

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS – SPATIALITIES FOR CHILDREN



Alice enters the world behind the mirror.

Lewis Carroll's „Through the Looking-Glass” is a colorful, fantastic, bizarre novel full of references, turnings, and playful ambiguity. En passant, it can work as a wonderful instrument to explain different concepts and aspects of space as stated in current spatial theories in social sciences, social geography, and geography education. Interpreting the story's absurdity, it may provide a creative reference framework to the spaces of childhood that should be subject in geographical learning and teaching, with Alice as the children's agent.



KINGS AND QUEENS – TERRITORIALITY

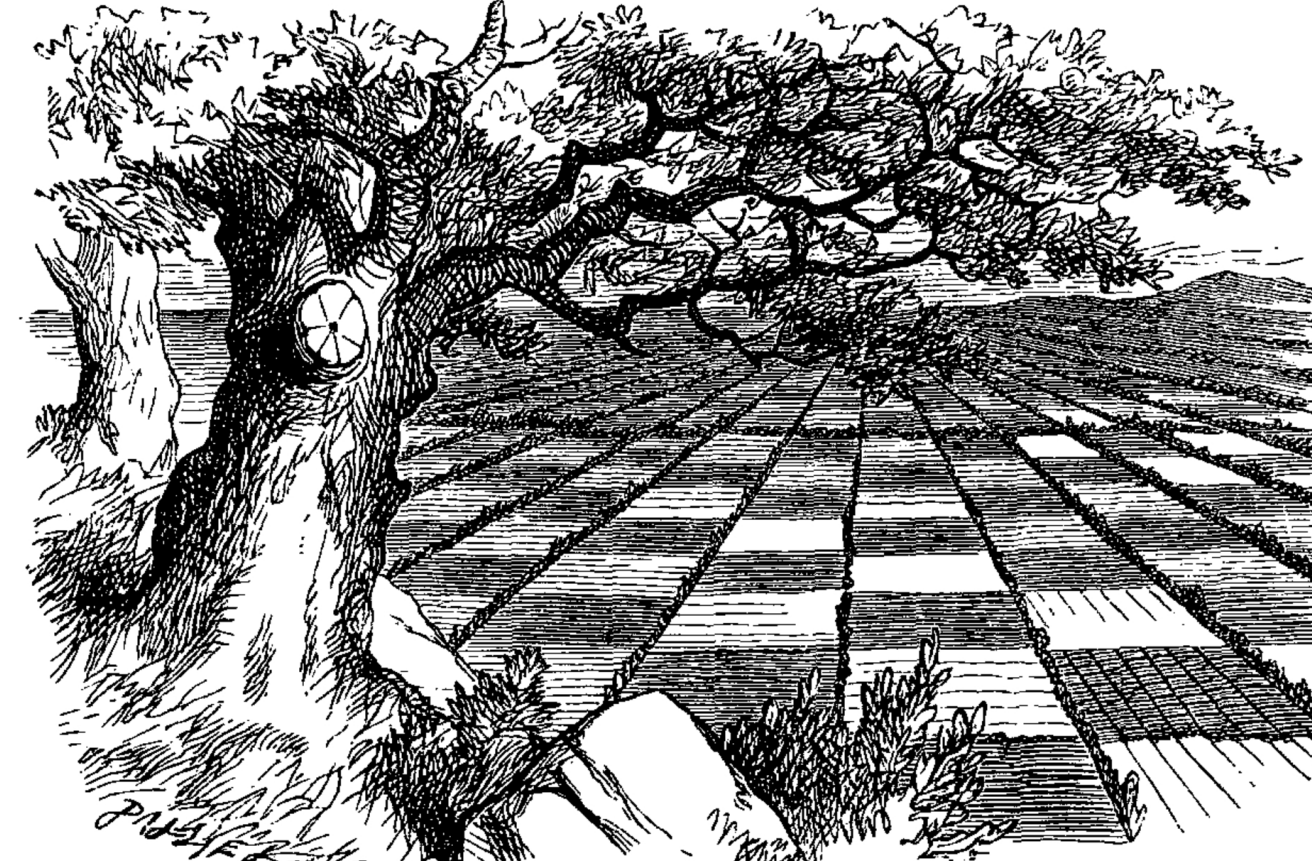
Within the chess game, the kings and queens mark their own territories, where they exercise power and set rules for action. Besides, they underlie the socially arranged and passed down rules of the game as well.

Carroll's kings and queens live an explicit territoriality (cf. de Certeau 1988), an assertive appropriation of spaces to exercise control and power (cf. Werlen 1995). This scenery is fine to explain how societies are willing to share a common set of rules in a certain area based on the acceptance of hierarchies and the idea of the right of ownership. In everyday life, the school playground is a good example to uncover and visualize adults' and children's practices of territoriality.



THE CHESS GAME – CONTAINER SPACES

The world behind the looking-glass is widely structured as a supersize chess game, in which Alice joins in a as a pawn. The squares themselves contain individual characteristics such as being connected to certain riddles, or to represent landscapes and places like a forest.



The chess game may work as a synonym for absolute container spaces of physical matter (cf. Wardenga 1995). Nevertheless, the chess game with its straight square borders also illustrates the arbitrariness of the demarcation of human-made container spaces. Therefore, even those seemingly objective spaces are social constructions. The production process becomes obvious, when Alice shall stick to certain rules of the game – which only exist within the game/discourse.

THE JABBERWOCKY – EMPOWERMENT

Alice imagines the Jabberwocky, a dangerous, daunting dragon that is mentioned in a poem and is finally beheaded by a sword.

Although only named at the edge in the novel, the illustration used to express Alice's imagination is a symbol of empowerment over a seemingly superior protagonist. For the purpose of geography education, the Spatial Citizenship approach (Gryl & Jekel 2012) explains how minorities can attach alternative meanings to physical spaces to challenge spatial constructions, including rules, and to share these with others. In this approach, the competent utilization of communication tools (digital mapping – beyond the sword) is central.

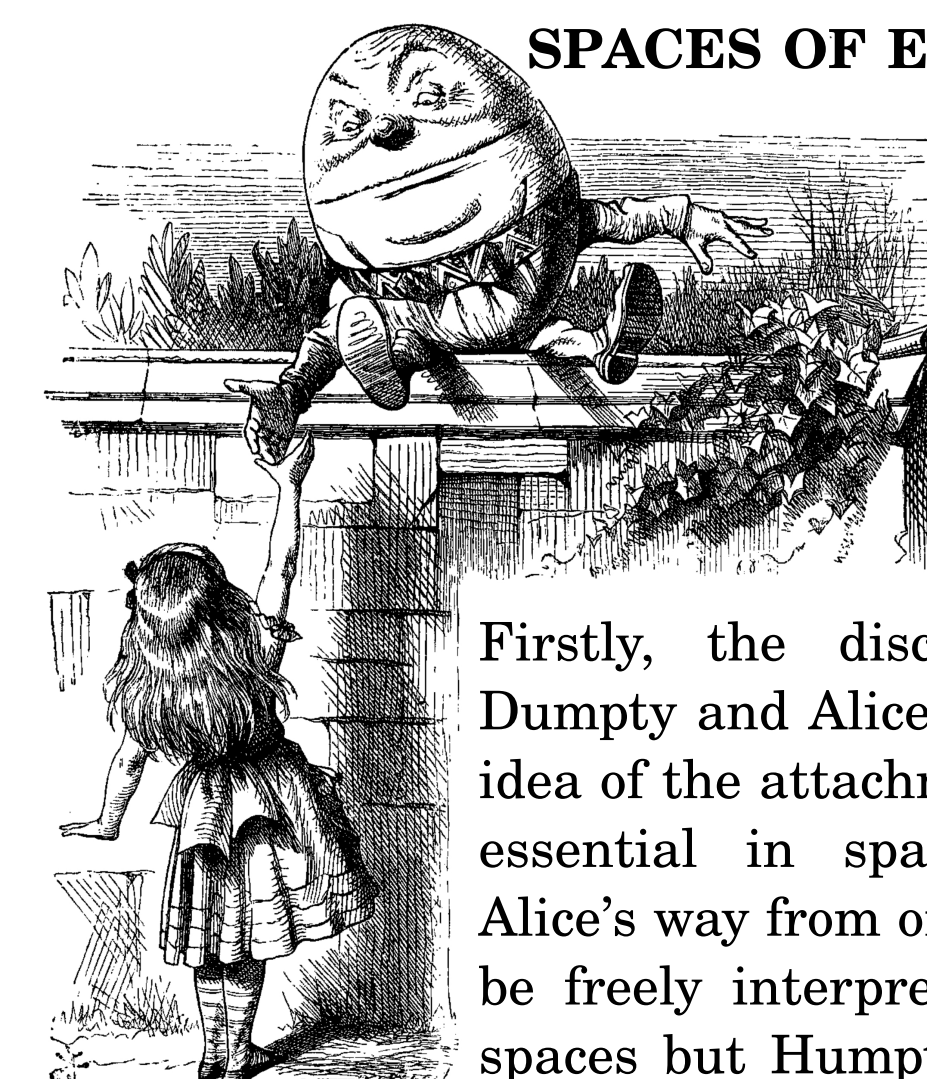


SO WHAT?

We do not assume that Lewis Carroll has intended to foresee the development of spatial theory of the 20th and 21st century in the 19th. Nevertheless, this very free but intellectually stimulating interpretation can be a playful approach for older youngsters to find their way through spatial theory, and a motivation for educators of children to understand children's spaces in their complexity between playfulness and empowerment.

HUMPTY DUMPTY ON THE WALL – SPACES OF EXCLUSION

Humpty Dumpty sits on a wall which blocks Alice's way to the next square. Finally, they discuss on meanings of words and rhymes.



Firstly, the discussion between Humpty Dumpty and Alice on meanings may add the idea of the attachment of meanings, which is essential in spatial theory. Beside this, Alice's way from one square to another might be freely interpreted as migration between spaces but Humpty Dumpty figures out not to be the best supporter to overcome Alice's exclusion from the space behind the wall (which may work as representative space, cf. Lefebvre 1993). In everyday life, children often face spaces of exclusion, protected by material and immaterial walls consciously and unconsciously built by adults.

QUEEN AMONG QUEENS – NEGOTIATION

Following the rules for her figure, Alice becomes queen after reaching the opposite side of the chessboard. The black and the red queen appear from nowhere and ask curious questions to examine her ("Can you do Addition?" the White Queen asked. "What's one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one?")

Just by her own right, Alice sets herself into a position equivalent to those who have formerly been superior to her. Still, the queens have their own whimsical rules of communication, and firstly try to challenge Alice whether she is capable to communicate on an equal level. Concerning capabilities Spatial Citizenship regards digital geomediation and basic competences to handle it key to competitiveness in spatial negotiation processes (Schulze et al. 2015).



THE QUEEN'S RULES – MATURE APPROPRIATION OF SPACE

As new queen, Alice holds a feast. Nevertheless, the participants act in accordance with the rules of the mirror world. Alice disagrees with these and tries to reshape rules actively by pulling the tablecloth.



Alice re-appropriates the table's space in accordance with her own interests. The position of the queen may link to her capabilities to act powerfully. Alternatively, the situation on the table might also be understood as anarchy which would give Alice a much more authoritarian role, leaving the question open whether her practices of making spaces are, according to de Certeau (1988), the strategic ones of the powerful or the tactical ones of limited impact.

Literature
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Link to the original novel by Lewis Carroll at the Gutenberg-Projekt