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Abstract: In her article "Metalanguage in Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' and Biggs's *reRead*" Asunción López-Varela discusses Simon Biggs's installation *reRead* <http://www.littlepig.org.uk/reRead/reRead.htm> in relation to Lewis Carroll's poem. López-Varela posits that both works draw attention to the function-ing of self-reflexive semiotic mechanisms present in human discourse and gestures. Based on the ex-amples of the poem and the installation, López-Varela discusses how the human mind creates narratological coherence out of random and recursive patterns and argues that it does so by including other media which enable formats beyond the textual and the iconic. Further, López-Varela discusses how we are pre-disposed to process any semiotic exchange in terms of spatiotemporal sequences and interpret signs with the help of prior knowledge gathered from intersubjective experiences.

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Asunción LÓPEZ-VARELA

Metalanguage in Carroll's "Jabberwocky" and Biggs's *reRead*

The poem "Jabberwocky" is found in Lewis Carroll's 1872 novel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. In this part of the story, Alice finds a book written in a strange language which seems to make sense only when read through a looking-glass in an inverted manner. Simon Biggs re-posits the self as non-singular, de-centered, and distributed. In Simon Biggs's *reRead* installation <http://www.littlepig.org.uk/reRead/reRead.htm> we find that it operates in a way similar to Carroll's poem: Biggs introduces metalinguistic variations into natural language in order to display its monstrous non-meaningful qualities when seen through unexpected perspectives. Thus I posit that these examples show that the human mind is trained to draw meaning out of nonsense patterns.

I begin with a theoretical preamble to my discussion: metalanguage is a language used to make statements about statements in another language (object language). Formal languages, sometimes called object languages, are organized sets of symbols which do not require external references. In *Gödel, Escher, Bach* Douglas Hofstadter explores how metalanguages can be embedded and nested and explains how the process of "modeling" uses either linear (active) narratological relationships (embedded language) or recursive (static) loops which reduplicate messages (nested language, that is, hypertext). Modelling is the basis for alphabetic writing, its associations with mathematical code, and with other self-reflexive structures of the natural world (for example, crystals) and in various media. Modeled on speech sequences and rhythms which imitated natural sounds, such as the singing of birds, the codes of musical melodies follow similar patterns as they are composed of harmonies of thirds (see Kilmer). The repetition of patterns was eventually assimilated in the cultural unconscious of human communities thus becoming part of languages, writing systems, and other forms of cultural representation such as geometry, algebra, and so on. Julia Kristeva writes that "we as subjects belonging to a cultural zone in which writing is phonetic and literally reproduces phonetic language, find it is difficult to imagine that a type of language—writing—could have existed and still exists today for many people that functions independently of the spoken chain, a type of language that is consequently not linear (as is emission of voices), but spatial, and so registers a mechanism of differences where each mark's value depends upon its place in the traced whole" (26). Formal (or object languages) are organized systems defined in spatiotemporal terms as shapes and locations within each system. From a structuralist perspective, these object languages operate at an abstract level in which external reference is unnecessary, no matter how "slippery"—as Derrida has put it (16)—the correspondence between sign and object. In contrast to structuralist and poststructuralist thinking, my argument here is that as a semiotic system, natural human language cannot do without the iconic and indexical aspects which link it to the external world. Indeed, alphabetic writing is a semiotic system with two planes: a syntagmatic, horizontal sequence of signs arranged in a linear structure which yields a particular reading or content on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a paradigmatic, vertical correlation of graphs or iconic forms characterized by their position with respect to each other in the system. In this sense, alphabetic writing is a code and simultaneously a text which encodes this code. Further, this code maintains certain iconic and indexical characteristics of proto-language. As John F. Healy argues, for example, a letter like the Aleph retains "an element of the pictograph, in this case the drawing of a bull's head ($\forall$) now upside down" (35). Similarly, W.J.T. Mitchell and Jerome McGann approach the discussion from different perspectives arguing that there is an antagonistic struggle between word and image/icon in the history of the development of human languages.

In her study on metarepresentation, Marina Grishakova draws attention to the distinction between the "metaverbal" (the power of verbal texts to evoke images) and the "metavisual" (the power of images to point to the incomplete nature of visual representation). Referring to Yuri Lotman's work, Grishakova describes this antagonistic "tension" "more or less explicit" (314) indicating that only an approximate equivalence between discrete language units and continuous semantic entities can be drawn, because visual and verbal languages are mutually untranslatable (313). In this way, "the metaverbal text (i.e., an ekphrastic text, cinenovel, or graphic poetry) reflects on the incomplete nature of verbal medium by probing the limits of verbal representation and appealing to the visual forms (graphic elements, real or virtual film shots, works of art, dreams, hallucinations, mental imagery,

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etc.)" (Grishakova 315). Similarly, "the metavisual text reflects on the incomplete nature of visual representation by juxtaposing image with verbal message and revealing their discrepancy" (Grishakova 315). Grishakova describes "metarepresentation" as a combination of both metavisual and metaverbal texts.

Contemporary cognitive models are based on the assumption that abstract reasoning is grounded in physicality. Thus, the abstract symbols which form discourse rely on icons and indexes. Charles S. Peirce distinguishes three types of signs, icon, index, and symbol. Icons are signs which operate on the basis of similarity and indices rely on cause-effect relationships. In the so-called "conceptual metaphor models" human language is envisioned as a kind of container, a sealed pipeline that transfers thoughts and feelings to others who extract this mental content. In discourse, signs are organized in propositional sets in the form of mappings and correspondences based on similarity across conceptual domains (metaphors). Mappings within a single domain are called metonymic and they correspond to processes which establish contiguity. This is the case, for instance, with cause-effect relations (indices) and image-schemas or pre-conceptual topological representations (icons) (see Geeraerts and Cuyckens). The ability to code and decode semiotic information in large temporal sequences is an attribute of human long-term memory and shorter memory patterns. Human memory records information coming from the different modes of sense perception—vision, sense of smell, touch, sound, taste—and helps to locate things in space and time. To transfer this information to others, pointers are used. Initially, attention we convey these information by means of face movements such as eye contact or sounds like the crying of a baby. Other indexical signs are used to direct another person's attention like the pointing of fingers and other hand movements. After language acquisition, narrative patterns connect events in a temporal sequences, whether spoken or written. Deictic pointers such as "I," "there," or "now" are now verbalized and mark those involved in the communication exchange (subject and object), the location (space) and the time of occurrence. In oral discourse, the exchange occurs in the same time-space frame, although this is not the case in sound recordings. In written discourse, the information sent by the writer reaches a reader who does not share the same spatiotemporal coordinates. Meaning making is dependent on the coherence of narrative patterns which, in turn, are linked through various forms of deictic pointers and other connectors (see López-Varela, "Intermedial"). Narratives can consists of connected discourse patterns in spoken or written language, but they can also be series of images and sequences of (moving) pictures, as in cinema, for instance. Even in the textual format, information is processed by means of mental images in a combination between the static temporality of descriptions, and the action present in the narration, between what Aristotle termed *mimesis* and *diegesis*. The contemplative or mimetic stasis of description is important for recollection. It captures attention and fixes the sign iconically and indexically—that is, in terms of physical *Gestalt* similarities—in the mind's eye. In other words, there is a combination of a linear and embedded on the one hand and nested loops or recursive patterns which lead to a continuum and infinite series on the other.

The inquiry into recursive patterns has a long history. One example is the Pythagorean tradition in which a five-pointed star symbol is enclosed in a pentagon where each diagonal is divided by the intersecting line into two unequal parts and the ratio of the larger section to the smaller one is an irrational number with an infinite nonrepeating decimal part. Another example comes from Zenon de Elea's paradoxes on the infinite divisibility of the world. One of the best known examples of the continuum concept are the so-called "Fibonacci sequences" which appear in many biological settings such as branching in trees and in crystal rocks. Leonardo de Pisa, also known as Fibonacci, introduced the Sanskrit numeral system he adapted from an ancient Indian treatise on prosody and from the Jain writer Acarya Hemacandra of the mid-twelfth century, who discovered the rule for counting the number of meters of a fixed duration. Fibonnacci's *Liber Abaci* (Book of Calculation) solved a problem involving the growth of a rabbit population and yielded the sequence of numbers later known as Fibonacci numbers: a sequence starting with 0, 1 and continuing 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc., where each new number is the sum of the previous two. In his 1611 book *Strena Seu de Nive Sexangula* (A New Year's Gift of Hexagonal Snow) Kepler arrived at the final series of numbers where he explained why snow crystals are hexagonal. The golden mean, as the periodic ratio is called, has been applied by many artists and painter like Giotto, Seurat, Mondrian, and Dalí, by architects like Neufert and Le Corbusier, as well as by musicians such as Debussy, Bartók, and Xenakis. Periodic functions are central to

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rhythmic patterns and visual compositional structures. Western music patterns, for instance, follow basic structures like AABB or AABA, where A and B represent musical phrases. Most patterns follow ABC sequences as well as permutations of these (see Livio; Singh).

Whether linear or recursive, many narrative and cognitive structures are modelled on ABC patterns also found in the natural world (see Kak). For many centuries, the ABC pattern established aesthetic canons. But the history of art has shown that many artists have also sought to depart from this canon and challenge traditional forms of aesthetics. Thus, some of Fibonacci's paradoxes were popularized by Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. According to Michael Bute and Brian Talbot, Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" was inspired by a legend from Sunderland, a region where Carroll lived in his childhood. The legend told the story of John Lambton, inheritor of a property under the same name near Durham. After his return from the crusades, Lambton had to fight a giant dragon-worm who had appropriated his father's land. He was able to beat the dragon with the help of a local witch, but she put a curse on the family according to which for nine generations the male heirs of the family were to die violently or accidentally. The legend was transmitted in the form of a ballad, sung in the Mackem dialect close to the Scottish language and contained reminiscences of old English. Another possible source for the poem was a ballad by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, translated into English in 1846 by Menella Bute Smedley, one of Carroll's relatives. In this, the monster resembles a griffon. Other sources mention that the Tumtum tree recalls some of the trees in the gardens of Christ Church at the University of Oxford where Carroll taught mathematics (see Gardner 154) and that the purpose of the poem would have been to satirize Oxford's snobbish and pretentious atmosphere by creating a parody of the archaic prosody and morphology of the English language (see, e.g., Chesterton; Green; Lucas). The 1871 illustrations of "Jabberwocky" by John Tenniel reflect the Victorian fascination with evolutionism and paleontology and the dragon reminds us of a pterodactyl, the figure that was to appear on the cover of the first edition of the book (see Gardner 196). In the early 1800s, the French naturalist George Cuvier was the first scholar to suggest that they were hybrid flying creatures, half an insect, half a lizard, with a sort of crest, the body covered by hair, and some kind of tense membranes of muscle fiber that served them as wings.

"Jabberwocky" is composed of seven stanzas in iambic tetrameter, although the last stanzas have only three feet instead of four. Its rime scheme is abab. The words in the poem are combined in such a way that their meaning is multiplied, similarly to James Joyce's experiments in his last novel *Finnegans Wake.* Hofstadter was also interested in the poem and referred to it in his book *Gödel, Escher, Bach* and as I mention above, the book has become fundamental for the study of self-reflexive paradigms, which Hofstadter eventually applied to the study of the human mind in his *I Am a Strange Loop* where he posits that human consciousness and spirit are two illusions that contemplate one another in a strange loop, and that it resembles a caged bird, both volatile and fugitive but also imprisoned in the physical body. "Jabberwocky" is made up of coinages of multiple roots, suffices, and prefixes. This *portmanteau* technique multiplies their connotations. For instance, "furious" and "fuming" becomes "frumious," "gallop" and "triumphant" becomes "galumphing," etc. Many words are onomatopoeic, that is, their meaning can be inferred from associations to their pronunciation and to other natural sounds. These coinages show that words are more than abstract symbols, and that they retain iconic and indexical features. Most of them can function morphologically as verb, adverb, or noun, a fact that again multiplies their meanings in a recursive way. The first stanza of "Jabberwocky" appeared first in 1855 under the title "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry," when Carroll was twenty-three. It was published in *Mischmasch*, a journal belonging to the Dodgson family. Apparently, Carroll revised the stanza before extending it into the poem (see Gardner 191-92).

The poem mentions many living creatures, toves, borogoves, raths, the Jubjub bird, the Tumtum tree, the Bandersnatch. Along with the Jabberwock, the descriptions of all these creatures function as verbal icons, that is, blueprints for creating mental images or what Grishakova has termed "iconotext" (323). The physical particularities of these creatures are distinctive, easy to visualize and, thus to memorize even if the words are made-up and non-existent in the English language. As argued above, most of the narratological structures of textual communication are made up of several ordering principles and coding forms whose roots can be traced to alphabetic writing (see López-Varela, "Antiabecedarian" <http://dx.doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v12i2.727>). Metalanguage seeks to reveal the ABC principle underlying everyday discourse. It does so by subverting these structures, in a similar

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way to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. For instance, meta-language might work from the principle of symmetry, found mainly in non-logic and unconscious states of the mind such as dreaming. In an unconscious state, there is a constant flux and transformation within the realm of sameness, which is to say, multiplicity within the one occurs, as in fractal geometry. On the other hand, conscious states of mind register ego-functioning (please explain ego-functioning) and are open to differences or asymmetries (see Matte Blanco). In language, symmetry manifests itself in overlaps, repetitions, and recursive structures at several levels. For instance, at the level of characterization, we may find double characters who are different and yet the same, like Humpty Dumpty. Words may also be used in different morphological roles—verb, noun, adjective—simultaneously, as Carroll does in his poem. This also contributes to a break in the indexical logic of narrative pointers, which in turn affects the relationship between cause and effect, and the temporal sequences of the narrative seem to duplicate, overlap, or resonate. Frequently, these techniques produce multiple meanings and ambiguities and they anticipate mechanisms used in postmodern fiction, concrete poetry, as well as in contemporary experiments of electronic literature. Techniques such as the "cut-up" which William S. Burroughs employs in *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded*, and *Nova Express* in order to create a collage of discursive expressions outside linear alphabetic writing. Similar experiments were introduced by Rimbaud and by Surrealists and Dadaists like Breton and Tzara.

Inspired by Carroll's poem, Biggs's *reRead* goes beyond textual meta-language and offers several ways of inquiry into intermedial metarepresentation: the installation reveals the tensions among different perceptual modes and highlights the incapacity of any one medium to capture the complete multimodal nature of perception. In his 2008 study "Onto-Poetics" Biggs explains that his works "address this focus through the use of interactive systems, where the relationship between the viewer and the artwork is explicit and active" (<http://www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/ontopoetics.htm>). Biggs therefore aims at presenting individual subjectivities as constructed in performative processes which operate within a digital environment and in interaction with other subjectivities: "the auto-linguistic artworks I make map an exploration of the manner in which this dynamic of differentiation through reading/writing can be disturbed and opened up as a conscious process" (<http://www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/ontopoetics.htm>). He adds that the primary element in this strategy is the use of auto-generative texts in order "to create instances of textuality where the text is written of itself. That is to say, the text is generated as a function of language itself. Authorial intent is absent, replaced by a process of auto-generative writing" (<http://www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/ontopoetics.htm>). Thus, in Biggs's autopoetic artworks viewers are able to observe themselves reading/writing self-generating texts. In metalanguage, attention is drawn to the fact that new media do not show how things "are," but how things "operate" and many times these operations are enabled by the machine code and allow for self-reflexive configurations, alien to the linear patterns of narratological cause-effect relations (see, e.g., Ryan). In *reRead*, readers/viewers find themselves facing a screen where auto-generative texts are reflected from a projector connected to a computer which is situated just behind the viewer. Unlike ordinary projections, here the letters appear backwards. Initially, viewers are unaware of this fact, as they look at the symbols which seem to come from an unknown unreadable language. They move rapidly into shapes which appear to be larger units of text. Eventually, they are recognized as letters of the Latin alphabet and as some kind of narrative pattern. Cognitive scientists have explained that the brain works in holistic self-organizing processes which complete perceived information even before full perception has been accomplished. Following the principle of psychophysical isomorphism, the human eye may not see objects in their entirety, but still perceiving parts, it would fill up the whole. Another mechanisms seem to copy information across perceptual regions by means of mirror-neurons and other ways in which the various sensorial modalities communicate and exchange information (see, e.g., Jackendoff; Kövecses; Land and Tatler; Noë; Zlatev).

All forms of articulation are related to the material aspects of the technical medium in which they take shape, as well as by communicative sign systems. Depending on the medium, certain senses and modes of expressions may dominate over others. For example, attention is captured more rapidly in the perception of movement. The eyes follow certain reading directions depending on the language, some a written from left to right, and others in inverse order yet others follow a straight reading direction from top to bottom. Printed texts are not read in the same way as texts displayed on a computer

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screen, where we might need to scroll down instead of passing the pages. But if the text moves, as in *reRead*, the reading experience becomes more difficult. Kinetic texts might cause the reader to pause and think, unable to follow alphabetic and narrative sequences. *reRead* complicates reading even more by incorporating the image of the viewers into the text displayed on the screen as they move towards it. This is done by means of a computer webcam connected to the projector. The art-work forces the audience to inquire into the textual and iconic nature of language: "art is the human activity which can confound basic sense and allow us to see things in a way we might otherwise not have considered … Art functions as a sort of meta-language" for "it is in the creation of disjuncture between the thing and its representation that we come to see the thing and its relation to other things (particularly our-selves) anew. In seeking to disturb the manner in which we see things, and thus our accepted notion of self as constructed through seeing, the objective to destabilize our sense of self can be met" (Biggs, "Onto-Poetics" <http://www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/ontopoetics.htm>). *reRead* also questions the Self and confuses the viewer's perception by inserting their webcam images as fragmented text pieces which disrupt the random pseudo-narrative on the screen. Initially blind to the meaning of the text which appears backwards on the screen, the viewer engages in action in order to understand, to see. The screen becomes a looking-glass where the viewers, much like Alice, inscribe themselves onto Biggs's text. The more viewers move, the more does the action on the screen incorporate their bodily motions within the random backward movement of letters, a silent performance of text and images.

Biggs's installation stages processes of selection, assemblage, ordering, and choice, whereby ac-tion or events are made into signs or facts. A fact is the negotiated statement which comes after an event. While events only offer the non-categorized dynamism of action, in facts information is negoti-ated, localized, and even affirmed (*state*ment). Events need to be described in order to appear as facts. Basic forms of description, such as eye movements and gestures outlining a shape may provi-sionally take the place of verbal language. Telling is, however, the final provision of a description which transforms an event into a possible object of intersubjective communication, that is, a fact. In his "Transculturation, Transliteracy and Generative poetics"—in which he discusses the work of fellow artist John Cayley—Biggs describes creativity as a constant performative everyday form of life. He calls Cayley's work *Translation* an "automated script evoking an infinite deferral of meaning but never compromising our apprehension of an instance of language that is writing itself" (<http://www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/trans.pdf>). Biggs terms this evocation "affinity of difference" "in its emphasis on structure and the internal relations of the work rather than through presenting associ-ations between signifiers and the things they signify" (<http://www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/trans.pdf>).

The majority of language signifiers are speech-act pointers with gaze and gesture being the pre-cursors of discursive deixis. As discussed above, humans have an innate capacity to copy the behavior of other humans and animals. Cognitive research has shown that we are particularly attentive to changes in position and movement. The matching between perceived motions and action comes about because, for certain forms of psychological activity, such as when we reach for an object, the organ-ism gains information about its own action via more than one perceptual modality. Reaching for an ob-ject provides both visual and proprioceptive information about the action, that is, information which relates to stimuli from within the organism. This combined input then results in an integrated multi-modal representation (fact) of an event, which we can recall and activate at a later stage. This can be applied to the experience of seeing another organism perform an action. Pointers, such as gestures, which locate things temporarily in approximate positions to be categorized later, also require that people share attention. That in turn, depends on the multi-tasking ability to shift one's perspective across distinct axes—the common focal point—on the other's attention to the same, as well as on the other's attending to one's own attending. Therefore, there is not only an understanding of the mediat-ing relation between one's bodily motion and the object, action, or event it corresponds to. There is also an understanding that such a representational relation (sign) can be used communicatively be-cause it is assumed that it has a similar meaning for the receptor and for the sender.

In Biggs's *reRead* vision serves as a third-person, a bridging modality which links first-person in-formation (self-awareness) to other viewers. Vision is task-oriented and goal-directed, that is, con-cerned with obtaining information in order to discriminate, identify, and categorize objects for later use. But the negotiations taking place in Biggs' installation, between the intermedial and the intersubjective, are more complex than just a mapping where actions are copied and mirrored. Under-

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standing the actions of others requires cognitive processes which involve the management of semiotic information, emotions, and trust. In the case of Alice, as onlookers watch her move in front of the mirror-like screen, they also try to make sense of her motivations and decisions in moving here or there. In order to understand her intentional actions, those watching Alice in her particular wonderland need to contextualize her desires. Thus, her discoveries can be explained and be passed on as a guide for potential behavior. This contextualization requires a certain degree of "trust" or "cooperative principle" as Paul Grice would have it. The trust placed by *reRead* onlookers on Alice's performance depends on aspects which range from the contextual to prior knowledge of similar situations. Age is an important factor in engaging in more active behavior. Older onlookers might settle for watching Alice perform the act. The more active and adventurous might decide to have a go themselves. Those not present at the time of the performance, for instance those seeing through my eyes in reading this text, will need to trust my telling.

The translation of an event into a fact requires consensus, and therefore, a communicative pact. Consensus takes place in language, either by showing (*mimesis*), as in performances and gestures, or by telling, as in discourse. Unlike gestures, which rely on the contiguity of vision, verbal communicative acts which take place in the present may posit the subject's experience in a different space-time plane, that is, the past or the future, and thus, in a new belief mode, distinct from that of the original occurrence. Whether in oral or written communication, telling does not account for veracity or truth, because the narrating subject always provides a biased perspective for the addressee. Once verbal language is introduced, situations are (re)presented (*reRead*). The addressee or reader visualizes the scene in her own space-time framework, implying a willing intersubjective coordination between speaker or writer and addressee or reader, respectively. The modal strength of the sequence provides the relation to the event and determines the cognitive value of the event (involving both subjective emotional coloring, and more or less objective forms of evaluation) (please rephrase this passage in layman's words). Value (truth) depends on the probability degree of the evidence presented by the subject and believed and trusted by the addressee/reader.

In conclusion, the examples of Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" and Biggs's intermedial installation *reRead* show different examples of metalanguage variations. In both cases diverse language modes in print and screen stage modeling processes which differ from the traditional linear narratological way of communication. Several forms of reduplication are used, either by means of breaking the alphabetic principles of verbal language in order to create reduplications and resonances, as in "Jabberwocky" or by drawing attention to self-reflexive structures both in text and image as in *reRead.* These language variations help to question the notion of identity in that they draw attention to the distributed, decentered, and multifaceted aspects of the words we speak about ourselves and about the world around us (or is it the other way around?).

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