

Plays around surfaces and depths: Transitions between two and three-dimensionality reflected by wordplays and puns

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The differentiation between surfaces and depths belongs to the most common space-metaphorical concepts. In particular it was of crucial importance within the history of European philosophy and its self-interpretation: Metaphysicists look for reasons ('foundations') and meanings 'beyond the surface' of appearances and signs. Postmodernism, however, objects to the suggestion of deeper meanings and abstains from searching for foundations in the 'deeper grounds' of reality. The surface thus appears as the only depth. There are affinities between the discourse about surfaces and depths on the one hand, the poetics of puns and wordplays on the other hand: In puns, the verbal 'surface' is presented either with the ambition to refer to a deeper sense (which would correspond to a metaphysical conception of hidden meanings) – or the search for such a 'deeper sense' is exposed to parody and deconstruction.

An interesting further perspective on the dichotomy of surfaces and depths emerges, if one regards it as reflected in (or at least connected with) the tension between two and three-dimensionality. In the light of Gilles Deleuze's considerations concerning "Le pli" (1988), especially moments of transition between two and three-dimensionality appear as aesthetically delightful and philosophically interesting.

In Lewis Carroll's novels, transitions between surfaces and depths as well as between two- and three-dimensional objects play an important role on the level of contents (mirror-surfaces open up to imaginary spaces, two-dimensional cards and paper objects act as protagonists etc.). Several puns also indicate to these oppositions and tensions. Thus they can be interpreted as internal reflections of a world, in which the opposition of surface and depth is questioned in more than one sense. In how far can Carroll's inventions and wordplays concerning two and three-dimensionality be regarded as auto-reflexive? And which authors followed his suggestions? I will deal with these questions by presenting selected examples.