

Zeitschrift: Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am
Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Herausgeber: Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Band: - (2018)

Heft: 32

Artikel: What's wrong with Wonderland?

Autor: Kostourou, Fani / Psathiti, Chrystala

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-919048>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 23.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>



After drinking from the little bottle in White Rabbit's house, Alice found herself growing uncomfortably big. © Fani Kostourou & Chrystala Psathiti

What's wrong with Wonderland?

Fani Kostourou and Chrystala Psathiti

For a space to become a place it needs love. We understand spaces as physical containers of everyday practices.

When people fill and appropriate a space over time, they add an emotional value to it and turn it into a place. Loved and cherished spaces have a particular quality of resilience: they persist in time because they work well and suit the inhabitants, and they conquer time, so to speak, as long as they remain loved and relevant to human needs.

In this sense architecture is not about designing spaces that people need to adapt to, but about spaces that people can inhabit and adapt, independent of their body size and cultural practices. A space that considers standardised body measurements and behavioural taxonomies in its making as its main parameters, excludes those bodies that do not match to the homogenised average, from occupying and caring for it.

This is exactly what happened to Alice in Wonderland. The fantasy world depicted in this tale, defies all common sense and logic, and toys with our creative imagination. Alice is constantly trying to adapt to fit into the spatial conditions of Wonderland. By eating a particular cake or having a special drink, she grows smaller and larger several times to get through tiny doors and big houses. At first, she is curious and surprised in the face of the sudden changes her body goes through, but soon 'poor Alice' starts to feel anxious, frightened and unsure of herself. In the hallway she cries gallons of tears unable to reach the key fitting into the door that opens up to the loveliest garden. When she visits White Rabbit's home, she grows uncomfortably big resulting in her lying down on the floor, her head pressing to the ceiling, her elbow against the door, one foot up to the chimney, one arm curled around her head and the other one stuck out of the window!

No wonder, 'poor Alice' seems lost being in spaces that she constantly needs to adapt to. With a constant feeling of disorientation, she soon begins to miss her former home outside of Wonderland, because there her body never had to grow or shrink to adapt to the space around her. Whatever Alice had known about normal body sizes became redundant and obsolete in this other world, making her feel an 'abhuman'¹ subject, characterized by morphic variability.

Eventually, Lewis Carroll's story makes us wonder if there is such a thing as the 'right body size' that fits all spaces. As the architect and critical theorist Blanca Pujals² noted, there has been a conscious effort in history by scientists, sociologists, criminologists, statisticians and architects to come up with a normalised average body size that can inhabit the modern city in a perfect ergonomic way. If we want to learn from the story of 'poor Alice', we should start rethinking how human bodies can inhabit spaces in the non-Wonderland. As architects, we need to imagine spaces that people are able to transform to accommodate their needs, and fall in love with the spatial environment they spent time to create for themselves. Because if really anything was possible in Wonderland, Alice should have been able to make the doorway larger to access her beloved garden with the bright flowers and the cool fountains and have her adventure going on!

- 1 William Hope Hodgson, 'The Night Land', The Project Gutenberg EBook 2004 [original 1912]. www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKewiqxpvYpuTXAhWiHsAKHek4D-90QFggxMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fflivros.universia.com.br%2Fdownload%2FThe-Night-Land-William-Hope-Hodgson.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2XeOLIP1IrFaQ4q-3pdeUV. Retrieved: 28.11.2017.
- 2 Blanca Pujals, 'Bodily Cartographies: Pathologizing the body and the city', *The Funambulist*, Vol. 7 'Health Struggles', France 2016, pp. 22–27.



‘Poor Alice’ pressed against the ceiling seeking for her loveliest garden. © Fani Kostourou & Chrystala Psathiti



Alice falling into the pool of her own tears. © Fani Kostourou & Chrystala Psathiti