams emphasizes, Müller's position displayed enough ambiguity to alleviate some of the public's anxiety, conferring to his lectures their popular appeal. According to Williams this is due to Müller's lack of clarity in his usage of the word 'language', a clarification that would later be systematized in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure with the clear distinction between language as a system (*la langue*) and language as it is spoken or practiced (*la parole*). While for proponents of scientific philology language is usually an abstract category distinct from specific languages (such as German or English), Müller somehow maintains strong ties between 'languages' as they are being used to convey meaning and 'language' as a field of inquiry that obeys rules residing outside of human control. A similar slippage occurs when Müller refers to 'man' and his thoughts (the notion of 'man' as an abstract category freely alternates with that of 'man' as a specific speaker), an ambiguity that still grounds language in the familiarity of everyday experience. See Williams, 656. On the notion of a cultural anxiety about language in the nineteenth-century context, see also Ramsey, Shawn, "Cultural persuasion in Lexicographic Space: Dictionaries as Site of Nineteenth-Century Epideictic Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Review*, 32 :1, 2013, 64-80, doi: 10.1080/07350198.2013.739494.

17   Shawn Ramsey examines the impact of lexicographic endeavors in the context of the nineteenth century, and places these two positions at opposing ends of the spectrum of Victorian theories of language. See Ramsey, "Cultural persuasion in Lexicographic Space," 64-80.

18   Williams, 656.

19   Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," In *Carroll, The Annotated Alice*, intro. and notes Martin Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 23.

20   Williams, 656.

21   Concerning the "Germanization" of Carroll's famous nonsense poem, Williams refers to a translation into German of the first and last stanzas published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1872, by Oxford lexicographer and philologist Robert Scott. Interestingly, as we shall see, the same Scott is targeted in Carroll's architectural pamphlet.

22   Ibid., 670. See Williams, 666-675.

23   Carroll, "Through the Looking Glass," 150.

24   Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," 92.

25   Lewis Carroll is the pseudonym of English writer/mathematician/logician Charles L. Dodgson (1832-1898). When he published *The New Belfry*, Carroll used an anagram of his real name's initials, D.L.C., which is also the acronym for *doctor civis legis* (doctor of the law), a title given at Oxford to the highest-ranking personalities. *The Vision of the Three T's* is signed "by the author of the New Belfry," thus connecting the two pamphlets while blurring the notion of authorship. See "Notes sur les pamphlets oxoniens", in Lewis Carroll, Œuvres (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 1859.

26   The texts are usually mentioned as part of a group of nine Oxford pamphlets. A good contextualization can be found in "Notes sur les pamphlets oxoniens," 1859. I propose a reading of the architectural pamphlets in relation to questions of authorship in Dionne, Caroline, "Architectural Creativity in Lewis Carroll's The Vision of the Three T's", in *Architecture and Authorship* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 30-39.

27   Henry George Liddell (1811-1898) was head of Christ Church from 1855 to 1891 and father of the 'real' Alice Liddell, the little girl who inspired Carroll's fiction works. For a more detailed account of Scott and Bodley's participation in the architectural project and context, see Sherwood and Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxforshire*, 112. See also Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 77.

28   Idem.

29   The future bell tower was meant to house Great Tom, the college bell originally located inside Christopher Wren's tower above the main entrance gate. The new belfry was indeed completed between 1876-79, but in 1873, and due to political and financial issues as well as to construction delays, the lasting presence of the wooden scaffolding became a source of irritation for many Christ Church residents. See Sherwood and Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxforshire*, 112. See also Tyack, *Oxford an Architectural Guide*, 77.

30   Isaak Walton (1593-1683) is mostly known for his biographical work, amongst which are the *Lives* of Sir Henry Wotton (early translator of Vitruvius into English) and John Donne. See, Walton, Isaak, *The Compleat Angler: or the Creative Man's Recreation,* London, 1653.

31   Threnodies, or Elegies, are usually songs or poems for the dead, mourning the lost of a loved one and expressing nostalgia for bygone days.

32   Lewis Carroll. "The Vision of the Three T's," in *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1996), 1037.

33   The German "Warum nicht?" literally translate as "Why not?"

34   Carroll, "The Vision of the Three T's," 1040.

35   Idem.

36   Literally: "How do you find yourself?" The expression can also mean "How do you do?"

37   Carroll, "The Vision of the Three T's," 1040.

38   Carroll. "The Vision of the Three T's," 1049.

39   Interestingly, the same verse is ironically invoked by Dr. Rev. Edward B. Pusey, Oxford's Regius Professor of Hebrew, as the motto of the German "history of Sacred Books." Pusey's critique is aimed at the German-influenced philological approaches developing in the 1850's at Oxford, including Müller's. Carroll, who was most certainly aware of this 1853 extensive report, playfully has Tutor transform the ironic verse into a Latin rule of Grammar. See, "Evidence," compiled by Dr. Rev. Pusey, In *Report and Evidence Upon the Recommendations of Her Majesty's Commissioners on the State of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1853), 107. https://archive.org/stream/cu31924030614766

40   It is important to note that at the time of the construction of the belfry, Henry Liddell, main patron to the project, was working with Robert Scott on the completion of a Greek lexicon. Playing on the homonyms—replacing Scott the architect with Scott the lexicographer—Carroll's critique is aimed at the patron's poor administration of the project. It questions the possibility for architecture to embody single words, here patronyms, rather than more complex notions such as values, ideas, or the patron's entire "character," as was the case in earlier architectural theories.

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

42   Ibid., 1045.

43   Ibid., 1046. My emphasis.

44   Carroll. "The Vision of the Three T's," 1051-52; emphasis is Carroll's.

45   See *Lewis Carroll's Diaries, Volume 1*. Ed. by Edward Wakeling (London: Lewis Carroll Society, 1993), 74.

46   Carroll and Ruskin met on several occasions at Oxford, through Dean Liddell's circle, but, most importantly, through their common interest in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Extensive biographical accounts can be found in Cohen, Morton N., *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1996).

47   Ruskin, John, "The Lamp of Obedience" In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1907), 207. Emphasis is mine.

48   A parenthood between Carroll's work and twentieth-century avant-garde movements such as Surrealism has been noted, as well as literary connections with modern literary approaches like, for example, James Joyces' *Finnegan's Wake* and the works of some proponents of the *nouveau-roman*. See among others: Henkle, Roger B. "Carroll's Narratives Underground: 'Modernism' and Form"; Stern, Jeffrey, "Lewis Carroll the Surrealist" ; or McGarrity Buki, Ann. "Lewis Carroll in Finnegans Wake," in *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*. New York: C.M. Potter, 1982. See also Remy, Michel. "Surrealice: Lewis Carroll et les surréalistes." *Europe-Revue littéraire mensuelle* 68, 736 (1990): 123-136.

49   I must acknowledge here the influence of Gilles Deleuze's study of Carroll's nonsense. See his
        Logique du sens (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 273-276 and *Critique et Clinique* (Paris: Minuit, 1993),
        34-35.

About the Author

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