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Exploring in-betweenness: Alice and spaces of contradiction in refuge

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Introduction

In the light of ongoing political turmoil around the world and diverse processes of displacement created as a consequence, investigation into the spaces and dynamics of refuge within an increasingly mobile world is imperative. The initial premise of this chapter is that through the mass movement of populations in recent years, a new form of cities and spaces has emerged. I refer to them as ‘the cities/spaces of in-between’, which blur and challenge the boundaries between our perception of temporariness and permanence.

The in-between city is a migratory and transportable entity that moves apace with its inhabitants, existing briefly in certain transient spatio-temporal conditions. The recently demolished ‘Jungle’ refugee camp (2014–16), an informal and organically developing settlement in northern France, epitomized the notion of transitoriness both in its age demographics and its geopolitical location at the crossing between the ports of Calais and Dover (on the Jungle, also see Bailey, Crafter and Rosen, and Qasmiyeh, all in this volume). Within this new subspecies of the city, which became a place of contradiction and refuge, traditional spatial conceptions no longer apply. Architectural necessities such as doors, walls and rooms – which have been long-established markers of domesticity and privacy, born out of the desire to set ourselves territorial boundaries – have become invadable thresholds in the context of refuge. The camp becomes a test bed to investigate these architectural objects, which stand in for larger-scale notions of checkpoints, borders and countries (also see Maqusi, this volume).
Concepts of sociological and political space come to play in juxtaposition against architectural forms in an attempt to decipher the formation and morphology of the in-between state of borders, roads and cities. Often, the new definition and perception of the architectural object is in full opposition to our normative understanding of it.

**Methodology and Alice in Wonderland**

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* (Carroll, 2015) have been chosen as a political allegory in fiction to underpin and structure a critical analysis of the spatial politics of refuge. Lewis Carroll’s fictional works are a starting point for the author to analyse how
our bodies are defined, shaped and influenced by space in this context. Steve Pile speaks of ALICE’s relation to, and reciprocal effect on, space as follows:

ALICE was ‘at odds with her space. Poor, dreaming, misfit Alice, while pursuing the time conscious white rabbit, was either too big or too small for her space; too sane for the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party and dangerously outspoken in the Queen’s Court. (Nast and Pile, 1998: xvii)

Investigating Carroll’s dream spaces addresses fundamental questions surrounding concepts of spatial memory and perception, especially in children. ALICE becomes the vehicle that allows for a single-point perspectival view of the particularities of immigration. This fictional vehicle operates on several levels, the first of which is the geographical narrative of the dream world or, more specifically, the landscapes that guide and shape ALICE’s pilgrimage through Wonderland. The scale-less pool, the nonsensical pathways that always lead back to the Looking-Glass house and the chessboard landscape of woodland and meadows all reflect the nineteenth-century rule-bound bourgeois society of Britain where, according to J.S. Mill, laws and social norms had combined to eliminate individuality (Siemann, 2012: 430). In the same fashion, the migrant trail through sea, crop fields and woodland can be interpreted as a compressed and miniaturized replica of the current political norms ruling the European Union.

The second level of operation is ALICE’s character, which echoes her upbringing in a Victorian imperialist society. The child-imperialist (Bivona, 1986: 143) struggles to grapple with the non-conformist Wonderland dominated by rules and logic unknown to her. She tries to maintain her sanity by talking to herself, reciting poems to test her memory and to verify if she still is the ALICE that she was before her descent into the rabbit hole. Daniel Bivona states that the mind of child-ALICE lacks the ability to comprehend the operational modes of the dream world – perhaps due to it being a world dominated by older levels of mental organization, or else due to an absence in fixity of rules and regulations (ibid.: 168). Hence, despite the familiarity of Wonderland and the events that ALICE stumbles upon, she is soon to realize that this is a world which contradicts the logic-bound world of her reality by hovering between sense and nonsense, reality and fiction, variation and repetition, even linearity and circularity:
‘Come, there’s no use in crying like that!’ said Alice to herself, rather sharply; ‘I advise you to leave off this minute!’ She generally gave herself very good advice, (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself … for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people. (Carroll, 2015: 13)

In Wonderland, unlike space, time exists in a psychological/perceptive sense. The static and reversed time of the dream world is overlaid with ALICE’s normative understanding of it. Despite the fixity and stagnation of physical time at the six o’clock tea party, psychological time allows ALICE and the creatures to enter and leave the tea party and to expect the experiences of Wonderland to come to an end. Similarly, in the Jungle, time perception expands to the indefinite and continuous unfolding of events; whereas on the refugee trail, perception of time is highly compressed with a diluted content and is reduced to the sheer interval between two successive events/destinations.

The fifth level of operation of the ALICE vehicle is represented by the use of words and poems that follow the linguistic logic of Wonderland. The
inhabitants of the dream world have frequent altercations with outsider-ALICE and challenge common-sense references and dictionary-bound definitions. Carroll allows words to break from their dictionary definitions and adopt new/altered meanings:

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.’
‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ (Carroll, 2015: 205)

The transitoriness of refugee status emerges from a perpetual sense of movement and an absent sense of belonging, which create a strong connection to ALICE’s status as an outsider in the fictional setting of Wonderland. The unlikely scenario of ALICE being a refugee in the nonsensical Wonderland is set as a hypothetical background in order to start a conversation on transitional spaces. Similar to her constant progression through dream spaces, coherently or otherwise connected, refugees pass through distinct, sequential spatial arrangements.
‘Alice’s Alternative Wonderland’

The exploration into various scales of spatial inhabitation in refuge starts with ‘Alice’s Alternative Wonderland’, an inseparable part of the study, which adds fragments of the refugee trail narrated by child-alice and as imagined by the author, through the use of critical and creative storytelling. Comparable with ALICE’s sudden and unintended descent down the rabbit hole and into the perplexing world of Wonderland, the condition of refugee-alice imposes a set of abrupt and unanticipated circumstances that she must conform to. Having ventured into the heart of unknown countries whose laws are alien to the story’s subject, she must discern logic by transcending both immaterial linguistic/legislative barriers and physical borders. alice’s memories – often real accounts composed from news extracts, data and travel journals – are complemented by fictional input from the author in order to create a less disjointed, highly detailed plot. The term ‘critical imagination’, coined by Jane Rendell, best defines the construct of the essay and the production of the narrative as an indispensable element of the chapter.

**Figure 29.4** Detail from a line drawing of the Geometry of Journeys. © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, 2016.
Rendell describes this methodology as ‘an analytic mode to outline the structure and form of her response, and memories – sometimes real, sometimes fictional – to create the content-filled detail’ (Rendell, 2007: 185).

The character, *alice*, is the result of an amalgamation of factual and imagined realities reflected in story and journal writings; perhaps the author becomes the adult projecting her own self onto the child, or else it is the child that aspires to be the adult author. Much like Carroll’s ALICE, who was fond of being two people, often scolding and contradicting, the voice of *alice* becomes the collective voice of refugee contributors, and it is thus used as a vehicle to facilitate the processes of anonymizing and ethicizing the research methodology and writing mode.

**The Jungle**

As introduced earlier, this chapter evaluates the ‘Jungle’ refugee camp, in France. The ‘Jungle’ becomes a test bed for locating and identifying architectural motifs and, through the use of theoretical analysis, referring to their significance in different contexts and scales of refuge. It represents a moment of repose/stillness where, within a particular spatio-temporal condition situated outside the rules of the host country, one finds the freedom to express one’s identity and nationality.

The study uses four motifs as metaphors to analyse architectural spaces and their significance in the context of the journey or that of the encampment. I move from the small scale of the bed to sequentially larger scales of human inhabitation such as the door; the house; and, eventually, the corridor/passage, alluding to the spatial sequence of

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*Figure 29.5  ‘Alice’s Alternative Wonderland’, extract no. 2.*  
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ALICE Through the Looking-Glass. There, Carroll takes us from the space of the interior and interaction with small objects such as chess pieces to the larger mirror; Looking-Glass room; hall; and, eventually, paths, hills and woods.

First, the bed is of a scale highly comparable with that of the human body – virtually an extension of it in the times when we slide into the unconscious dream state. It dictates the position and form of our body through its size and proportions, which were in turn originally determined from standardized human measurements – it is perhaps the

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Figure 29.6  Site-visit documentation. All photographs and sketches © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, Calais ‘Jungle’, 2016.
encapsulation of the idea of reciprocal effect between the body and object or the body and space.

Second, the door is the embodiment of the idea of passing from one state to the other, one space to the other and one room to the next. It becomes the establisher of interiority, the delineator of passage into personal space and the protector of territories in the context of the refugee trail.

Third, the house beyond the door, with its four walls, encloses the personal space, materializing its borders and symbolizing territories of the home or those of the country. Its walls can be as concrete and tangible as the walls of the room I am writing in now, or they can melt and vanish as suddenly as the spaces of Wonderland or Looking-Glass country.

Finally, the corridor symbolizes passage and transition. Through yet another door, one finds oneself in the Jungle, the ever-growing yet ever-shrinking city of contradictions, which condenses the experiences of the refugee trail within an area of 51.2 hectares. The Jungle, as a transient refugee camp, is merely a stopping point in the longest corridor between the Middle East and northern Europe. This last pinch point to cross over to Promise-land is perhaps comparable to the small door standing between ALICE and the ‘loveliest garden she had ever seen’ (Carroll, 2015: 11). The last section therefore focuses on the larger, continental scale, analysing the European route and the transformation of countries into human corridors leading towards a destination that is a distorted mirage of the reality of asylum.

The investigation of architectural elements that epitomize the concepts of passage, connectedness, barrier and boundary is refined by referring to Georg Simmel’s themes of social separation and connectedness reflected in architectural forms (Simmel, 1994: 5–10). In a highly metaphorical and fictional interpretation of sociological and geopolitical space, this chapter looks at the inherent and acquired significance of the four metaphors in relation to the refugee trail.

Counting the beds

The bed is the first metaphor for the investigation of small-scale objects that embody cultural memory. It allows external circumstances and factors to morph its physical form, manifesting itself in various shapes throughout the journey. The bed scale, as we will call it henceforth, symbolizes and stands in for the multitude of objects transported from home
that carry part of the sense of belonging. Concurrently, the bed evokes ALICE’s sleeping and awakening – the original nature of her accidental descent into the dream-scape of Wonderland, which we are only aware of upon her awakening. It is not only representative of ALICE’s unconscious state of mind but also stands for a level of interplay of scales within the novel. It can be interpreted as a standardized object of daily life, against which one might compare one’s scale to make sure that one is the right size. Of course, for ALICE, the bed was the riverbank, under the shade of the trees – a first reference to the multivalence of the word itself: could a bed be anything?

Georges Perec argues that the bed is the individual space par excellence, the elementary space of the body, the space of dreams and nostalgia where, perhaps in a way similar to Wonderland, anything is possible (Perec, 2008: 16–17). The space occupied by the bed becomes a marker for the space of contemplation and fear, but also of desire and fantasy.

Contrary to the normative procedures of undertaking a population census, a more adequate criterion for carrying out a population census in the Jungle seemed to be counting the beds, sleeping bags or rugs. In this manner, one would easily determine the constant population of the camp, disregarding the minor fluctuations and exchange of individuals. Sleeping areas are often abandoned by refugees crossing the channel, but are immediately taken over by new arrivals.

Figure 29.7 ‘Alice’s Alternative Wonderland’, extract no. 3. © Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, 2015.
Perec argues that the bed is an individual space, ‘which even the man completely crippled by debts has the right to keep’ (Perec, 2008: 16); in other words, it surpasses social class and statute. In the particular case of the beds that I have seen in the Jungle, the statute of the bed has changed from an indispensable commodity to a shared and, at times, political space. Not unlike in most European capital cities, social stratification can be identified in various instances within the Jungle, although not as evidently, with subclasses with visible differences in financial ability. For instance, while some refugees may have the luxury of owning a bed as I described in my field notes, many others lack the ability to purchase a bed on the black market and will settle for a sleeping bag from the camp’s donation-distribution points. These variations can be found in the underlying, less-visible layers of inhabitation but also in the larger setting of the camp. Similarly, there may be distinguishable differences in the physical construct of the different communities, with better-managed resources in one area and lack of provisions in another. This condition has resulted in unequal access to food or clothing and has been aggravated by the creation and silent operation of the black market, often controlled by one group of refugees (including on ethnic and/or national
lines) that webs across to other regions and sells donated goods at a high price. Perhaps with time, similar to many urban societies, the various strata will become increasingly accentuated, resulting in the growth and proliferation of certain enterprises and the collapse of others.

In this context, the bed becomes more of an identifier than a fingerprint. Objects and belongings often help to define the character and individuality of the domestic quarters in camps, and are a means of expression for the occupants of the shelter. The sleeping bag has been reclassified as the bed just as the shelter has become the house. It can speak of past financial and social status/provenance and has the power to express the present-day condition, such as duration of citizenship and occupation in the non-state of the Jungle.

Figure 29.9  Film stills showing the sequence of entering the camp from the western border, driving south towards the exit. Film stills, film (Duration 03’:02”), Calais ‘Jungle’. © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, 2016.
The missing doors

The door, as an essential element in delineating thresholds, becomes imperative both as a metaphor for borders/frontiers but also as the signifier of interiority. Coincidentally, in Carroll’s novels, doors often awaken senses of insecurity, hesitation and uncertainty in ALICE. They are difficult to open, difficult to walk through and their very reason for existence
is questioned in various instances in the novel at which permission needs to be granted for safe passage. In the Alternative Wonderland, conflict is the inherent property of doors:

‘Alice went timidly up to the door, and knocked. 
‘There’s no sort of use in knocking,’ said the Footman … 
‘Please, then,’ said Alice, ‘how am I to get in?’ 
‘There might be some sense in your knocking,’ … 
‘How am I to get in?’ she repeated, aloud … 
‘ARE you to get in at all?’ said the Footman … 
‘Oh, there’s no use in talking to him,’ said Alice desperately: ‘he’s perfectly idiotic!’ And she opened the door and went in. (Carroll, 2015: 53–4)

Despite the similar scale of beds and doors, which have both been designed according to bodily dimensions, the latter architectural objects represent the vertical act of passing and are inherently active, whereas the bed represents the space of horizontality and stasis.

Thresholds of a larger scale are materialized by checkpoints and may shrink or expand according to changes in regulations, laws and individual circumstances such as nationality. In the context of the refugee trail, the concept of the door as threshold retains its architectural duality, both as an essential element in delineating personal space, cultural heritage and territory but also as an impassable barrier preventing access and integration. On a smaller scale, doors act as thresholds between personal space and the space of the outdoors, the space of solitude against the rest of the world. The multivalence of the checkpoint as an element of separation, connection, passage or interruption and a signifier of territoriality and identity can be substantiated in conjunction with the dual nature of doors. Frontiers or borders are dominant factors in delineating boundaries and contouring local identity; they become the manifestation of doors at large, urban scales. As well as a linear interpretation of doors as symbols of the permission of passage, a second – circular – interpretation is that of the door as marker of interiority and domesticity: a closed loop. The two perceptions enter into conflict in ALICE’s spatial experience of Wonderland, in which the door often pertains to the idea of barrier between inside and outside:

She came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high … Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. (Carroll, 2015: 11)
The missing doors in/of the Jungle camp are ones that can be invaded, and their power of separating spaces is undermined by their inherent conflict. On the rare occasions on which doors maintain their divisive potential, disproportionately large locks and chains are used to enforce ownership. For instance, community doors are usually more ornate and secure, ensuring the impartiality of public spaces and preventing their exclusive use by a particular group. Private areas for living may be broken off from the public realm by doors in the form of material thresholds or immaterial boundaries that have the power to filter and avert outsiders. The tents in the Jungle have permeable boundaries, lacking a physical or perceivable threshold to complete the internal space; thus, the space of domesticity is left exposed, incomplete. These semi-permanent shelters made of ply and chipboard, covered in tarpaulin sheets, are raised above the ground and require that one steps up, pushes the door open and takes off one’s shoes in order to enter the space, imposing material or performative rituals before entering a well-defined space.

The entrances to the camp can be likened to checkpoints protecting border crossings between countries. Often, one or two entrances into the

Figure 29.11 ‘Alice’s Alternative Wonderland’, extract no. 6. © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, 2015.
Jungle are guarded by riot police who prevent any interaction between outsiders and the residents of the Jungle. In the absence of the police, the entrances are made visible by markers such as handwritten signs, car-tyre markings or simply the flow and direction of people walking or cycling towards and away from the camp.

Similarly to the sleeping-bag reclassification, the door is reclassified as the checkpoint. Perec treats the two as similar concepts by stating that one cannot simply allow oneself to slide from the space on one side to the other without crossing a threshold, and that in order to cross that threshold one would have to communicate by showing credentials or, alternatively, knowing the password (Perec, 2008: 37). In the case of alice’s Alternative Wonderland, the door loses its role as provider of freedom and marker of personal boundaries and itself becomes the fine line between capture and release (Simmel, 1994: 7).

The house beyond

The house beyond the door stands for ideas of territoriality and the delineation of borderlands through the use of an imaginary line. Similar to Wonderland and Looking-Glass country, where spatial compression and expansion were commonplace, geographical borders also change according to sociopolitical circumstances and respond to instances of conflict and resolution between counterparts. Carroll very rarely speaks of walls in the novel, and yet there is a curious tendency for spaces to vanish and

Figure 29.12  Mapping, Calais ‘Jungle’. Drawing © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, 2016.
for ALICE to find herself removed from one place and placed into another without a logical/clear spatial connector for the reader:

the oars, and the boat, and the river, had vanished all in a moment, and she was back again in the little dark shop. (Carroll, 2015: 197)

Where the previous section dealt with permission and border crossings between two domestic or geopolitical spaces, here I speak of walls and fences – tangible or otherwise – at the scale of the body and that of the country. Within the Jungle, the issue of shifting edges and territories can be analysed through the lens of identity and nationalism, by observing regional conflicts and blurred boundaries between islands of communities. Susan Stanford Friedman writes of the historical appearance of a Thai epistemology of mapping, which allowed for great fluidity against the alien British concepts of a fixed imaginary line imposing the separation of territories. Similarly to the regional demarcations of Jungle communities, in Southeast Asia temporary borders were established during times of tension and conflict and disappeared with the re-establishment of friendly relations. Borderlands were spatial conditions that, according to the relations between different communities, would expand and contract, changing from spaces of open commerce and cultural exchange to spaces of confrontation (Stanford Friedman, 1998: 154).

The essence of the house can be reduced to the existence of a single room or can expand to the scale of a community or the camp. The room that I am writing in now is defined by four walls, but what if the walls vanished and I was left with my bed, writing desk, lamp, pen and books: what

Figure 29.13  ‘Alice’s Alternative Wonderland’, extract no. 7. © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami, 2015.
would then define the room, or the house itself? As Simmel outlines in ‘Bridge and Door’, the need to draw boundaries and set territorial markings is primary in human nature. Together with the limitation that borders provide, people allow themselves the possibility to move them, readjust them or even step outside of them into freedom (Simmel, 1994: 7).

The Jungle was a space of contradiction, of conflict versus resolution, rapid annihilation versus rapid growth, a place of transition versus home, peace versus war and tragedy versus beauty. It hosted a ‘transient community’, in which individual inhabitants regularly changed but the integrity of the camp and its territorial markings remained consistent.

Within the Jungle, the physical construction and distribution of shelters is best described as typified and duplicated across the site. The division of the singular space of the shelter boasts of a stark contrast with the way in which we historically perceive domestic spatial arrangements. The seemingly simple and indivisible form of the singular internal space of the shelter is divided by immaterial spatial barriers into areas for sleeping, praying, eating or guest reception, which often overlap.
Robin Evans, in his essay entitled ‘Figures, Doors and Passages’ (1997) notes that in sixteenth-century Italy, buildings such as Villa Madama reflected social relationships and stratification through their organizational characteristics. The multitude of doors leading to one space was considered convenient and spatialized the journey between two opposite points of the domestic quarters as a labyrinthine experience.

Three centuries later, in Britain, concepts of privacy and division of social classes had penetrated domestic architecture and triggered changes

![Figure 29.15]( Untitled. © S. Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami. )
to the typical arrangement of the house and patterns of inhabitation. The connecting matrix of rooms, which resulted in the intersection of activities, was reorganized by the introduction of a singular access door, marking the distinction between the inhabited space and circulation space. The statute of doors as establishers of privacy was progressively reinforced from that point onwards, and rather than being predominantly a connecting element they have been emphasized as elements that break spaces in two and allow one to retreat into solitude (Evans, 1997). This sequential arrangement of spaces has eventually evolved to dominate patterns of activities, physically shaping/changing the way in which we live. Walls and doors have become tangible divisions between spaces of sleeping, eating or receiving guests, changing our previous perception of interlinking spaces that bled into each other.

The moment of transition from one space to the other reinforces the in-betweenness of the Jungle. In some respects, the Jungle itself is a doorway: a doorway to reach Promise-land, which in this case is the United Kingdom, but also a doorway to adulthood. A large number of the inhabitants in the camp were unaccompanied youths on the brink of reaching their majority; hence, the moment of transition from one state to the other was twofold – both in the geopolitical position of the camp and also in its demographics and age groups.

**Conclusion**

The ‘Jungle’ lived outside the laws and social principles of its host community, with a constantly changing and fluctuating population without which the camp would have stagnated. The settlement became the projection of a Promise-land that refugees aspired to reach, with its own legal system and emergency services, policing, educational curriculum and transportation. Of course, as previously mentioned, condensed periods of rapid growth and development were counterbalanced by rapid annihilation, which was coupled with violence and destruction. There was a proportional relationship between the rates of growth and annihilation: the faster and more developed the growth, the more frequent was the demolition – and larger areas were cleared.

The Jungle can be compared with early town settlements, which were established near sources of water. Here, the camp was built around the industrial lake located in the city outskirts, as well as by the Channel as a passage of exchange/commerce. There are various theories of city creation and growth to which we can refer in order to analyse and explain
the situation of the Jungle; one would be the precedence of agricultural activities, which were essential to the growth of economies and, hence, cities. Another discusses the precedence of the city and the interdependence of rural and urban activities in development and progress (Jacobs, 1972: 15). The question here, I presume, is whether the Jungle was an anti-city or an in-between city? The contaminated industrial lake and unsuitable soil prevented growth and the spread of farming, whereas the channel was inaccessible for trade or movement. Hence, the city relied on sales and the vendor economy in order to sustain itself: it was an anti-city within the mother-city of Calais.

Notes

1. ALICE in capital letters refers to Lewis Carroll’s fictional character in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass.
2. In the context of the refugee trail, Promise-land is the name I have given to the northern European countries, which have been a major destination point for those fleeing war.
3. The shipping containers provided by the French Government in the northern portion of the Jungle soon became symbols of forced removal/displacement at the heart of the EU. This was primarily due to the procedures of identification and fingerprinting to which refugees were subjected in order to enter the sleeping areas. Their provision became a mode of exerting control over an otherwise organic settlement.

References