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1. Introduction

1.1 *The Polyphony of Carroll's Work*

Lewis Carroll's Alice books are a multilayered work of literature which set a classical example of the principle of *literary polyphony* in the sense of Bakhtin (1929). Written for children and (re-)read by adults, the Alice books have been investigated by scholars from the most diverse perspectives, such as social history, literary criticism (Reichert 1974, Kreutzer 1984), psychoanalysis (Greenacre 1955), philosophy (Holmes 1959), logic (Spacks 1961), and linguistics (Sutherland 1970 and this conference) including text linguistics (Halliday & Hasan 1976, Petöfi 1990).

1.2 *Semiotic Aspects of Wonderland*

That Carroll's Alice books should also be read from a semiotic perspective was first proposed by Kirk (1962). But although Kirk called Charles Dodgson a «semeiotician», he restricted his own study to impressionistic annotations concerning some anomalies of logic and language in the world of Alice (ibid.: 51-68). Sutherland (1970: 68-90), by contrast, has a more comprehensive chapter on «Signs» in Carroll's work, but the range of his study is restricted by the limitations of the behaviorist model of semiosis which he adopted from Charles Morris (1939-56). My own explorations in the semiotics of Carroll's Alice books (Nöth 1980) have gone in three directions. One was an ambitious attempt to describe the anomalies in Alice's world against the background of a holistic model of the structures of the semiotic and

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nonsemiotic world. A second area of investigation were the pragmatic anomalies in Alice's dialogic interactions; and my third topic concerned anomalies in the structure and use of signs in Alice's world.

1.3 *Charles Dodgson Semeiotician?*

Today I would like to resume this third topic of semiosis in Wonderland. My argument is that the anomalies of semiosis in Alice's world call the reader's attention to those conditions of normal and felicitous sign use from which Wonderland semiosis deviates. By wondering about the strange, impossible or nonsensical situations of sign use in Wonderland, the reader becomes indirectly aware of how signs function in everyday semiosis. In this sense, the Alice books contain an implicit theory of semiotics. However, the logician Dodgson never developed any explicit theory of signs of which Carroll's Alice books might be a poetic illustration. Carroll's interest lay in problemizing semiotic processes rather than in systematizing them.

My following considerations are intended to link the problemization and systematization of the semiotic aspects of Carroll's Alice books. I propose to base the systematization on the framework provided by C. S. Peirce, whose comprehensive sign theory offers an especially delicate grid for the analysis. (For further references see also my survey of Peirce's theory of signs in Nöth 1990). I do not, however, intend to intimate thereby any form of influence between Carroll (1832-1898) and his contemporary Peirce (1839-1914).

2. Signs in Normal and in Wonderland Semiosis

Alice's Wonderland and the land behind the looking glass are regions in which the laws of space, time language and logic are partially suspended. The curious things which happen there cause Alice to seek constantly for signs which may help her find her way in Wonderland.

Sometimes, Alice is indeed successful in orienting herself by such signs, but semiosis, the process of interpreting signs, is often incomprehensible, disorienting or even deceiving in Wonderland.

2.1 *Signs in Everyday Semiosis*

The «drink-me-bottle» (AW I) is a *sign of orientation* in Wonderland. Alice checks «wheter it is marked "*poison*" or not» and discovers that it does not have such a label. She knows the code developed by

druggists for users of drugs and other chemicals. It consists of two signs, the label "poison" and the absence of this label, which is a zero-sign. Alice is not deceived in applying the rules of this code. She interprets the zero-sign as referring to a drinkable liquid, tastes it, finds it «very nice» and is not poisoned. Such signs of orientation are thus successfully interpreted on the basis of a valid code, and the result of this act of semiosis is in accordance with the interpreter's expectations.

The nature of the sign in such processes of successful semiosis can be specified in terms of Peircean semiotics. Semiosis, according to Peirce, is based on a semiotic triad, which he once called a «triple connection of *sign, thing signified,* [and] *cognition produced in the mind*» (CP 1.372). In a more comprehensive definition, Peirce circumscribed this triad as follows (CP 2.228):

> A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen.

Only in orientational semiosis does Alice encounter signs which constitute such fully developed triads. Consider the zero-sign of the drink-me-bottle. The missing label is the representamen or sign-vehicle of this sign. Its object is the chemical quality of the liquid which Alice eventually drinks. Its interpretant, the cognition produced in Alice's mind, is her knowledge of drinkable liquids. This interpretant is itself a more developed mental sign because, among other things, the idea of "non-poison" belongs to a semantic network containing the semantic opposition between drinkable and non-drinkable liquids.

2.2 *Signs in Wonderland Semiosis*

Alice's disorientation and her wondering about the strange events in Wonderland is due to deviations from normal semiosis in everyday life which I would like to discuss under the headings of incomplete and transformed semiosis. In incomplete semiosis the interpreter is disoriented because one of the correlates of the sign cannot be identified. Transformations of signs in Wonderland are either deceptive of creative. In deceptive semiosis, the sign creates semiotic expectations in the interpreter which later remain unfulfilled. In creative semiosis, signs are either used in the exploration of unusual and unexpected potentialities of an existing code or they have to be interpreted on the basis of a new code.

Such anomalies in Wonderland semiosis direct the reader's attention to those elements which deviate from normal and natural semiosis in everyday life. By transforming constituents of the semiotic triad and other elements of the process of semiosis, Carroll arrives at problemizing the structure of the sign in general. I would like to investigate such meta-semiotic processes by focussing on the three correlates of the sign individually.

3. Problemizing the Sign-Vehicle

In Wonderland, we become aware of the role of the sign-vehicle in semiosis when it is absent or when it is creatively transformed.

3.1 *The Absent Sign-Vehicle*

The clearest illustration of Carroll's problemizing the sign-vehicle by its absence is «the wood where things have no names» (LG III). Here Alice is unable to designate linguistically the wood, the fawn and herself. But although these sign-vehicles are lacking, Alice's orientation is not really much disturbed. She knows that she is under trees («"— under *this*, you know!" putting her hand on the trunk of the tree») and finds her way through the wood. Thus, she has not lost acquaintance with the object of the sign whose name she does not remember. This object even produces a further «cognition in her mind», which is its interpretant, «an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign», as Peirce defines it. This «more developed» mental sign referring back to its object is her remembrance that the wood consists of trees and that in this place, the forgetting of names «really *has* happened after all».

Alice's adventures in the wood where things have no names do not prove that semiosis is possible with signs lacking a sign-vehicle. In fact, Carroll's illustration of communication without sign-vehicles is simply not radical enough as an illustration of such an extreme case of incomplete semiosis. Alice's dialogue with the fawn and her walk through the wood show that the heroine still has many sign-vehicles at her disposal which she can substitute for the forgotten names. Such sign substitutions are processes of semiosis that illustrate the very Peircean principle of semiosis as a «series of successive interpretants *ad infinitum*» (CP 2.303,2.92).

3.2 *The Transformed Sign-Vehicle*

Considered in itself, the sign-vehicle, according to Peirce, is a *qualisign*

when it occurs in the form of a mere quality, it is a *sinsign* when it functions in situational singularity, and it is a *legisign* when its semiotic function is due to a general type, a convention or law. Creative transformations of the sign-vehicle appear in all three of these subdivisions.

3.2.1 *The Transformed Qualisign*

An unusual transformation of qualisign is attempted by the gardeners of the White Queen (AW VIII). After having planted white roses instead of red ones, they want to correct this mistake by painting them with red colour. The natural quality of whiteness represents a qualisign by which the Queen could detect their mistake. To paint it is an attempt at a deception by a manipulation of the qualisign.

A natural transformation of the visual quality of signs is illustrated by Alice's first encounter with the Jabberwocky poem in mirror writing. Here, the poem is at first enigmatic only because of this simple optical inversion of its printed words. At this moment, it is only as a qualisign that the letters of this poem are incomprehensible. Reversing the reflected image by holding it against another mirror is the transformation of the qualisign which allows Alice to decipher these signs as letters and thus as legisigns.

3.2.2 *Legisigns Transformed into Sinsigns or Qualisigns*

Language signs in everyday semiosis function largely by convention. In so far as a word is *regularly* associated with a given meaning it functions as a legisign.

In Alice's Wonderland, however, we find strange transformations of linguistic legisigns into sinsigns, that is, signs which derive their meaning not from a general rule but only from the singular circumstances of their occurrence.

When Humpty Dumpty (LG VI) explains the meanings of words to Alice, she is at first willing to accept his definitions as meanings of legisigns in one of the languages of Wonderland. But she finally becomes suspicious:

> «But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument"», Alice objected.
> «When *I* use a word», Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, «it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less».

Instead of adhering to the conventions of language use, Humpty prefers to assign *ad hoc* meanings to his signs. If words, in his own private code, mean just what he chooses them to mean, these mean-

ings, unlike those of everyday language, have no regularity. Instead of legisigns, he uses only sinsigns.

Another curious instance where a legisign is used in a degenerate form occurs in the speech of the King of Hearts (AW XII):

> «That's very important», the King said, turning to the jury..., when the White Rabbit interrupted: «*Un*important, your Majesty means, of course», he said... «*Un*important, of course, I meant», the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, «important — unimportant — unimportant — important —» as if he were trying which word sounded best.

The King is at first unsure whether to use the legisign «important» or «unimportant». He later completely loses track of the linguistic rule which distinguishes both words as antonyms. Finally he concerns himself only with the mere sound impression of these words. The linguistic legisigns have therewith degenerated into mere phonetic qualisigns.

4. Problemizing the Object

The object of the sign, in the semiotics of Peirce, is that with which the sign «presupposes an acquaintance in order to convey some further information concerning it» (CP 2.231). When it is «outside the sign», being the «reality» which the sign can only indicate, it is called *real* or *dynamical object*. When it is a cognition produced in the interpreter's mind as a mental representation of such an object, it is called *immediate object*.

The role of the object in semiosis is problemized in Wonderland in two ways. One is by suggesting the absence of the object, the other is by transforming the relations which normally exist between the sign-vehicle and its object in everyday semiosis.

4.1 *The Absent Object*

In Alice's Wonderland, semiotic disorientation due to the correlate of the object is particularly frequent with indexical signs. The label «ORANGE MARMALADE» on the empty jar in the rabbit's hole (AW I) is a sign-vehicle whose immediate object is a cognition which directs Alice to expect marmelade as a «real object» in the jar. However, since the jar is empty, the dynamical object is missing.

Semiosis without a real or dynamical object is not a semiotic anomaly in itself. Peirce knew that the «object outside of the sign» could be

non-existing or «altogether fictive», but Alice, in her childish semiotic mentality, is a defender of semiotic realism and insists on the reality of dynamical objects. She is «greatly disappointed» at finding no marmalade as a real object of the sign on the jar. Elsewhere she even makes her realism explict. When Tweedledum suggests that Alice might only be a fictive dream-object, she protests, crying, «I *am* real!» (LG IV).

In addition to this ancient topic of semiotic realism, there is another typical form of problemizing the object in Wonderland semiosis, namely the absence of the dynamical object in indexical semiosis. The marmelade-sign was a first example. Another example is the «QUEEN ALICE» doorway sign in large letters (LG IX) which disappoints Alice because she is in fact refused admission by the frog-servant. Is it perhaps not really her palace that the doorway sign indicates? Also the finger-posts «TO TWEEDLEDUM'S» and «TO TWEEDLEDEE'S HOUSE» (LG III) are questionable as to their reliability on a dynamical object because Alice never arrives at such a house, meeting the two Tweedles merely «standing under a tree» (LG IV). The question raised by these and other situations of disorienting indexical semiosis is whether the dynamical object is merely absent in the given sign situation or whether it was missing in the first place. In the latter case, the index would function as a deceptive sign. Deceptive indices which indicate no object at all are definitely the cause of disorientation in the evidence-poem (AW XII) and in Humpty Dumpty's four-seasons-poem (LG VI). Here, the disorienting indices are deictic words whose situational (exophoric) and contextual (endophoric) object-reference is empty. In the evidence-letter (AW XII: «They told me you had been to her / And mentioned me to him . . .), all personal pronouns are exophorically empty. We do not know to whom the letter is addressed and which other persons are referred to. Whereas the King wants to profit from this exophoric emptiness by arbitrarily declaring the accused Knave to be the dynamical object of the pronoun «you», Alice reveals the inadmissibility of this interpretation by exclaiming, «*I* don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it».

In Humpty Dumpty's four-season-poem, referential emptiness is further extended to endophoric reference. In the lines

I sent a message to the fish:
I told them "This is what I wish."
The little fishes of the sea,
They sent an answer back to me.

The little fishes' answer was
"We cannot do it, Sir, because —" (LG VI)

the content of the message and the answer remain concealed although they are referred to endophorically by the indexical pronouns *it* and *this*. Even the conjunction *because* functions as an empty linguistic index. The reason which it promises to indicate is left unexpressed.

4.2 *Magical Transformations of the Object Relation*

The relation between the sign-vehicle and its object in natural and human semiosis has been analyzed by Peirce in his icon-index-symbol trichotomy as being one of similarity, contiguity or conventionality (see 5.). In Wonderland, by contrast, these relationships are occasionally transformed in ways unforeseen by the general theory of signs. A recurring semiotic anomaly of this kind is magical semiosis, and it is perhaps not surprising to find this phenomenon, which Piaget has described as a characteristic of the child's semiotic mentality, as a topic in a book for children.

4.2.1 *Magical Semiosis*

In the garden of the living flowers (LG II), the flowers maintain that a tree offers them protection against danger.

«But what would it [= the tree] do, any danger came?» Alice asked.
«It could bark», said the Rose.
«It says "Boughwough!"» cried a Daisy. «That's why its branches are called boughs!»

The belief that the non-animate tree could perform the action of barking *because* of the phonetic nature of a sign-vehicle designating one of its parts as [bark] is typical of magical thinking. Its semiotic basis is the belief that a given sign-vehicle constitutes not only a semiotic relation but also a relation within the non-semiotic world. The assumption that the sign-vehicle influences an inanimate object to be transformed into an animate one confuses the effect of semiosis with a nonsemiotic process.

4.2.2 *Black and White Magic*

Alice experiences both white, or protective, and black, or harmful, magic in the «wood where things have no names» (LG III). There she meets a fawn. Neither can remember their names, «so they walked on together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn». Suddenly, however, this harmony is

destroyed as they leave the wood and the fawn again remembers its name:

«I'm a Fawn!» it cried out in a voice of delight. «And, dear me! you're a human child!» A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed.

Here again there is a confusion between semiosis and the nonsemiotic world. In our natural world, a fawn is afraid of a human for biological reasons, which are independent of human semiosis. The knowledge and the use of sign-vehicles cannot directly transform the sphere of nonsemiotic nature. In the «wood where things have no names», by contrast, we learn that semiosis can have both protective and harmful influences on the nonsemiotic nature. The lack of the knowledge of names protects the fawn from fear and danger. This forgetting of names has thus the function of protection, or white magic. The knowledge of names, by contrast, has the effect of black magic on the fawn, making it frightened. The mere knowledge of a sign-vehicle and not of the object itself causes the sign user to fear this object as a possible cause of harm.

4.2.3 *Euphemistic Magic*

Every euphemism is based on a weakened form of protective word magic. Alice herself makes use of this means of influencing her conversation partner, the mouse (AW III), who cannot tolerate people to speak of «cats and dogs». In order to be able to refer to the objects of these sing-vehicles without offending the mouse, Alice changes the linguistic signs by acronymic abbreviation:

«... — C and D,» she added in a whisper, half afraid that it [= the Mouse] would be offended again.

This euphemistic transformation of the sign-vehicle by abbreviation and whispering alone causes a changed reaction of the conversation partner, although the same objects are referred to. By manipulating the sign-vehicle Alice achieves the effect of white magic.

4.2.4 *Magical Pseudo-Remetaphorization*

Remetaphorization is the process of reviving a dead metaphor by reminding us of its original but now forgotten metaphorical motivation. If the revival is not really in accordance with the true etymological origin of the word it is a pseudo-remetaphorization. In Wonderland, such pseudo-remetaphorizations are implicit in the figures of the Rocking-horse-fly and the Bread-and-butter-fly. The shapes of these

Wonderland insects unetymologically suggest that the species «horse-fly» and «butterfly» to which their subspecies belong have metaphorical names because of a natural similarity with horses and flies. Furthermore, these pseudo- and folk-etymologies do not remain speculations of a merely linguistic nature. They have an effect on the nonsemiotic reality of Wonderland since the objects to which these sign-vehicles are supposed to be metaphorically similar surprisingly appear in reality. Thus, semiosis has again magically transformed the nonsemiotic world.

5. Transformed Symbols, Indices and Icons

Based on the criterion of the relation between the sing-vehicle and its object, Peirce developed his famous subdivision of signs into icons, indices and symbols. In an *icon* this relationship is one of similarity, in an *index* there is an existential, spatio-temporal or causal relationship between the sign-vehicle and its object, whereas a *symbol*, in this definition, is an arbitrary sign related to its object by a rule or convention of the sign users. In Wonderland, signs of these types contribute in various ways both to Alice's orientation and to her disorientation.

5.1 *Disorienting Symbols*

In a foreign country, such as Wonderland, it is at first the code of symbolic signs which remains enigmatic to the visitor. Humpty Dumpty, when explaining the Jabberwocky poem, even suggests that there are whole languages, that is, systems of arbitrary symbols, which a visitor has to learn in his country. But there are also nonlinguistic symbols that Alice learns to decode. The code of military armor and uniforms according to which the two Tweedles are armed is one of such symbolic codes. Tweedledum is wearing what he «*called* a helmet», but to Alice, it «looked much more like a saucepan» (LG IV).

The function of the saucepan-helmet in the Tweedle's military code is not naturally apparent. Therefore, Alice has to learn that this piece of outfit is an element of this code. The arbitrariness of assigning a martial function to this otherwise peaceful object makes it a symbolic sign.

However, the acquisition of symbols in Wonderland does not always have to rely on symbolic teaching. Often, Alice is able to decore symbols by means of contextual icons or indices, which are more natural types of signs and do not have to be taught.

5.1.1 *Iconic Orientation in Symbolic Disorientation*

That *icons* are particularly important to the orientation of a child in the symbolic world of adults is one of the first ideas expressed by Alice (AW I): «What is the use of a book,» she asks herself, «without pictures or conversations?» Later we find that icons can even serve as a means of teaching the conventions of a symbolic code: Showing the Caucus-race is the method of teaching its rules to Alice. As the dodo puts it, «the best way to explain it is to do it» (AW III).

5.1.2 *Indexical Orientation in Symbolic Disorientation*

The special importance of *indexical* signs in situations where symbolic communication breaks down is particularly evident in the «wood where things have no names» (LG III). In this wood, where symbolic sign vehicles are not available (see above, 3.1), indexical signs continue to provide at least a minimal orientation to Alice. She designates the tree by means of the indexical word *this* and by means of the indexical gesture of pointing to its trunk. This gestural replacement of arbitrary symbols by means of the more natural index signs also illustrates a regression from evolutionarily later human semiosis to earlier, more primitive modes of semiosis.

5.1.3 *Deceiving Indices in Symbolic Disorientation*

The best known example of indices occurring in the context of a symbolic disorientation is the Jabberwocky poem (LG I). Since Alice cannot decode the symbols of this poem, namely such lexical roots as *brill, slithe* or *tove*, she finds the poem «rather hard to understand». However, she recognizes grammatical and derivational morphemes in this text which are linguistic indices, and therefore the poem «somehow seems to fill her head with ideas». But these indices, which should indicate the structural relations between the linguistic symbols, are really deceptive signs, since no relation can be surely indicated where the terms to be related are missing.

5.2 *Disorienting Indices*

In our investigation of the absent object (see 4.1), we already saw that indices in Wonderland, instead of being a help in orientation, often contribute to Alice's disorientation. Such disorienting indices also occur in the language of the Wonderland creatures, which I would now like to illustrate briefly.

5.2.1 *Misunderstanding the Direction Indicated by an Index*

Indices in language include both exophoric or situational and endopho-

ric or textual modes of reference. In endophoric reference, the linguistic index points either backward or forward in discourse. It is thus either an anaphora or a cataphora (cf. Halliday & Hasan 1976: 33). These two only possible directions of endophoric indexicality are confused by the duck when it interrupts the mouse in its «dry tale» about the Norman conquest:

«"...and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable —"»
«Found *what?*» said the Duck.
«Found *it*», the Mouse replied rather crossly: «of course you know what "it" means.»
«I know what "it" means well enough, when *I* find a thing», said the Duck: «it's generally a frog, or a worm. The questions is, what did the archbishop find?» The Mouse did not notice this question, but hurriedly went on, «— found it advisable to go with Edgar Atheling...»

(AW III)

The Mouse uses the pronoun *it* in a syntactic construction called extraposition (cf. Quirk et al. 1972: 965). *It* anticipates cataphorically the postponed clausal object «to go with Edgar A». The pronoun is thus a syntactic index which can only be interpreted with reference to the following object clause which it anticipates. The duck, however, interrupts right after *it* because it interprets this word either as an anaphoric or as an exophoric pronoun, an index which should be preceded or situationally accompanied by its referential object, and such an object is missing. This confusion of a forward- with a backward-pointing index is paralleled with a misinterpretation of the verb «find». The «finding» in extrapositional constructions which the mouse has in mind is, of course, a figurative finding of ideas. The duck's understanding, however, is restricted to the narrowly literal interpretation of "finding a physical object", and in this meaning, the verb «find» does not occur in extrapositional constructions in English.

5.2.2 *Disorientation by Abusing Indices as Symbols*

In contrast to a symbol, such as the word «day», which the interpreter can relate to its object without knowing when and where this sign-vehicle was produced, an index, such as the word «today», can only be related to its object, a given day, in a given month and year, when the interpreter knows at which time this sign-vehicle was uttered. Indices are thus sign-vehicles with fixed spatio-temporal coordinates. Whereas an index changes its referential object when the coordinates of its sign-vehicle change, the symbol basically continues to refer to the same object as time or place of sign-production vary. This characteristic of

indexicality is grossly neglected by the White Queen when she offers Alice the following wages for a job as a chamber maid (LG V):

«...Two pence a week, and jam every other day...
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 ca'n'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!»

By definition, a rule is essentially a symbolic legisign. It is valid independently of the time and place of its utterance. «Jam every other day» would be an acceptable rule even though its object of reference is vague since the time of the events referred to can either be the set of even or odd days of the month. The Queen, however, abuses this rule by reinterpreting its temporal symbols as indices whose referential objects change with the time of utterance. Her interpretation «jam to-morrow and jam yesterday», being dependent on its specific time of utterance, is in fact not a valid paraphrase of the rule, but only an application of it to the moment of its utterance. Nevertheless, the Queen wants to raise this doubly indexical sentence to the status of a symbolic legisign. Like true symbolic rules, her indexical pseudo-rule «jam to-morrow and jam yesterday» is supposed to be valid at any time of its utterance. With the daily change of the utterance time there would be a daily change of its object, the event time, and this would result in an indefinite postponement of Alice's pay-day.

5.3 *Transformed Iconicity*

Iconic signs in Wonderland are less frequently the cause of disorientation. But in addition to being an aid in orientation in an otherwise disorienting world (see 5.1.1), they also give cause for wonder due to their creativity in exploring the potentialities of known codes of iconic representation.

5.3.1 *Creative Iconicity*

Thus, the existing code of typography is creatively explored in the picture poem of the mouse's tail-tale (AW III) and in the small print representing gnat's «extremely small voice» (LG III). The typographic tale-tail is in the first place a visual icon of the Mouse's long tail to which the sign-vehicle is similar in its long and curved form. But there is also an icon, a phonetic one, which relates this picture poem in the form of the mouse's tail to the narrative tale which its graphic symbols represent. This relationship between the picture tail and the narrative tale is an indirect or secondary mode of iconicity since the

picture poem and the narrative are only similar with respect to a tertium, namely the sign vehicle [teil], by which both signs are designated in the code of spoken language.

5.3.2 *Mirrors and Optimal Iconicity*

Carroll was fascinated by mirror images (cf. Fisher, ed. 1973: 70ff.), and the laws of optical reflection are his first topic in *Through the Looking Glass*. Mirror images illustrate a type of iconicity which Peirce defined as an *image*, that is, an icon representing by a similarity based on «simple qualities», such as colors or gestalt-forms. In comparison to other types of iconicity, namely diagrams of metaphors, images exhibit a particularly high degree of iconicity, and mirror images even seem to come close to optimal iconicity, the borderline case of semiosis, where the sign-vehicle is identical with its object. However, as Alice aptly observes, in spite of its high iconicity, a specular icon has one significant feature distinguishing it from its object, its left-right reversal. Commenting on the great similarity of the looking-glass room with the drawing-room reflected by it, Alice says: «First, there's the room you can see through the glass — that's just the same as our drawing-room, only the things go the other way» (LG I).

Optimal iconicity and the degree of difference between the iconic sign-vehicle and its object is a topic which Carrol also explores elsewhere. In *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (Ch. II), a German professor reports on his development of maps in a 1:1 relation with the land areas they represent. The disadvantage of such optimal icons, however, was soon discovered by the farmers: «They said it [= the map] would cover the whole country, and shut out sunlight! So now we use the country itself, as its own map». The semiotic principle violated by this professor is the one of sign economy. Sign-vehicles in natural semiosis must be adapted to the practical conditions of sign usage. Therefore sign-vehicles, whether iconic or not, are normally different from their object, and this is the difference to which Peirce refers when he defines the *ground* of the sign-vehicle as its semiotically distinctive feature: «[The sign] stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen» (CP 2.228 and see 2.1).

The principle of semiotic economy is also violated in the sign-vehicles serving as tickets to the people in the Looking-glass train (LG III): «They were about the same size as the people and quite seemed to fill the carriage».

5.3.3 *Reversed Diagrammatic Iconicity*

Reversal by mirror inversion seems to be only a symptom of Carroll's more general pleasure in creating an upside-down world. This general principle of Carroll's creativity is also apparent in a number of semiotic anomalies involving diagrammatic iconicity that is, iconicity based solely on a similarity between the structural patterns of the sign-vehicle and its object. In Wonderland, violations of natural diagrammatic iconicity often occur in the form of a simple reversal of sequential order. Alice solves the problem of subtracting 1 from 365 by the aid of a diagrammatic icon, writing the number 1 below the digit 5 of 365 in order to arrive more easily at the solution 364. Humpty Dumpty, however, has difficulties with this diagram since he reads it upside down and in his reversed diagrammatic icon the remainder 364 is up and the subtrahend 365 is down (LG VI). Other classical instances of reversed diagrammatic iconicity occur in the trial of the King of Hearts (AW XII). The King claims that the oldest rule of his note-book is number fourty-two, but Alice shows this to be an instance of unnatural diagrammatic iconicity. If it is the oldest rule in the book, she remarks, «Then it ought to be Number One». Soon after, the Queen follows the King in another attempt at reversing diagrammatic iconicity in the order of events by demanding «Sentence first — verdict afterwards».

6. Problemizing the Interpretant

The *interpretant* is Peirce's term for the meaning of a sign. It is that which is «created in the mind of the interpreter» (CP 8.179) and its nature is again one of a sign (see above, 2.1). Problemizing this sign correlate is usually connected with problemizing the object, too, since cognition of the interpretant presupposes acquaintance with the object (see above, 4.0), while at the same time it also conveys some further knowledge about this object. As Peirce puts it, «a sign is something by knowing which we know something more» (CP 8.332).

6.1 *The Absent Interpretant*

In Wonderland, the focus is on problemizing the interpretant whenever Alice encounters sign-vehicles whose meanings she cannot decode without help of others. Hearing the Jabberwocky poem (LG IV), Alice asks Humpty Dumpty

«And what does "*outgrabe*" mean?»
«Well, "*outgribing*" is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of

sneeze in the middle: however, you'll hear it done, maybe — down in the wood yonder — and, when you've once heard it, you'll be *quite* content...»

«Outgribing» is a sign-vehicle that has no interpretant in Alice's code of British English. Humpty maintains that there is one and defines it by means of a paraphrase. This definition has all Peircean features of an interpretant: it is a «more developed sign» which is supposed to be semantically equivalent to «outgribing». But the object of this sign, the strange sounds described by Humpty, is also problemized. Alice has apparently never heard such sounds and will not hear them either as her adventures continue.

Ignorance of interpretants is also the cause of the eaglet's misunderstanding of the dodo (AW III). But this time, the dodo's learned words, «I move that the meeting adjourn, for the adoption of more energetic remedies», are certainly sign-vehicles with conventional interpretants in the code of English. Only the eaglet's command of that sign system is insufficient to interpret these sign-vehicles.

Finally, the classical example of problemizing the interpretant is Humpty's famous semiotic axiom that names must mean and that «*my* name means the shape I am...» (LG VI). In fact, from the point of view of the semiotics of every-day language, Humpty is both right and wrong. He is wrong because a proper name is normally only an indexical sign with no other interpretant except one that merely identifies its bearer in contrast to other persons. But Humpty is right in so far as his own name happens to have a meaning on phonesthemic grounds. Humpty Dumpty is a word formation on the principle of rhyming reduplication with the root morpheme *hump*, and *hump*, like *lump*, contains the English phonestheme —*ump*, whose meaning is "something compact and heavy". This semantic element is appropriate to the interpretant of Humpty Dumpty whose shape is «exactly like an egg», as Alice remarks.

6.2 *The Absent Final Interpretant*

In his theory of interpretation, Peirce further distinguished three types of interpretant. The first, the *immediate* interpretant, describes the potential semantic effect which a sign may have on its interpreters. The second, the *dynamical* interpretant, is the actual effect which a sign really has on the mind of an interpreter. The third, called *final* interpretant, is associated with semantic habits and laws. In Peirce's definition, «It is that which *would finally* be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached» (CP 8.184). Considering the polyphony of

Carroll's work mentioned above, we can conclude that the Alice books are a literary macro-sign without any final interpretant. They are not texts with an ultimately valid meaning which might be discovered in any final interpretation. Neither a conference of experts in Carrollian studies nor Carroll himself could provide such a final interpretant. The Alice books will always remain open to further insight and new interpretations. Lewis Carroll himself was aware of this polysemy inherent in his writings. In a letter to a friend, Dodgson wrote (quoted from Wollen 1947: 63):

> «Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them; so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer means. So whatever good meanings are in the book, I'm glad to accept as the meaning of the book.»

Thus, Carroll was aware of the polyphony of his literary work, and even if all of its semiotic implications may not have been dynamical interpretants foreseen by himself, he may well have accepted them as an immediate interpretant, that is, one of the potential meanings of his work.

Winfried Nöth

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A

miotica, linguistica, semantica
miotique, linguistique, sémantique
miotics, Linguistics, Semantics

B

Semiotica narrativa e discorsiva. Retorica
Sémiotique narrative et discursive
Rhétorique.
Semiotics of narrative and discourse.
Rhetoric

C

Socio-semiotica (socio- ed etno-lingui
Socio-sémiotique
(socio- et ethno-linguistique)
Socio-Semiotics (Socio- and Ethno-
Linguistics)

D

miotica letteraria; mitologia e folklore;
etica
miotique littéraire; mythologie et folklore;
étique.
erary Semiotics;
ythology and Folkloristics; Poetics

E

Semiotiche auditive
Sémiotiques auditives
Audio Semiotics

F

Semiotiche visive e audio-visive
Sémiotiques visuelles et audio-visuel
Visual and audio-visual Semiotics