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di Architettura

Partecipazioni Nazionali

LARES ET PENATES

POLISH PAVILION AT THE 19TH INTERNATIONAL
ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION — LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

LARES ET PENATES

ON BUILDING A SENSE OF SECURITY IN ARCHITECTURE

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ZACHĘTA — NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WARSAW, 2025

EXTENDING CARE
A WORD FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Saint Helena, patron saint of nail makers, gave her name to the island in Venice that holds the Polish Pavilion. She is also called upon to intervene in storms and fires. May she also keep watch over the *Lares and Penates: On Building a Sense of Security in Architecture* exhibition, presented at the Polish Pavilion during the 19th International Architecture Exhibition.

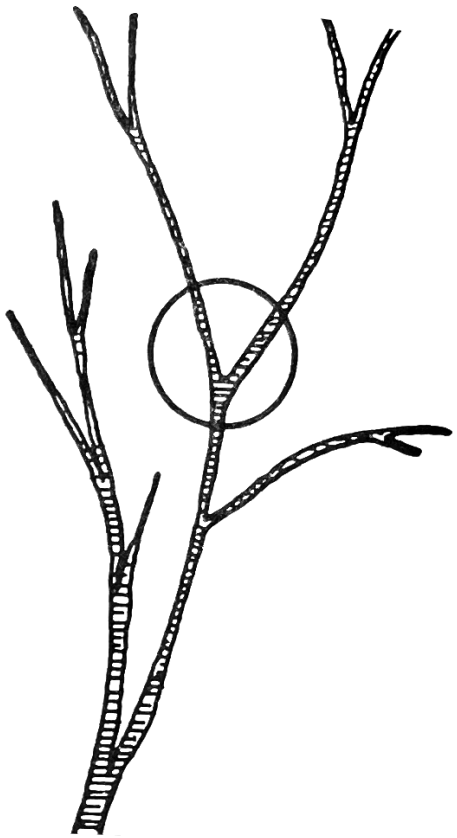
The rituals recalled by the project's creators — Aleksandra Kędziorek, Krzysztof Maniak, Katarzyna Przezwańska and Maciej Siuda — have accompanied architecture from the dawn of its creation to its adaptation and habitation. Their roles have not diminished — they still serve as a connector between a space and the human need for security. At one time, willows planted on boundary lines marked the edges of fields, and scarecrows symbolically protected them. Today this function has been adopted by gated communities, ringed by fences and placed under constant surveillance. Both the hanging of the topping-out and firefighters' safety certification of a building are gestures — one archaic and one modern — that stress the same effort to ensure safety. The magical thinking referred to by the interdisciplinary team is joined with a turn towards indigenous

knowledge in the face of the global polycrisis. Alternate ways of managing resources and knowledge remain in conflict with the dynamically developing security market. A clear example here is the commercial access to satellite systems for communicating and monitoring a territory, and the sale of Iron Dome air defence technology.

Widespread access to balanced, resistant and regenerative systems based on traditional practices of managing water resources, farming and ecosystems is a key basis of response to today's challenges. Unpatented and uncommercialised food production knowledge and the restoration of local building techniques and traditional solutions help build social resilience in extreme weather and political conditions. Adaptation strategies based on old rituals build mental fortitude in uncertain times.

The authors of the Polish Pavilion exhibition have created a space that joins traditional rituals and contemporary adaptation strategies, stressing the role of architecture as a tool for building security and immunity.

Agnieszka Pindera
Commissioner of
the Polish Pavilion
at the 19th International
Architecture Exhibition



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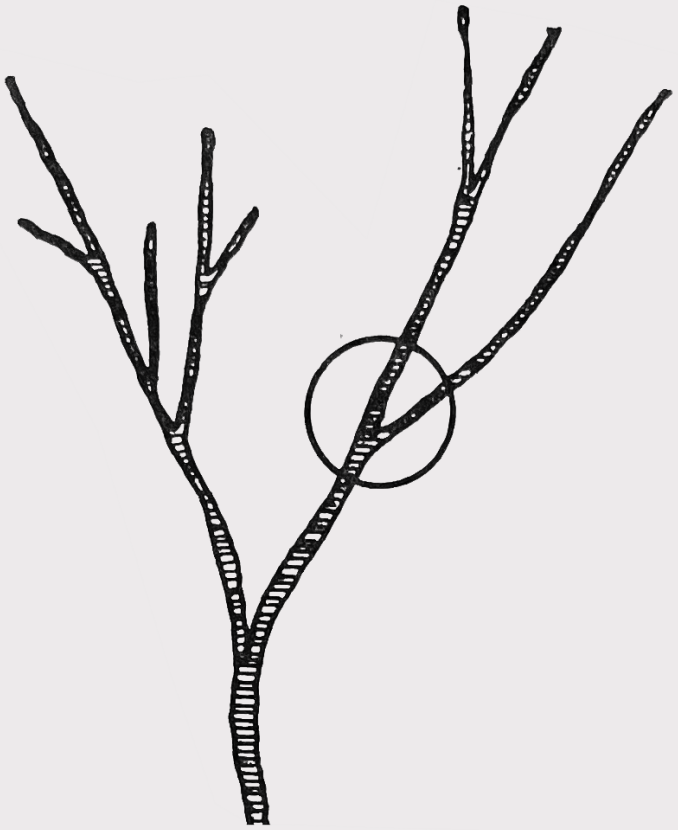
Cutting a radiesthetic rod with a forking end; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990



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Cutting a radiesthetic rod with a forking end; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990

Lares and Penates

Aleksandra Kędziorek

The *Lares and Penates* exhibition presented at the Polish Pavilion for the 19th International Exhibition of Architecture in Venice speaks of anxieties and how people respond to them to feel safer in architecture.

The lares and penates of the title were household guardian deities in ancient Rome, meant to ensure inhabitants good fortune and to protect dwellers from the adversities of fate. From the very origins of architecture, it has provided shelter from external threats, including weather phenomena. Today the catalogue of those threats is far wider, spanning armed conflicts, political unrest, and the near-inconceivable effects of climate change. Does architecture have the tools to safeguard us from all of them?

At this exhibition we explore ways of building security and a sense of security in architecture. This is done within two systems. The first involves solutions derived from building, fire, and health department regulations. The second is culturally-rooted practices, customs and convictions that have more to do with magical thinking. Co-existing in reality, though overlapping with a range of disciplines (architecture, engineering and law, as well as anthropology), they are treated as equal and complementary at this exhibition. Together they help people feel more secure in a swiftly changing reality. In working on this exhibition, which crosses between disciplines and undermines the

Enlightenment principle of reason over emotions, we have reached for radical[1] forms of collaboration, rooted in the performance and visual arts or the philosophy of speculative realism. In a team made up of an architect, a performer, a visual artist and an architectural historian, we sought the tools to redefine the role of the architect and architecture in a world of shared uncertainty. This book records and expands our investigations.

It begins by going out and delving into the landscape. Krzysztof Maniak, a performer whose artistic medium is walking, and whose field and materials are the forests and meadows surrounding his hometown of Tuchów in southern Poland, takes readers on a shared exploration of nature. His photographic essay examines the archetype of shelter and the concept of the uncanny, and looks for objects of magical potential in the landscape, some of which appear in the exhibition.

In the article that follows, architectural historian Aleksandra Kędziorek traces the long path of architectural practices meant to ensure good fortune and ward off bad luck. Drawing from Renaissance treatises, late-Baroque horoscopes and contemporary building practices, she shows the dissonance between the history of architecture and anthropology in describing the built environment.

Philosopher Andrzej Marzec and architect Maciej

[1] Following the authors of *Radical Pedagogies*, we are hearkening to the etymology of 'radical', from the Latin *radix*, or roots. See *Radical Pedagogies*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Ignacio G. Galán, Evangelos Kotsioris, Anna-Maria Meister, Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2022, p. 11.

Siuda weave a tale of interiors and people's relationships with their surrounding objects, dipping into the philosophy of speculative realism, new materialism and object-oriented ontology. This textual/visual essay is, at the same time, a formal experiment: its content occurs between the text and the image, producing another space on the two-dimensional pages of the book.

12 In another essay, cultural anthropologist Olga Drenda looks at practices that have travelled from 'traditional culture' to urban reality in Polish society, mainly of peasant origins. She describes preventive actions, from fake cameras to radiesthesia, which were widespread in communist Poland and the anxious transformation period and used just in case, in the spirit of 'better safe than sorry'.

Artist Katarzyna Przezwańska presents a piece of her photography archive detailing the connections between architecture, nature and emotions. Alluding to Edward Osborne Wilson's biophilia hypothesis of the 1980s, concerning the instinctive human attachment to patterns and structures from nature, she focuses on features that make us feel comfortable and safe in a space.

Coming after the photography section, the conversation with architect and scholar Tatjana Schneider concerns the sense of agency so crucial to the exhibition. We analyse this issue, which Schneider has been exploring with Jeremy

13 Till for over a decade, in the context of a key modern anxiety — the climate catastrophe. Called a 'hyperobject' by philosopher Timothy Morton on account of its spatial and temporal properties, it eludes the cognitive capabilities of the human mind, and thus can elicit a sense of powerlessness. We ponder how we might build a sense of agency in terms of architecture when it comes to the climate.

Rounding off the catalogue are some objects invoked at the exhibition — Slavic 'lares and penates' used in building practices to provide security and a sense of security in architecture. Although the exhibition focuses on Polish examples, international biennale viewers will no doubt find echoes of practices from other countries or cultural spheres. The pieces gathered at the exhibition are thus performative in nature — they are like props whose meaning is expressed in action. There is a similarity in the project's proposal for another approach to architecture. The exhibition, inspired by the performative turn in the modern humanities, introduces a new figure of an architect, closer to the dancing philosopher.❷ The dancing architect, whose role is no longer to offer ready-made solutions as an outside expert, would begin their work not with design, but by immersing themselves in the world and becoming attuned to it in all its complexity. We have tried to create this possibility of experiencing the multi-dimensionality of the world at the Polish Pavilion in Venice.

❷Andrzej Marzec, *Antropocień. Filozofia i estetyka po końcu świata*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2021, pp. 30–34.

KRZYSZTOF MANIAK

Better Not Tempt Fate: On Architectural Strategies for Security and Good Luck

Aleksandra Kędziorek

HOROSCOPE AND TOPPING-OUT

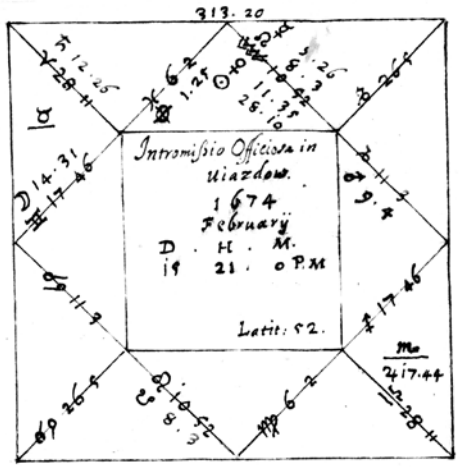
15 February 1674, at 9 pm, the stars above Warsaw were quite favourably aligned. The moon, the astrological symbol of change and mobility, broke away from Saturn, a planet signifying permanence and stability. Mercury, which stands for the intellect in horoscopes, aligned with Venus, the patron of pleasure, and the Sun was in the Fourth House, stressing the importance of the home and family. At this time, Polish magnate and Court Marshal of the Crown (later: Grand Marshal of the Crown) Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski took over Ujazdowski Castle, the onetime royal residence, devastated by the Swedish Deluge.❶

←← Dragon gates in contemporary Hong Kong skycrapers, photo: Natasza Minasiewicz, 2025, courtesy of the author

↙ An engraving by Charles Eisen for the frontispiece of *Essay on Architecture* by Marc-Antoine Laugier, 1755, Bibliothèque nationale de France

❶Tylman van Gameren, *Horoscope on the Occasion of Acquiring Ujazdowski Castle, 15 February 1674*, University of Warsaw Library Print Room, inv. no. G.R.6496. Bibliography, see Przemysław Wątroba, 'Horoskop z okazji przejęcia Zamku Ujazdowskiego 16 [sic] lutego 1674 r.', in *Sztuka dobrego myślenia. Dziedzictwo Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego*, ed. Kamil Frejlich, Piotr Skowroński, Warsaw: Muzeum Łazienki Królewskie w Warszawie, 2024, p. 124. Horoscope transcript, see Stanisław Mossakowski, 'Rezydencja Ujazdowska Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, no. 3, 1969, p. 364.

→ Tylman van Gameren, *Horoscope on the Occasion of Acquiring Ujazdowski Castle, 15 February 1674*, University of Warsaw Library Print Room, C.0



Fascinated by astronomy and astrology, Lubomirski commissioned horoscopes for major events.❷ This custom, going back to antiquity, adhered to the fashion of the day — even the church hierarchs succumbed, though astrology's determinism clashed with the Christian doctrine of free will.❸ In an astrological treatise published in Venice in 1552, Luca Gaurico included a horoscope commissioned by Pope Julius II before the modernisation of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.❹ There were also cathartic, or founding horoscopes for London, Rome and Venice;❺ predictions tied to a person's pivotal events were incorporated into their home decor (one example is the birthday horoscope fresco for Agostino Chigi that embellished the interior of Rome's Villa Farnesina❻). The custom of having a horoscope done before construction was also noted by Leon Battista Alberti in his famous treatise *De re aedificatoria*:

> Some maintain that, to proceed to construction, you must select and await the right moment, they say that this moment when it is to begin and commence its existence is of vital significance . . . . Though I do not believe the purveyors of this knowledge and scholars of signs of the times to such a degree that I suppose they may affect the course of events, I do think they ought to be appreciated . . . . At any rate, let it be — if it is true, then observing their warnings could be of great help; if not, it causes little damage.❼

The author of the horoscope made upon the acquisition of Ujazdowski Castle — now the headquarters of Warsaw's Centre for Contemporary Art — was Tylman van Gameren, the architect employed for its reconstruction. The collections of the University of Warsaw Library Print Room hold his device for telling horoscopes,❽ a tool you would not be likely to find in a present-day architect's kit.

❷Apart from the horoscope for the Ujazdowski Castle, one other has survived, for the laying of the cornerstone of the palace in Puławy; see Wątroba, p. 124. ❸See Ewa Śnieżyńska-Stolot, *„Zamek piękny na wzgórzu . . .": Horoskopy — zapomniane źródło historyczne*, Krakow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2015, pp. 6, 10. ❹Luca Gaurico, *Tractatus astrologicus*, Venice, 1552, I, 6, University of London, Warburg Institute, https://resources.warburg.sas.ac.uk/pdf/fah1940w.pdf (accessed 3 February 2025). See Mary Quinlan-McGrath, 'The Foundation Horoscope(s) for St. Peter's Basilica, Rome 1506: Choosing a Time, Changing the Storia', *Isis*, vol. 92, 2001, pp. 716–741. ❺Śnieżyńska-Stolot, pp. 23–24, 42. ❻Mary Quinlan-McGrath, 'The Astrological Vault of the Villa Farnesina: Agostino Chigi's Rising Sign', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 47, 1984, pp. 81–105. ❼Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, II, 13. ❽Tylman van Gameren, Device for telling horoscopes, University of Warsaw Library Print Room, inv. no. G.R. 6933.

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A topping-out on the building of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 5 July 2022, photo: Marta Ejsmont/MSN

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A female fire guard using the stirrup pump on the roof of a building in London, 1941, © Imperial War Museums (Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection)

← A topping-out on the Standard telephone and cable factory in Oslo, 1959, Oslo Museum, CC-BY-SA

On 5 July 2022, an important phase in the construction of Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw came to an end. The building, designed by Thomas Phifer, had reached its target height. A topping-out ceremony was held for the occasion, with people directly involved in the construction as well as the museum staff and the city authorities. A green wreath, featuring wood-cut depictions of builders' tools and decorated with colourful ribbons, was placed at the highest point of the building to signify the construction was finished.

'The tradition of the ceremonial topping-out is . . . our chance to thank all the builders for their concerted effort in making the new museum headquarters', said Nicolas Dépret, council chair of the building firm, Warbud Co., at the ceremony.❾ This custom going back to the fourteenth century is now primarily a chance to celebrate together. Also cultivated in Germany and Scandinavia, it has been passed down from traditional architecture to urban construction. Archival photographs, for instance, document a topping-out ceremony at a building in the experimental Hansaviertel housing estate in Berlin (its designer, Walter Gropius, sat in the front row).❿ During the pandemic, events were organised in smaller groups and shown on-line — this was how the neon topping-out was unveiled at the peak of Warsaw's Varso Tower in March 2021.⓫ Today, particularly in Germany, the custom is so widespread that web shops offer sets of gadgets for individual ceremonies,⓬ yet few recall its original significance. It is tied to a belief widespread among Slavs, among others, that good spirits inhabit the trees.⓭ Placing a wreath of branches on the ridge of a roof was an attempt to summon these spirits into the new building. Their protection could also prove useful in the tumultuous twenty-first century: 'The investment is coming about in an exceptionally difficult time — first the pandemic, then the war in Ukraine', the chair of the company building the Warsaw museum pointed out in his speech. 'Both these circumstances have taken their toll on the construction industry, introducing a variety of challenges.'⓮

These two events are separated by several hundred years, the post-Enlightenment cult of reason and technological progress. In buildings made today, users' security is ensured by numerous legally-mandatory installations. Cameras, alarms, fuses, smoke or carbon monoxide sensors, fire extinguishers, hydrants and fire-resistant substances inhabit our homes and public spaces. Buildings are joined to the urban infrastructure on many levels, and we increasingly control its devices through apps. What, then, makes us still turn to customs and building beliefs for good luck and protection from danger? Do we still need a favourable alignment of the planets and the watchful eye of good spirits in contemporary architecture and construction?

A CATALOGUE OF ANXIETIES

In the 2020s, security has become a major issue in public debate. After the hard lessons of the global pandemic, the spectre of war hung over Europe — with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, armed conflicts moved from faraway corners of the world to a proximity that troubled the imagination, and those that had been raging for years, in the Near East, for instance, became far more heated. Physical threats were complemented by those connected to virtual reality. In our complex geopolitical reality, migrations of peoples inspired civic action (when it came, for example, to giving shelter to Ukrainian refugees after the Russian invasion), but also stoked anxieties (spatially expressed by the wall on the Polish/Belarusian border). Droughts, floods and fires, observed up close and through the media, were exacerbated through the progress of climate change. People's everyday set of anxieties has significantly expanded.

According to Marc-Antoine Laugier, author of the eighteenth century *Essay on Architecture*, architecture began with the search for shelter.⓯ 'Man in his primitive state', self-reliant, sought shelter from 'the burning sun', 'dreadful rain', 'unpleasant damp'. Disappointed by the insufficient protection of forests and caves, he went 'out of it, resolved to supply by his industry the inattentions and neglects of nature'. He cut off branches to build a roof construction 'covered with leaves put together, so that neither the sun nor the rain can penetrate therein: and now the man is lodged. Indeed cold and heat will make him sensible of their inconveniences in this house, open on every part; but then he will fill up between the space of the pillars, and will then find himself secure.'⓰ Laugier believed the first architectural gesture came from building a sense of security.⓱

❾ 'Wiecha na szczycie budynku Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie', Warsaw — official city web site, 5 July 2022, https://um.warszawa.pl/-/wiecha-na-szczycie-budynku-muzeum-sztuki-nowoczesnej-w-warszawie (accessed 3 February 2025). ❿ *Richtfest des Zeilenhauses von Walter Gropius im Hansaviertel (Berlin)*, 1956, Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek — Staats- und Universitätbibliothek, Deutsche Fotothek, Aufnahme-Nr. FD E 082 748, http://id.bildindex.de/thing/0001550181 (accessed 3 February 2025). ⓫ 'Wiecha już na Varso Tower', Wiezowce.pl, 12 March 2021, https://wiezowce.pl/news/wiecha-juz-na-varso-tower/ (accessed 3 February 2025). ⓬ Available, for instance, at etsy.com; search under 'Richtfest'. ⓭ Aleksander Brückner, *Mitologia słowiańska i polska*, Warsaw: PWN, 1985, p. 106.

⓮ 'Wiecha na szczycie budynku Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie'. ⓯ Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essay on Architecture*, London: T. Osborne and Shipton, 1755. ⓰ Ibid., pp. 127–128. ⓱ This is not the sole hypothesis on the origins of architecture. Vitruvius, for instance, traced the creation of the first buildings back to the discovery of fire, communication and the imitation of animal shelters; Vitruvius, *De architectura libri decem*, II, 1. See Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972.

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Selected fire-extinguishing devices: snow fire extinguisher, powder fire extinguisher, conical fire extinguisher, fire grenade, from the collection of the Science Museum Group, © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Over time, the catalogue of dangers for man-made buildings to withstand grew. Protection from enemy attack joined shelter from unpredictable weather phenomena. This meant the advent of the thick walls of Romanesque buildings, moats, and drawbridges of castles, as well as the Renaissance *palazzo in fortezza*. The search for protection from fires that consumed cities led to constructing fire walls and attics in modern blocks of flats. This brought about the creation and spread of such architectural innovations as steel girders, which were introduced on a mass scale after the great fire of Chicago in 1871. The modernists responded to anxieties tied to the spread of contact-transmitted illnesses with the use of materials that were easy to keep clean and mechanical air-filtration systems. The threat of nuclear arms in post-war Europe brought about a system of shelters, and Cold War tensions were reflected in the designs of Polish schools built in the late 1960s (the 'millennial' schools), which could be swiftly adapted to field hospitals. The growing catalogue of modern anxieties and dangers was accompanied by a growing infrastructure: temporary hospitals for the pandemic period, transit camps and walls in transborder regions or tent villages in areas touched by natural disasters. Their temporary and improvised nature accurately shows the dynamic of today's world.

The typological, formal, and construction solutions introduced over the course of centuries only partly respond to our question of how architecture can protect us from all kinds of danger. A parallel story is provided by the cultural anthropology and ethnography. Describing the home and the act of dwelling in 'traditional culture' and the present day, they document customs, rituals and beliefs that users of architecture present to feel safer.

CULTURAL/TECHNICAL *BRICOLAGE*

In *Wild Thought* Claude Lévi-Strauss laid out two figures that served him as metaphors for technical and mythical thinking. The first was the engineer, whose technical approach to problem-solving matches the paradigm of Enlightenment rationality. The second was the *bricoleur*, or tinkerer, who tries to contend with challenges with the means, beliefs and ideas at hand, conscious of the fact that there is not, nor ever will be total knowledge of the world or control over it.[18]

As users of a space we practice, in a certain sense, Lévi-Strauss's *bricolage*. We build our sense of security with technical solutions: we install alarms, cameras and doorbells, we purchase safety equipment, set up anti-theft doors. At the same time, we use a wide repertoire of convictions, customs and superstitions deeply rooted in society: we hang a lucky horseshoe over the door, we don't shake hands over a threshold, we knock on an unpainted wood. The meaning of many of these gestures, as with the topping-out described above, is quite vague to us at present, and their efficacy, from a rational point of view, is dubious. Still, we practice them — consciously or not, with conviction or 'just in case'. Their endurance proves they are necessary. Their simplicity and accessibility in a highly technological world gives us a sense of agency, and their ubiquity confirms a sense of belonging to a cultural community. Both ingredients are essential in building a sense of security.

←←
Currier & Ives, *Chicago in Flames*, 1871, Chicago Historical Society, C.0

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A beam crowning the UPMC Presbyterian Tower in Pittsburgh (the broom means the construction reached the sky without loss of life and the wintergreen plant symbolises happiness and future growth), 2024, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

[18] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

[19] Kurt Kohlstedt, *Housing the Occult: How Superstitions Shape Architecture Around the World*, 99% Invisible, 8 October 2020, https://99percentinvisible.org/article/housing-the-occult-how-superstitions-shape-architecture-around-the-world/ (accessed 3 February 2025). [20] Andrea Lo, *The truth behind the mysterious holes in Hong Kong's high-rises*, CNN, 28 March 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/hong-kong-sky-scrapers-with-holes/index.html (accessed 3 February 2025).

AN EMPATHETIC HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE

A broader, international context lets us see that beliefs, more tied to magical thinking than design, have also been reflected in architectural forms. One example is 'witch windows', slanted windows in the vernacular architecture of Vermont (United States), whose shape is meant to ensure that a witch cannot fly in. The same goes for the ceilings on porches in Georgia and South Carolina, which are painted 'haint blue' so that bad spirits will associate them with water and not enter the home. The characteristic bent roofs in traditional Chinese architecture also have a defensive function — their shape comes from a conviction that unfriendly spirits can only move in straight lines.[19] Nor is contemporary architecture free of magical thinking. The openings in the high-rise designs in Hong Kong are rooted in a *feng shui* conviction that they must not be obstacles in the path of dragons, a symbol of good luck, in their daily flight from the mountains to the ocean.[20]

The trouble with writing a history of architecture that takes into account such practices, rituals and beliefs is that they are not always found in written documents and require an openness to the irrational. Stories about, for instance, the Wawel Chakra, a stone of power found in the inter-war period during archaeological work at Wawel Castle, or the rabbis' curse, meant to have caused the construction of the Blue Tower in Warsaw on the former site of the Great Synagogue to stretch over twenty-three years, are mainly founded on urban myths and a belief in something more than empirical science. Would a history of architecture rewritten in this way uncover any lessons for architects themselves?

The archive of a Polish avant-garde architect, Barbara Brukalska, holds a substantial envelope with photographs of scarecrows she collected in the 1960s and 70s.[21] This peculiar collection not only testifies to her private interests, but also to her sensitivity to aspects

←←
Witch window in Vermont, photo: Rich/Flickr.com, 2023, CC-BY-NC 2.0

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Dragon gates in contemporary Hong Kong skycrapers, photo: Natasza Minasiewicz, 2025, courtesy of the author

[21] Barbara Brukalska archive, deposit at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, presently under inventory. I thank Dorota Daria Pikulska for making available the materials for this study.

of space that elude rational cognition and description. 'During my strolls I once came across a peculiar scene', she said in an interview. 'I almost thought they were spirits, the most dangerous ones, the "Lady Midday" . . . . I entered a clearing. Suddenly, at the edge of the woods, I saw a strange procession . . . It set off. Some of the humanoids were stooped over, as if searching for something in the grass, others pointed to the sky.'[22] The scarecrows, wrapped, as per tradition, in worn rags soaked in human smells, were meant to scare birds and boars from the crops. At the same time, they made a ghoulish impression on people who were still recovering from war trauma in the 1960s.[23] Although these fascinations are not directly reflected in Brukalska's architectural designs, they show her openness and sensitivity to the psychological aspects of space: the customs, beliefs, and human emotions, anxieties and spiritual needs at their core. We should take an empathetic approach to them in contemporary architecture as well.

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Scarecrow from the archive of Barbara Brukalska, photo: Jan Minorski, 1960s, Museum of Architecture in Wrocław

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Veranda with a roof coloured haint blue, United States, photo: Lake Lou/Flickr.com, CC BY 2.0

[22] 'Uzbrojona w kamerę wędruje prof. B. Brukalska w poszukiwaniu . . . strachów', *Express Wieczorny*, no. 213, 1970, from the Barbara Brukalska archive. [23] Monika Powalisz put forward this interpretation in the synopsis of her unrealised film about Brukalska. I thank the author for the conversation and making the synopsis available.


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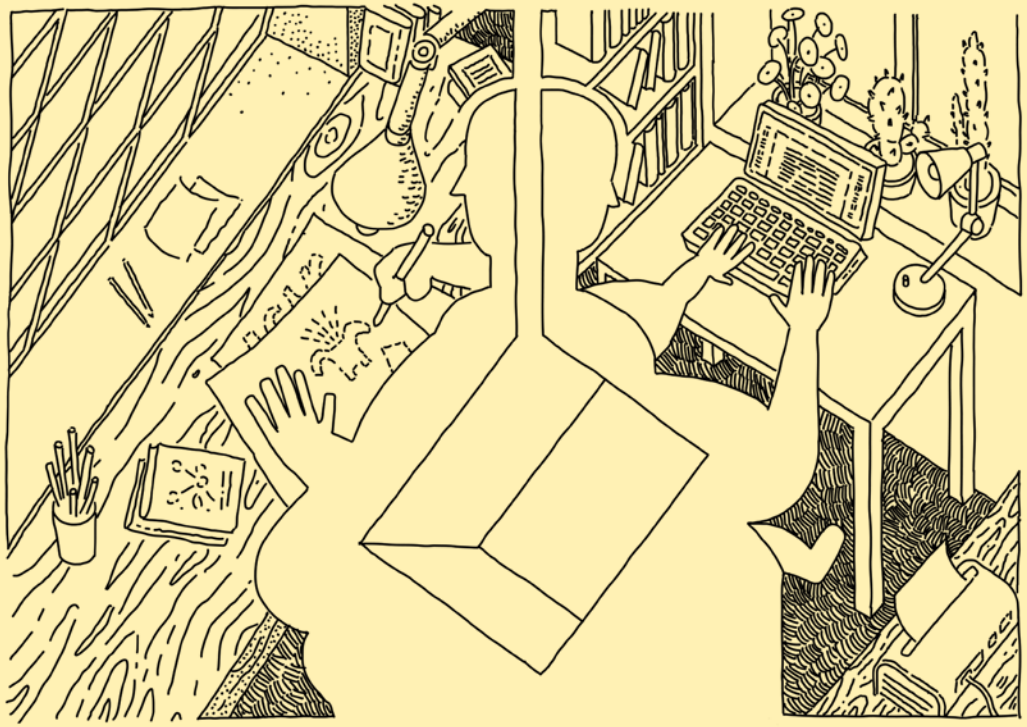


Interiors — Under One Roof with Objects

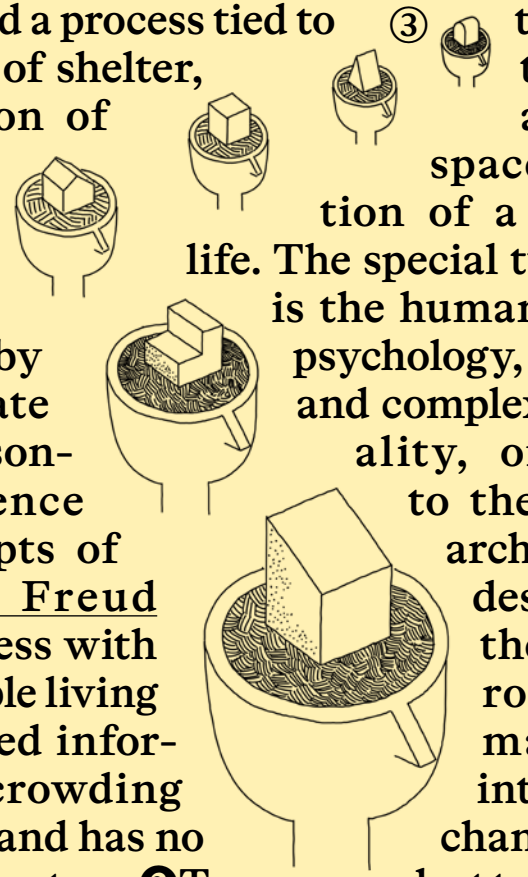
Andrzej Marzec
Maciej Siuda

It is not a solely human privilege to have your own home interior. Animals, plants, buildings, and every existing object, including this text, has one as well. This hybrid, visual/textual essay came about because we did not want to stop at describing interiors. We wanted to create them ourselves with both words and pictures, to create depth and space — you can hide and delve in it, fall into it, even live in it for a while.

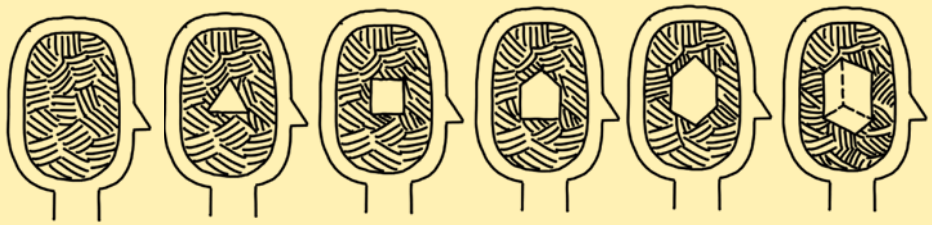
The text and image
here are two
parallel
streams
of thought,
which sometimes
inextricably
weave
(create an organic, symbiotic whole),
other times achieve
a f a r - r e a c h i n g
i n d e p e n d e n c e, trying to compete for the readers' attention, drawing them into the game. The textual layer of the essay does not interpret particular images, and the visual layer does not illustrate the text — image and text operate in terms of shared thinking.

PRODUCING AN INTERIOR — ARCHITECTURE AND PSYCHOLOGY

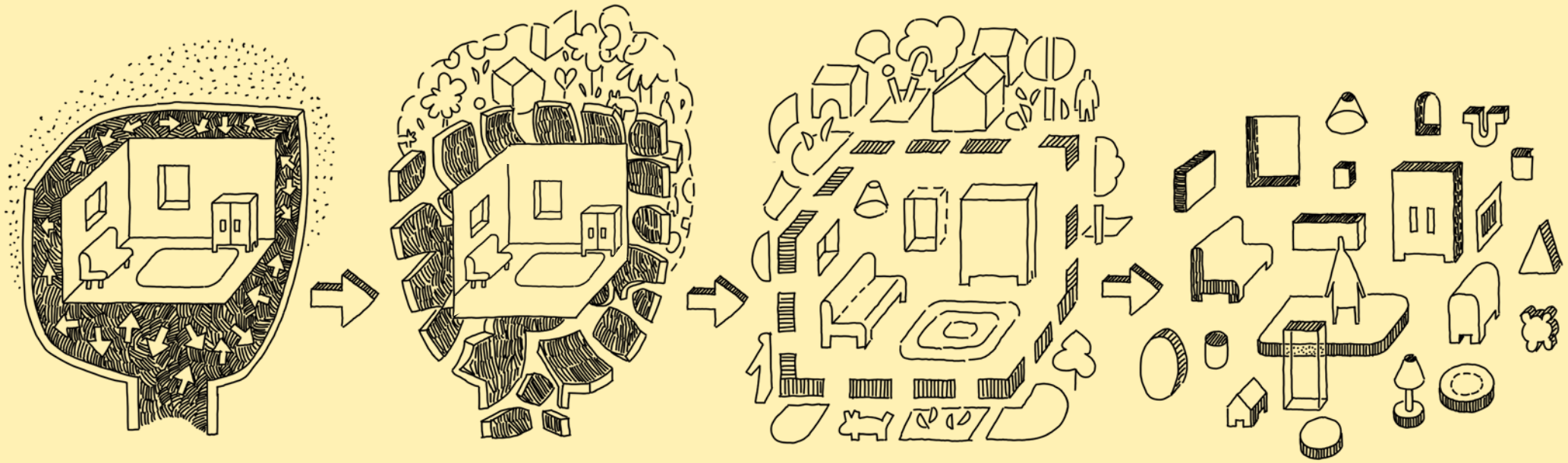
A sense of security is among a person's most important needs, though none of us reaches this desired state immediately. In speaking of security, we have in mind a process tied to the design or location of shelter, the gradual construction of a private, enclosed space and the production of a world for everyday life. The special type of interior that is the human psyche is dealt with by psychology, examining the intricate and complex structure of the personality, often making reference to the language and concepts of architecture.❶ Sigmund Freud described the consciousness with the image of a comfortable living room which no unwanted information can access — crowding into the foyer, it is denied and has no chance to enter the inner sanctum.❷ To better depict the spatial relation in the human psyche, Freud also used diagrams, which later became the trademark style of Jacques Lacan. Slavoj Žižek, in turn, continuing the tradition of seeing psychoanalysis as the architecture of the mind, went much



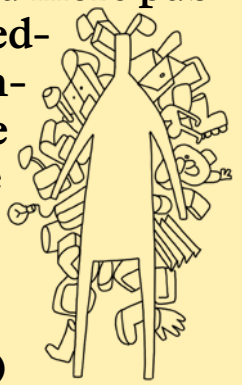
further in his interpretation of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Žižek shows us that the director used the architecture of the family home in the film to show the mental conflict of the main protagonist, moving between the building's level: the superego (upper floor), ego (ground floor) and id (basement).❹

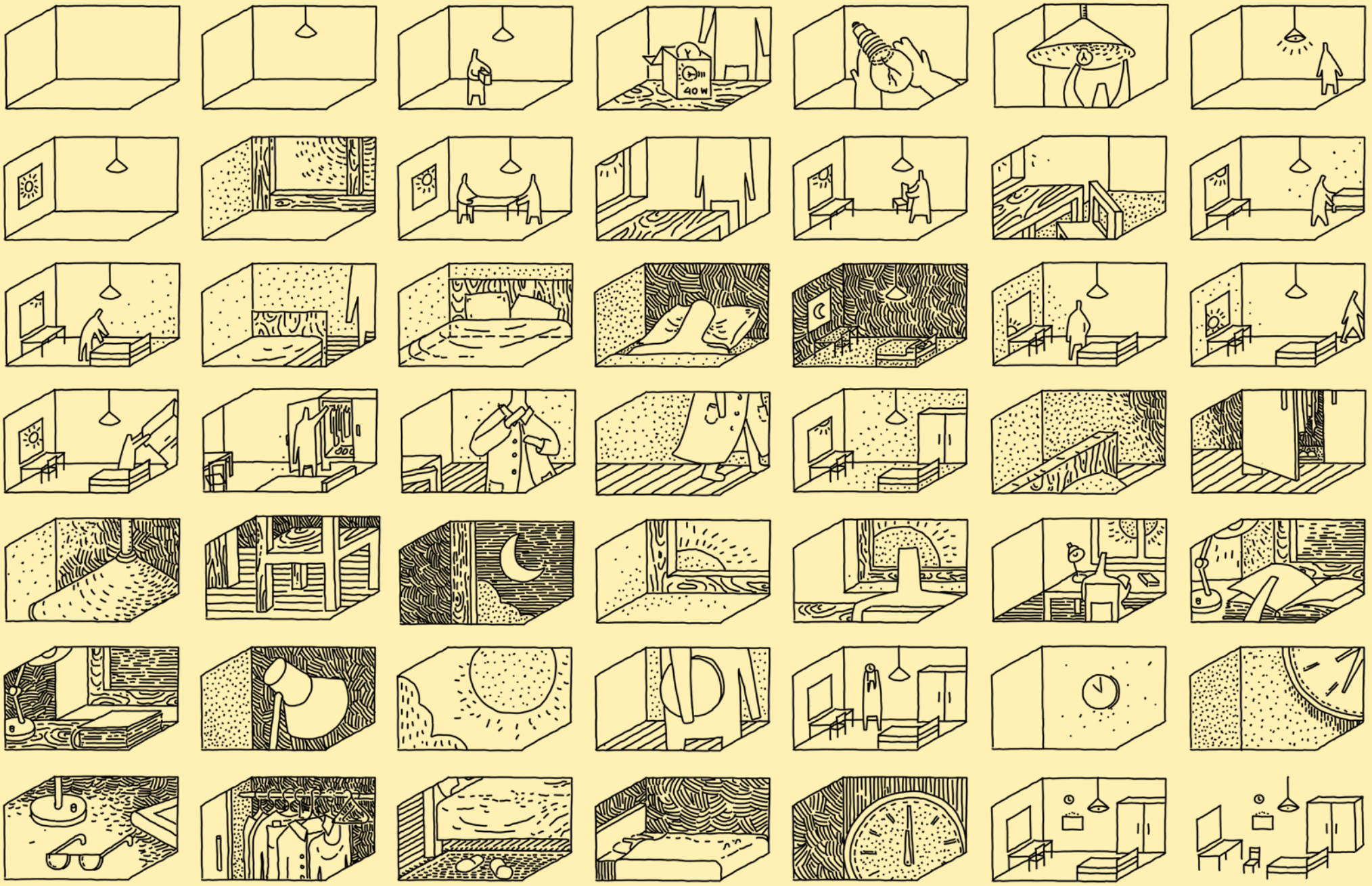


Those consulting Freud for his psychoanalytical services most often came from privileged social classes, with bourgeois lifestyles. Their problems not only came about in private enclosed family household spaces, but were often also produced by its characteristic control and power mechanisms (orders/prohibitions). Small wonder that psychoanalysis never left the sphere of the home, making its architecture a universal model for the human psyche.❺ The therapeutic process it proposes is more the equivalent of a total renovation, or, in a gentler version, just freshening up the interior, which we may not leave under any circumstances, to take a walk and get some air (it is too dangerous). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were critical of psychoanalysis, trying to show that its basic problem was conserving the smothering space of



the home, which serves as a matrix for all actions. They call the phenomenon of domestication (of the human psyche, as well) Oedipalisation, which means that every object (animal, plant, thing etc.) in the space of the home is also inscribed in the human power structure, the network of family relations.❻ Deleuze and Guattari suggest we step outside of the Oedipal social structure, they encourage us to leave the home interior and form (extra-familial) relationships with non-household participants in reality (becoming with others), gaining more freedom, though this means losing a sense of security. As it turns out, architecture and psychology have more in common than it seems; the same goes for home interiors and the interiors of our minds. The gradual discovery of the recesses of the human psyche goes hand-in-hand with the dynamic development and transformation of the sphere of the private home. Back in the Middle Ages, residential spaces were mostly unfurnished and had more public functions; the same went for the bedrooms, which had no intimacy. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the interiors inhabited by the bourgeoisie were filled with countless objects and secrets, becoming private and off limits, much like their inhabitants' minds ('what happens at home stays at home').❼

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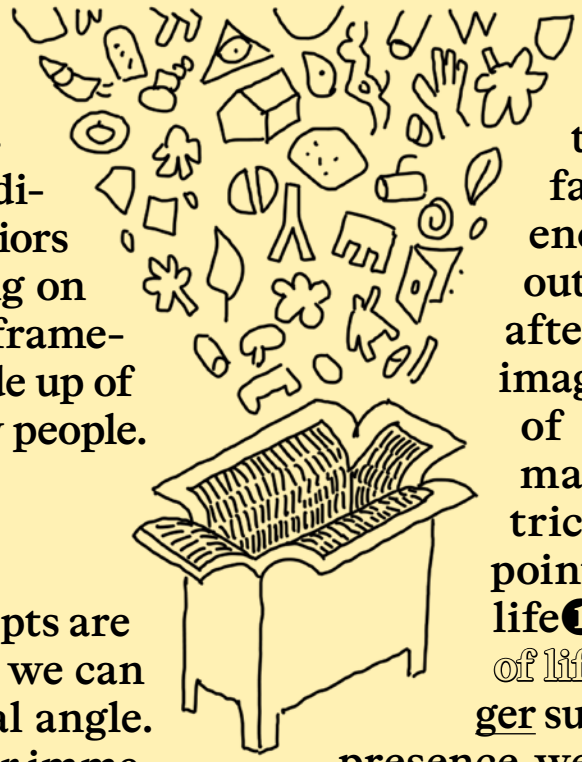
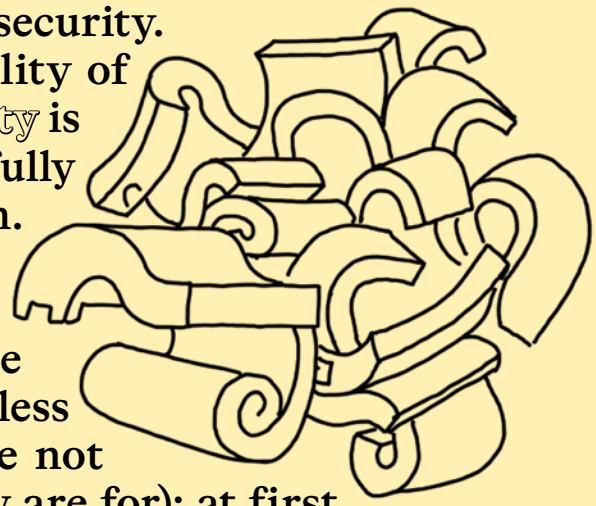
If psychology examines the individual's internal, mental sense of security (subjective introversion), architecture serves a similar role, building human exteriors — immediate surroundings, which become home interiors (objective introversion). Instead of focusing on the human interior, it creates an external framework (exoskeleton) for human security, made up of material reality, the objects that accompany people.



ARCHITECTURE-ORIENTED PHILOSOPHY

If we now know how various interior concepts are produced by psychology and architecture, we can move on to a far less evident philosophical angle. Describing a person's relationship with their immediate surroundings, Martin Heidegger uses the category of 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-sein*).❾ He uses this for two reasons: 1) he wants to use the hyphens to show the spatiality of his concept, to produce its interior; 2) he wants to stress that the human individual cannot function without the world coming before it, a world into which they are thrown at the moment of their birth. Insofar as we can imagine the existence of an objective reality without a concrete person (for instance, after they die), we are not capable of imagining an isolated person, devoid of the surroundings that partly make them up, as they are inextricably linked. Timothy Morton points out that the world of human life⓫ is created more by the stuff of life, and not language, as Heidegger suggested. Everyday objects whose presence we seldom notice give our existence meaning and value, they bring joy, fulfilment and a sense of security. The astonishing ability of things to create reality is revealed most powerfully at our birth and death. Every parent knows the birth of a child is preceded by the appearance of countless things (often we are not quite sure what they are for); at first they only fill the space of the home, then they radically change it, and our lives. We experience some-



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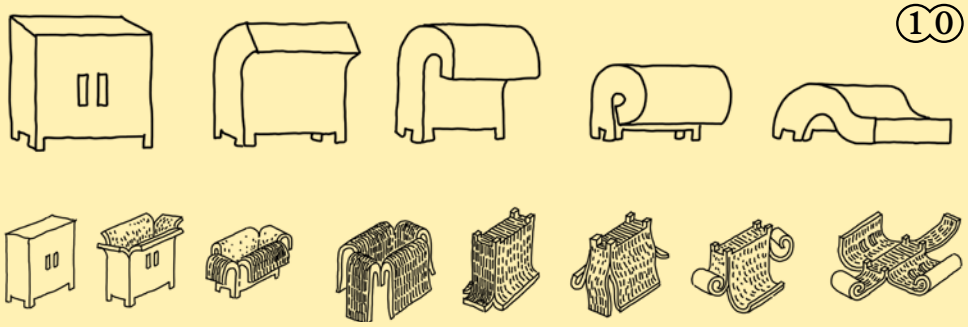
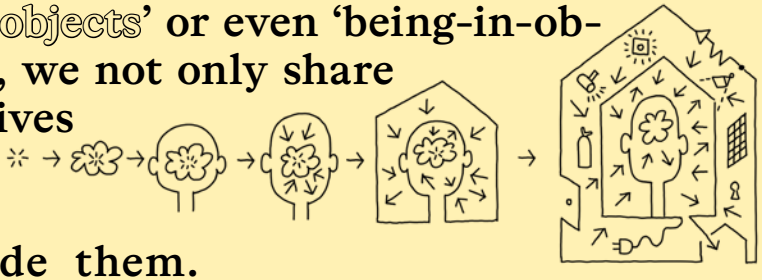
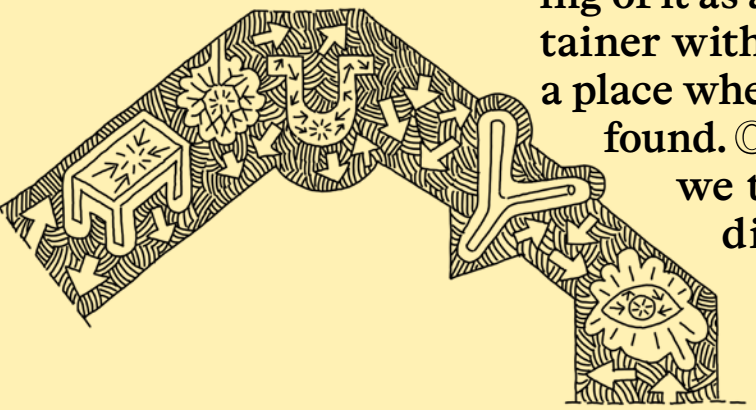


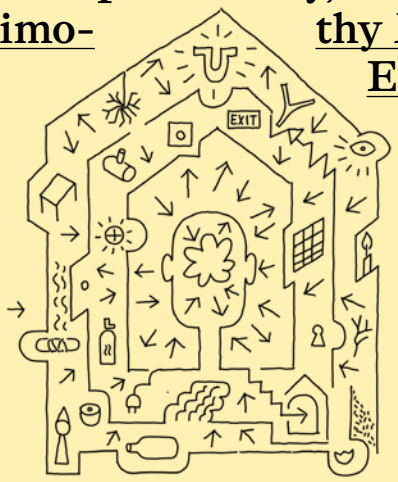
thing similar after the death of a loved one — the number of things they leave behind, to which we must attend, can be overwhelming. It is called the 'mass of the succession' for good reason.[12] The world of our life is the reality of our relations with objects, which, in psychological terms, has been aptly noted by Melanie Klein. Making an important amendment to Freudian psychoanalysis, she suggests it moves from agoraphobic introspection to a fascination with the outside space. When we consider Heidegger's views in this context, we realise we should more speak of human existence as 'being-with-objects' or even 'being-in-objects'. After all, we not only share our everyday lives with objects, we even find ourselves inside them.



Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) does not recognise the existence of a universal space — we are accustomed to thinking of it as an empty container without qualities, a place where things are found. OOO proposes we take a totally different perspective: it is objects that produce



space through their existence. They are spacious, deep — we do not stumble upon them on our way, we more fall into them (they are vast as the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*). Things are always found in other things (like Matryoshka dolls), and not in some abstract imaginary container. Air is in my lungs, which are found in me, the person writing these words is in a flat located in a district of a European city, within global warming (which Timothy Morton calls a hyperobject).



Edmund Husserl promised to gain access to objects through philosophy and to peer into their private reality. Despite this positive-sounding prediction, however, he was only interested in how particular things appear in our consciousness (idealism), and withheld his judgement when it came to the real existence of things (ἐποχή). Phenomenology, much like Freudian psychoanalysis, was forever trapped in the human mind and never stepped outside of it, toward real objects that were no part of human cognition. Examining representations of things projected on the screen of his consciousness, Husserl is like a man who spent all his life in the cinema and then, based on the films he saw, wants to tell us about reality. It was only the work

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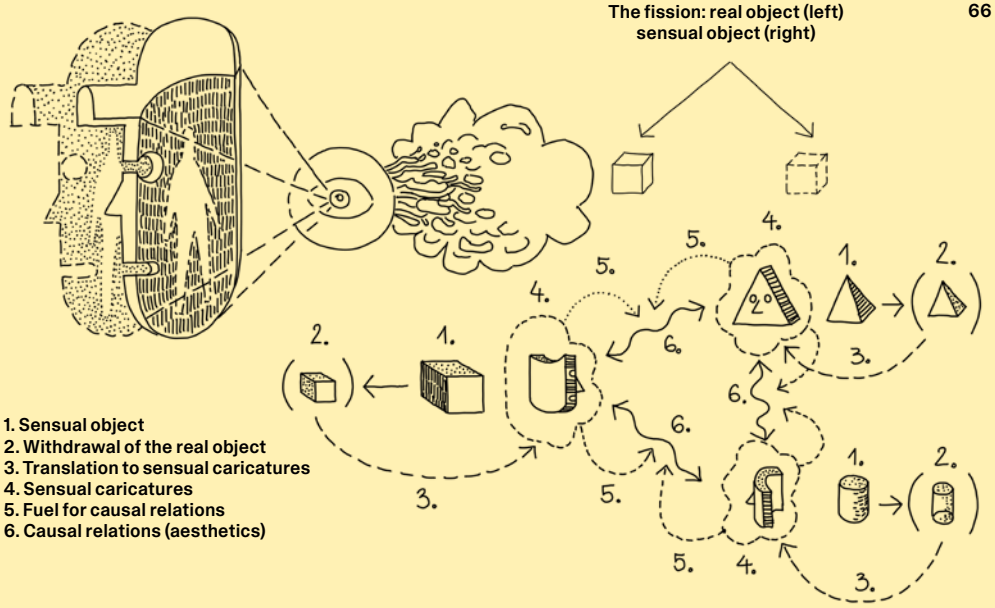
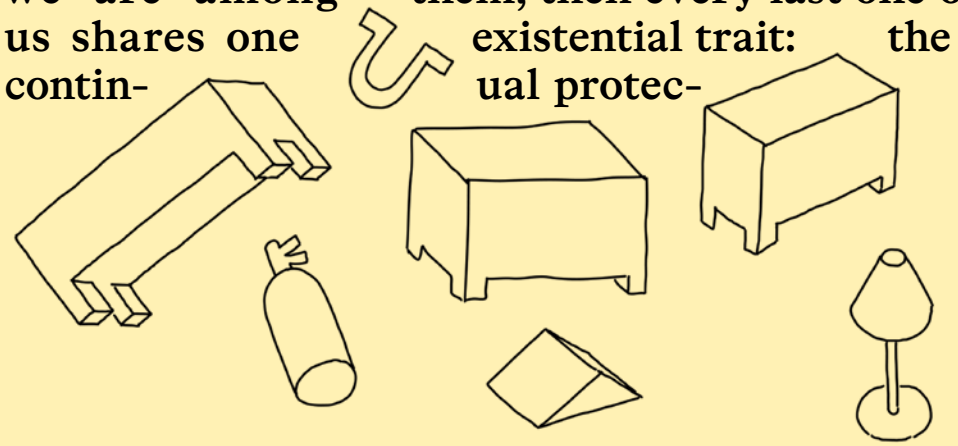
The fission: real object (left)
sensual object (right)



of Graham Harman that brought a long awaited return of a realist perspective in philosophy, and the conviction that objects have depth. He called attention to the existence of the insides of objects, which had been ignored; his discovery might be compared to that of Freud's unconscious. The introverted, concealed and withdrawn interiors of objects could not be explored, however, by psychology. Harman suggests calling this whole new field of knowledge ontography[14] — this would play the role of ontological geography, describing the metaphysical shaping of things. To my mind, however, when philosophy tries to describe and design the spacious interior of objects in a speculative way, this visionary and world-building enterprise comes closest to architecture.

NO ENTRY: THE PRIVATE INTERIORS OF OBJECTS

Phenomenology has accustomed us to thinking about objects as utterly accessible and transparent, to suppose they hide no secrets from us, we can observe them from any angle we like, and this is one reason why no one wants to be an object. Meanwhile, Harman points out the astonishing capability of objects to retreat into the private sphere, to avoid curious gazes and protect their sensitive interiors from intruders. This introverted tendency, this movement within, is shared by all creatures through a defence mechanism. It comes from a desire to maintain our integrity and is a strategy closely tied to achieving security.[15] Perhaps it is things (which often outlive people) that have best mastered the survival strategy of inaccessibility, continually blocking access to the interior. And if, as Harman claims, there are only objects and we are among them, then every last one of us shares one existential trait: the contin- ual protec-



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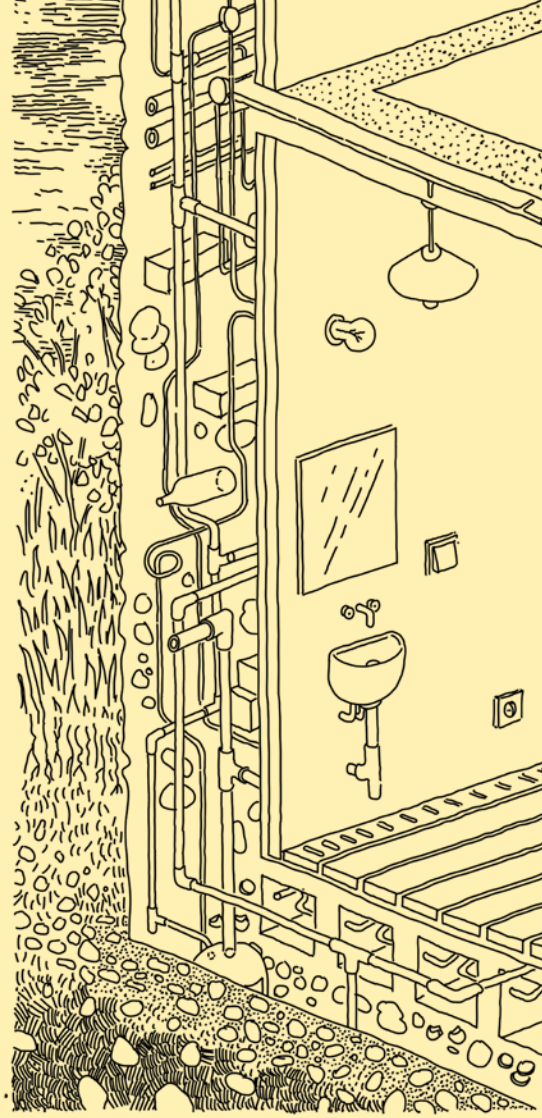
tion of our insides. Some do it better, some worse, but one thing is certain: it is best we do it together. It is undeniably easier to protect ourselves in a group, which is why we most often decide to form alliances, to gain a sense of security with the help of other objects (walls, doors, curtains, outer shades, hedges etc.) that effectively protect us from the gazes of others and danger. In this way, the house in which we were meant to feel at home, be safe, left alone, is filled up with mysterious objects. Our interiors unexpectedly change into a space of interobjectivity,17 a stage where objects interact. Most often we simply fail to notice these non-human actions, we ignore them. We do not take into account the relationship between the heaters and the thermostats regulating them, responding to changes in air temperature, the relationship between the cleaning robot and the carpet on the floor, or the dust mites with the mattress in the bedroom. Objects do, of course, protect our houses from break-ins, but most often they are busy with

their own tasks, that is, deflecting access to their insides. Territorial and narcissistically self-absorbed, immersed in the world of their own business, they are primarily occupied with their own existence. We have no keys, no entry codes to decipher the mysteries of their being, these objects are locked tight from us, operating in their social bubble. We create a community of close strangers with them, we live together under one roof, but separately. I never really know who is protecting me and how, I owe my sense of security to strange objects, devices and mechanisms. Most of our household installations (electric wires, ventilation shafts, sewage pipes) are prime examples of objects' retiring existence, working underground or in hiding (under cover). Their odd status is that, while being at the very heart of the home (buried



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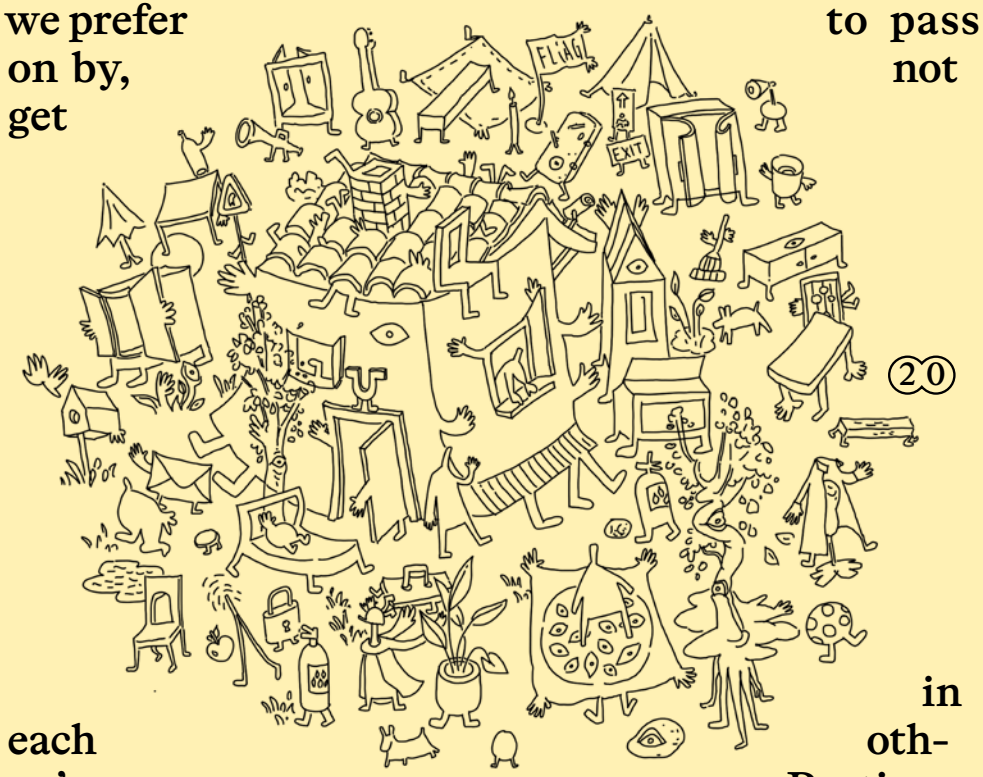
in the walls, sometimes almost bursting out), they mostly operate quite beyond our control.[19] Locating a wire proves to be a highly difficult, often hopeless undertaking — better just to leave it alone. We live under one roof with them, but we are used to ignoring each other, we prefer to pass on by, not get



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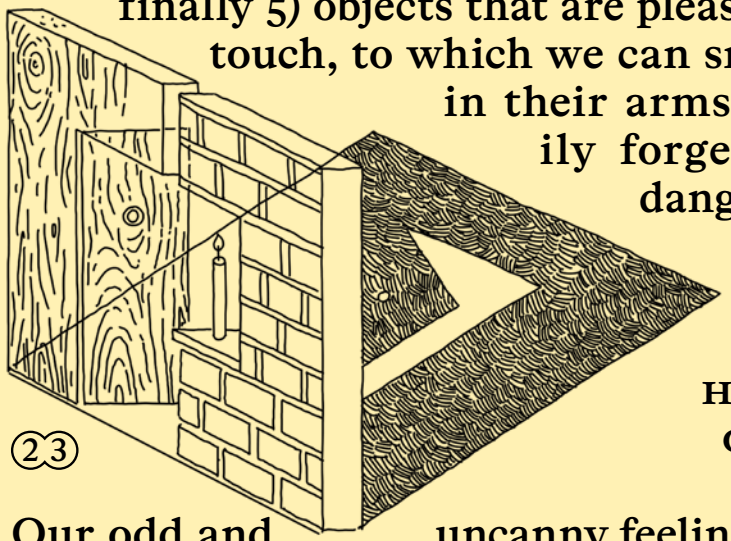
in each other's way. Particularly when we want to hang a picture on the wall, and decide to drill a hole. Morton states that when we see objects from the outside, they strike us as ordinary and natural, though often they conceal astonishingly complex and elaborate insides.[21] Electric sockets, vent openings and drains are portals to another, unfamiliar

reality, leading to not the slightest idea. Objects are mysterious and enigmatic as black holes, icebergs or the door of the old wardrobe leading to Narnia. We generally see only their sensory appearances, the outer signs of a deeper, complex reality to which they lead, but we never know what they really are. When I look at the drain in my sink I conclude that objects are sometimes too deep, and I start to doubt if I want to know all about them. Perhaps respect for privacy and the right to secrecy are the basic principles of successful co-existence, especially in a society of objects. Among them are: 1) installations buried in walls, labyrinths of pipes, hideously tangled nets of wires (like the tentacles of the eternal Cthulhu);[22] 2) devices on standby, which never sleep and wink one eye of a red diode at the world; 3) architectural structures that scare off and discipline (cameras, lights with motion detectors); 4) the knick-knacks that keep us company, part of the interior, but in fact serving no purpose (like the helpers from Franz Kafka's *The Castle*); and

finally 5) objects that are pleasant to the touch, to which we can snuggle and, in their arms, momentarily forget about the dangers.



THE SECRET LIFE OF HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS

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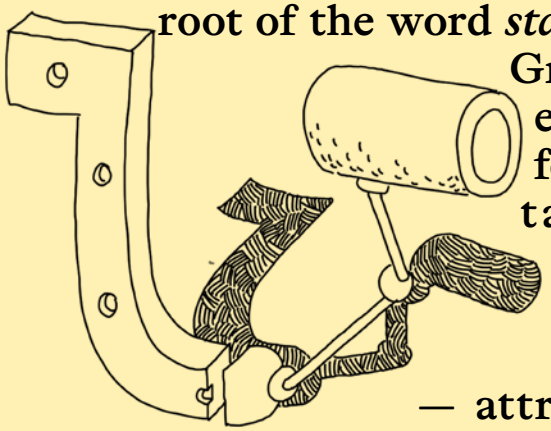
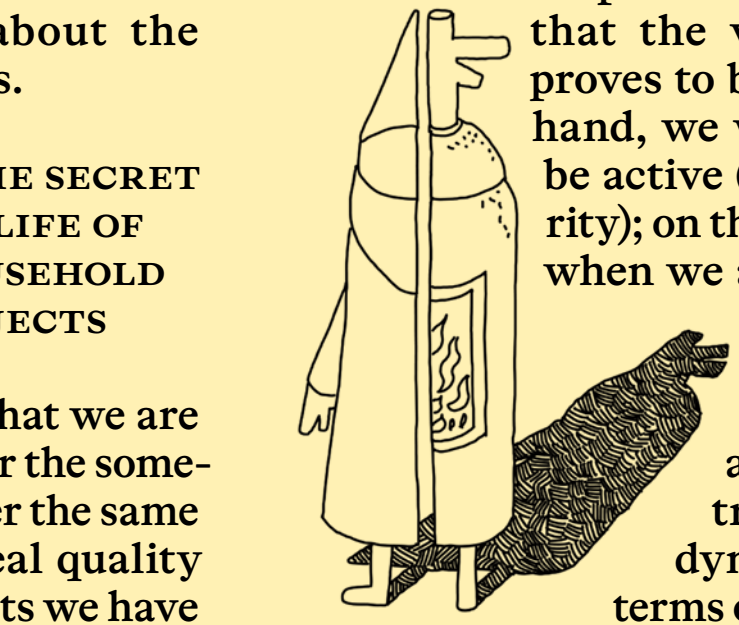
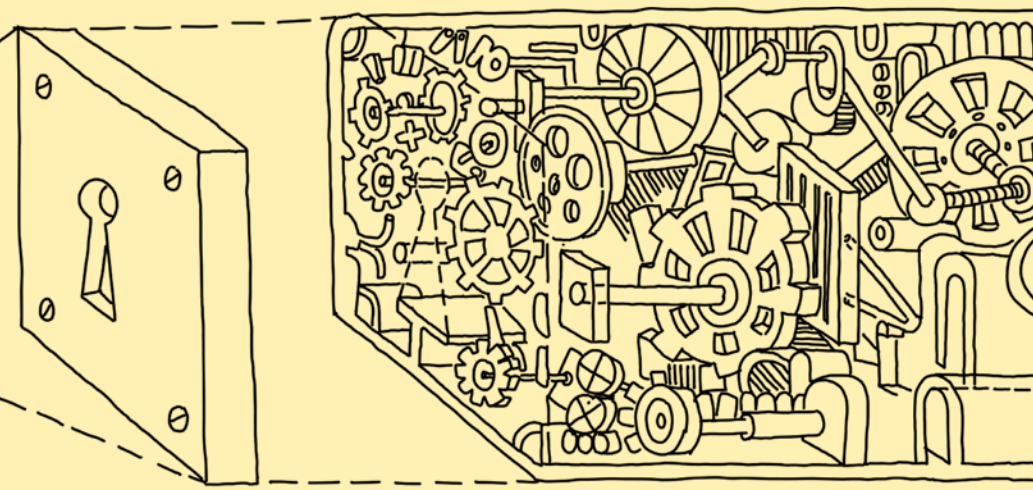
Our odd and uncanny feeling that we are not the only inhabitants of 'our' homes, or the somewhat absurd conviction that we live under the same roof with strangers takes on a very real quality when we think about the reality of objects we have not taken seriously. We usually imagine objects as passive and motionless, utterly devoted to human needs; then we think of them as frozen stone figures. They are objects from which we expect, above all, immobility and inactivity, as indicated by the Latin root of the word *statua* (*sto* — to stand).



Greek culture had entirely different expectations of statues; the word ἄγαλμα indicates their agency — attracting the gods with

their beauty or bestowing pleasure.24 Yet before we move on to the equivocal properties of objects and their performativity, we ought to stress that the very desire for security proves to be ambivalent. On the one hand, we want objects to work and be active (to give us a sense of security); on the other, we feel much safer when we are certain our household things are dead, motionless, strictly dependent on human plans. Things are not static — on the contrary, they are changeable, dynamic, and even ironic; in terms of sensory appearance, they are performative, less existing than happening. Interpreting the structure of Heidegger's tool-being, Harman points primarily to the existential ambivalence of tools, which like to play

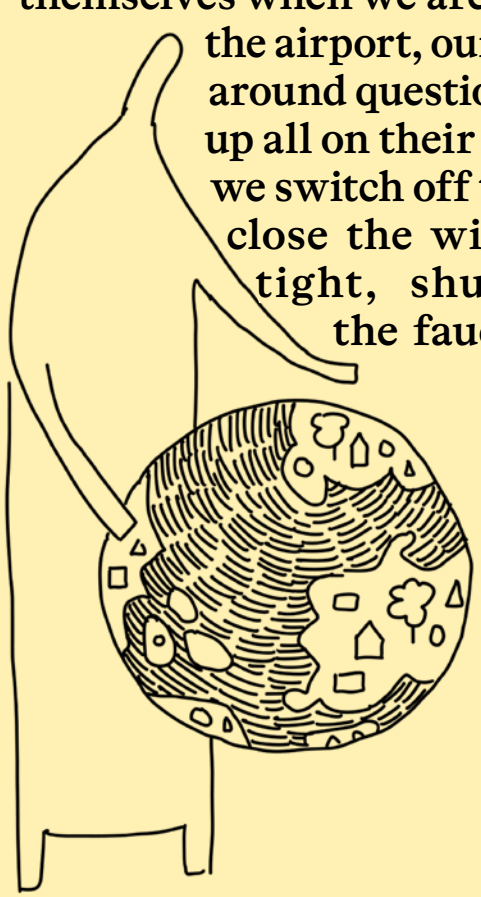




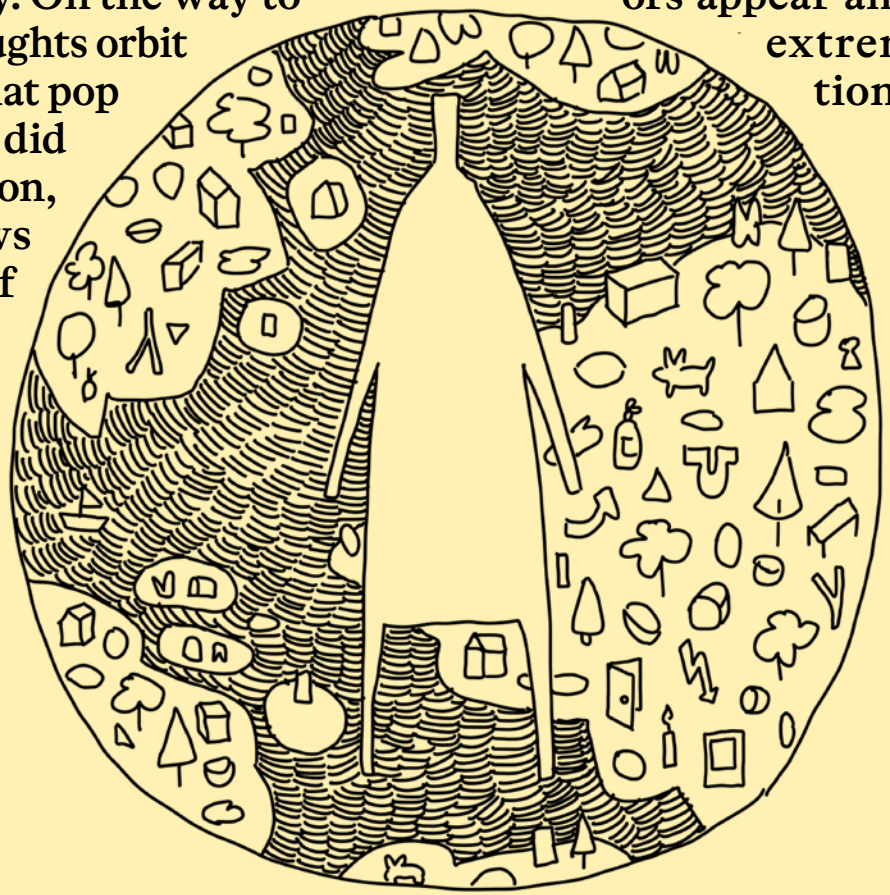
hide-and-seek with us. They can vanish entirely in our hands when we use them, or the opposite, take on a frustrating presence when they unexpectedly break.[25] Yet we can find many more of these ambiguities of everyday objects inside our homes. When we leave the home, we are often unsure if we remembered to lock the door, so we go back and test the handle to see if it is definitely shut, or just looks that way. Going on vacation, we want to make sure the household objects will not do anything by themselves when we are away. On the way to the airport, our thoughts orbit around questions that pop up all on their own: did we switch off the iron, close the windows tight, shut off the faucets, take out the trash, water the plants? We increasingly film ourselves doing certain tasks so that we can return to them at such moments. Perhaps we are remembering an old and enigmatic Polish saying ('every gun fires itself once a year') about the meddlesome, near-inexplicable, and mysterious aspect of things' agency.

THE MAGIC OF SECURITY

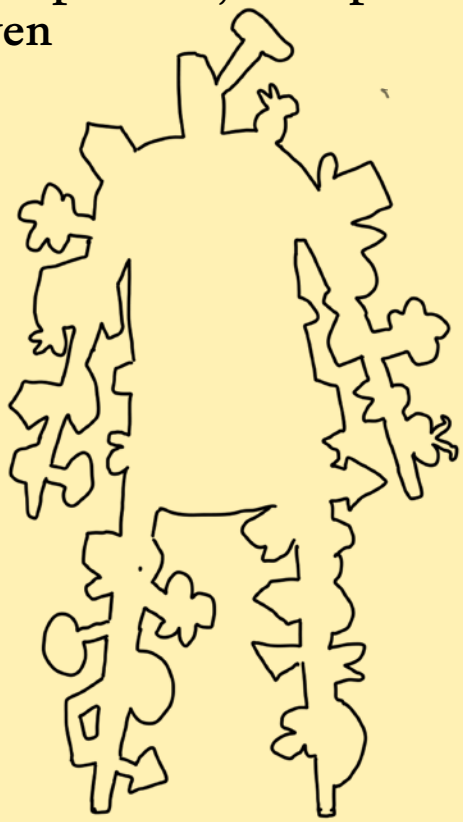
The objects that help create our household interiors appear and vanish — at times they are extremely important, exceptional, even



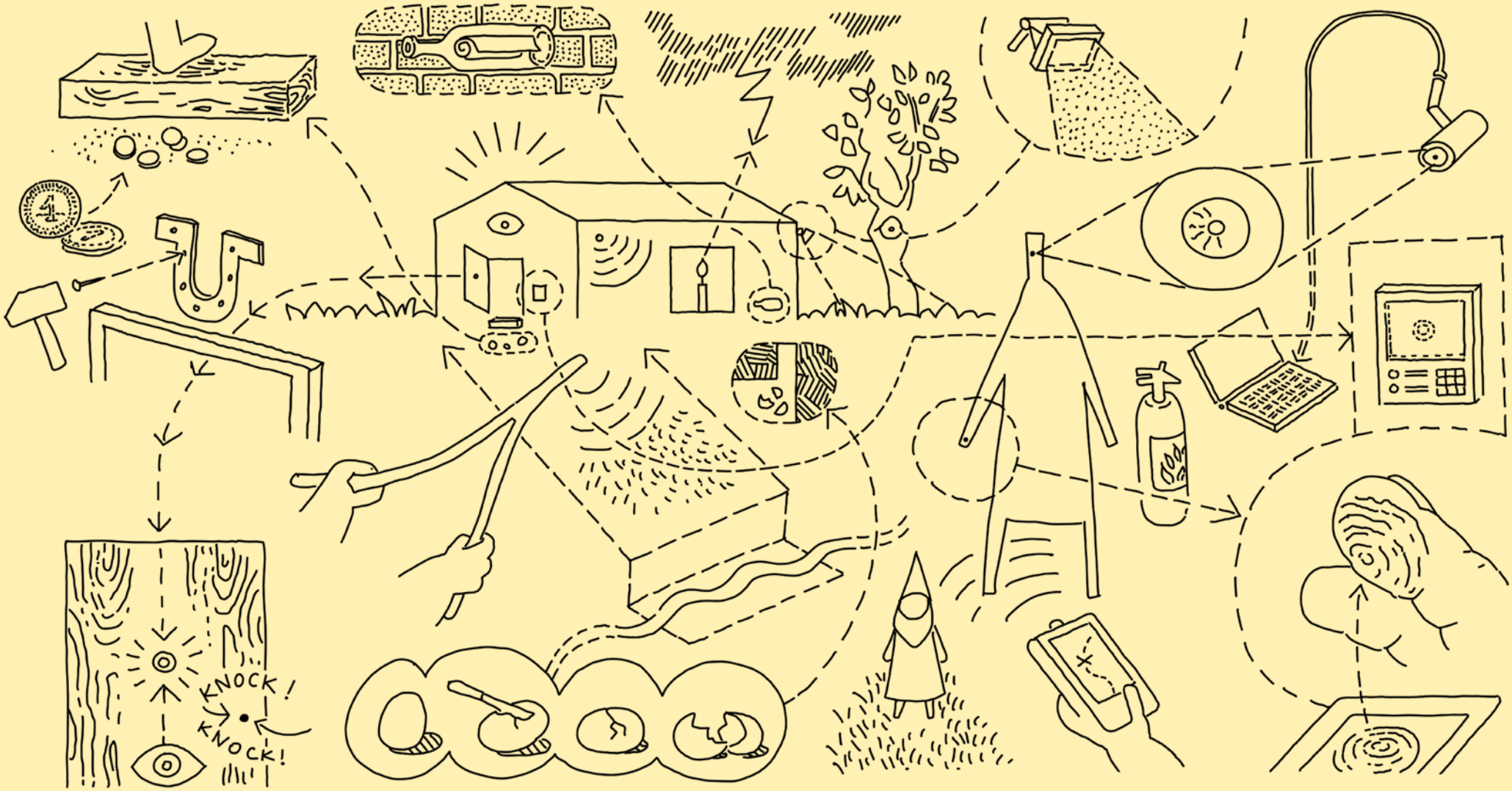
† Architect demiurge



† Empathetic architect



† Dancing (participatory) architect


KNOCK!
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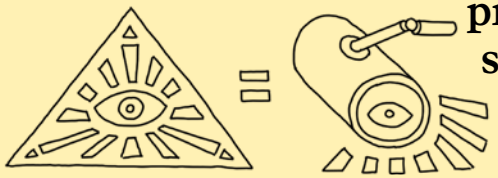
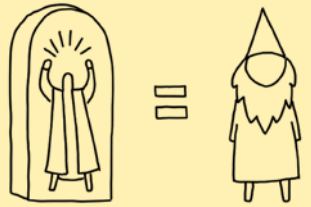
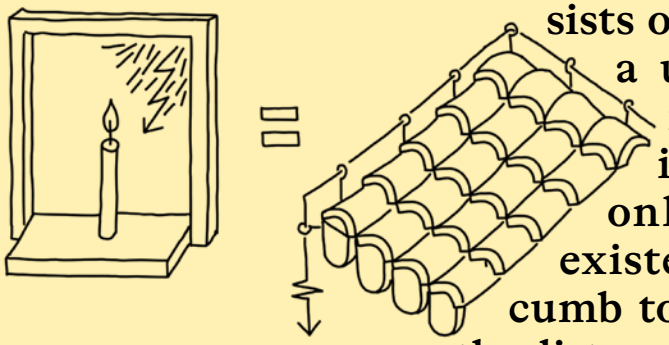
essential, only to become quite ordinary, quotidian, easy to miss. We encounter a similar ambiguity when we think of objects that tend to our security, putting down their efficacy to both technology and magic. Modernity has accustomed us to separating these two categories, yet at present, we mix them up without the slightest of problems. Our flats are protected by advanced security and monitoring systems (miracles of technology), though this does not prevent us from also turning to magical practices and beliefs ('bad luck to kill a spider', writing the C + M + B initials of the Three Wise Men — in chalk on the door, burning white sage in a new home). Joining the two approaches means the security objects in our homes always hold a place of pride (regardless of their origins), and we assign them special, nearly magical properties (superpowers). We cannot precisely explain what makes them exceptional, we simply believe they have something that makes us feel safer in their presence. Security is, above all, a matter of the trust and more or less rationally justified faith we put in our objects. I have limited knowledge about the lock in my door, I chose it myself based on the technical data and I know it works, because I turn the key in it every day. Do I know it well enough to trust it will protect me in any circumstances? I've never seen how it behaves in a crisis, so I am left to believe



in its efficacy, I have been given a guarantee, a promise of security. I will only find out what it can do if someone tries to break into my home and the lock is forced by unknown perpetrators, then I will know all about it, but do I really want to check? Security is tied to trust, though I do realise that some of my household objects let me down. This is especially true if my expectations are too great, coming from a desire for absolute safety. Do I then expect too much from them, do I believe in them too strongly? So long as objects do not disappoint me I simply trust them, I believe in their superpowers, knowing perfectly well there's no such thing as an unbeatable lock that cannot be cracked. Closing a door, even the strongest and most battle-tested, is always a kind of social contract, a play of conventions, even an aesthetic strategy (warning signs: 'entry forbidden', 'guard dog', or 'monitored site'). We achieve a sense of security working with many objects with which we are not entirely familiar, in whose powers we are to believe, as are the intruders seeking to enter our interiors and shatter our peace and quiet. Producing safe interiors — whether through psychology or architecture — is always a world-building gesture, giving concrete shape to our reality and its enchantment. A sense of security is quite similar to a household atmosphere; it is impossible to say what exactly it con-



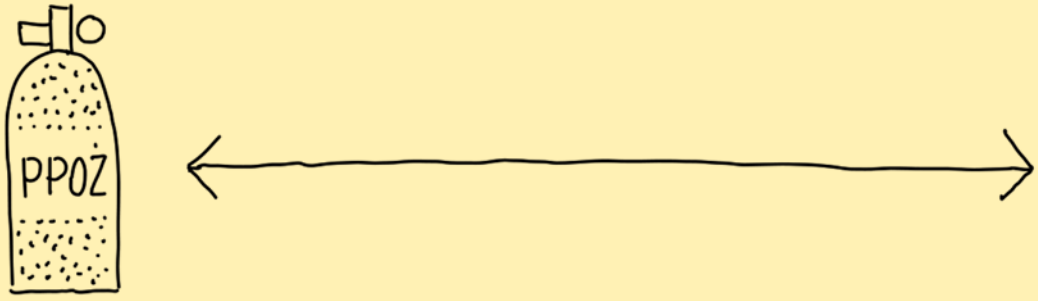


sists of or to create a universal recipe for achieving it — we can only confirm its existence (if we succumb to its charms) or the distressing lack thereof. In describing our experience of using new technologies, Nicolas Nova speaks in terms of magic and the miraculous, which have survived the times of Enlightenment rationality in an astonishing fashion. Today we no longer think about water nymphs or forest dryads, yet the digital realm plays host to a whole range of magical creatures: Internet trolls, viruses, Trojan horses, bots, computer game heroes, and Artificial Intelligence (Siri, Alexa or Bixby).[26] We can take a similar approach to the home environment and today's 'lares and penates' ensuring our security: intelligent monitoring systems using biometrics (recognising faces, fingerprints, or scanning irises), drones or four-legged patrol robots monitoring our property. Finally, one of the most popular non-human inhabitants of our homes is the cleaning robot, which we not only give a human name, but see as a member of the family. We can even trace the evolution of the magical imagination in how we apprehend security; it survives unchanged, only reinforced by the development of technology. The All-Seeing Eye

placed in front of houses has turned into the eye of a (CCTV) camera, the holy figures of building patrons have been replaced with signs bearing security company logos.

SOMETHING MORE . . .

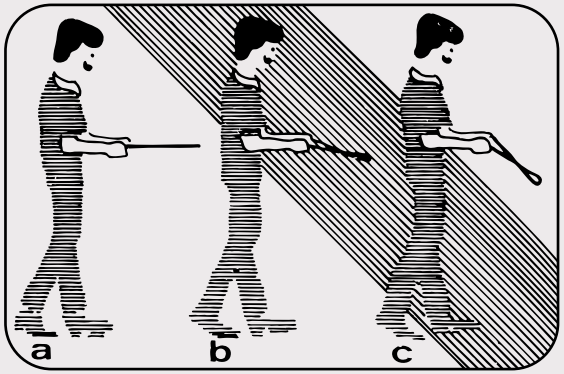
Describing the unique and exceptional nature of concrete objects, Harman turns to the French expression *je ne sais quoi*;[27] he uses this to try to convince us that every object is something much more than our knowledge about it, which comes from our human mode of perception. Federico Campagna takes a similar approach, stating that, while the instrumentalising language of technology is capable of manipulating and controlling objects, it is entirely unable to grasp what they truly are (clouds of atoms?). It is precisely the inexpressible, ineffable,[28] extraordinary, even magical way objects exist that makes them resistant, withdrawn and safe. Only in this way can we consider their private interiors, which we cannot reach, enter, and penetrate with our minds. Perhaps Harman's 'something more' best shows what a sense of security truly is — we cannot say what it is precisely, but we do know when we are safe. This also explains the need for a totally new, speculative language (other than the technical, instrumental description) to speak of the reality of strange, uncanny and mysterious objects that bring us both a strangeness and a sense of security.



❶For more on the influence of architecture on psychoanalysis and its spatial vocabulary, see Jane Rendell, *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis: Spaces of Transition*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024. ❷See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, London: Norton, 1977. ③See visual solutions applied in the opening credits for *Severance*, designed by Oliver Latta, Apple TV+, USA, 2022 (series creator: Dan Erickson). ❹See *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, dir. Sophie Fiennes, Holland, Austria, Great Britain, 2006. ❺See Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 39–40. ❻See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London: Continuum, 2004. ❼See John Lukacs, 'The Bourgeois Interior', *American Scholar*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1970, p. 623. ⑧Compositional references, see Chris Ware, *Rusty Brown*, Poznań: Centrala, 2023. ❾See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper, 2008. ①⓪A gesture inverting objects, see Roman Stańczak, *Flight*, 2018, drawing, Zachęta — National Gallery of Art. ⓫See Timothy Morton, *Stuff of Life*, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, p. 1. ⓬See Marcin Wicha, *Rzeczy, których nie wyrzuciłem*, Krakow: Wydawnictwo Karakter, 2017. ①③Diagram references and text/image layout in the book, see Susan Buck-Morss, Kevin McCaughey and Adam Michaels, *Seeing <—> Making. Room for Thought*, Los Angeles: Inventory Press, 2024. ⓮See Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Winchester: Zero Books, 2011. ⓯Jane Bennett (a vitalist materialist) tries to describe objects' survival mechanisms with the term *conatus*, found in Spinoza. While possessing will (*voluntas*) is a mental phenomenon proper to animate creatures, striving for self-preservation (*conatus*) is a universal ability that concerns all objects without exception. See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010. ①⑥Visual references, see Nick Drnaso, *Sabrina*, Warsaw: Kultura Gniewu, 2020. ⓱Unlike intersubjectivity, or the reality of human relationships, in which linguistic communication and understanding are pivotal, coming together to make the human world. ①⑧Methods of visually presenting architectural interiors, see Atelier Bow-Wow, *Graphic Anatomy*, Tokyo: Toto Publishing, 2007. ⓳For more on architecture that creates mysteries and hard-to-access worlds within the space of the home, see Tom Wiscombe, *Objects Models Worlds*, Beijing: AADCU, 2021. ②⓪A way of showing the diversity of societies, see the animated series *Once Upon a Time . . . Man*, Albert Barillé, Canal+, France, 1986–1987. ②①One of Morton's favourite examples is the TARDIS (Time And Relative Dimension[s] In Space), the telephone booth from *Doctor Who*, which turns out to be as big as a space ship when you step inside. See Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. ②②See Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*, Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2012. ②③Taking objects apart into their prime components (entering their interiors), based on an analysis of the make-up of a croissant, see *Enric Miralles*, Madrid: El Croquis Editorial, 2025. ②④For more on this topic, see *What We Ask of a Statue Is That It Doesn't Move*, dir. Daphné Hérétakis, Greece, France, 2024. ②⑤See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being, Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Chicago: Open Court, 2002. ②⑥See Nicolas Nova, *Persistance du merveilleux. Le petit peuple de nos machines*, Paris: Premier Parallèle, 2024. ②⑦See Graham Harman, *Architecture and Objects*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. ②⑧See Federico Campagna, *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

Playing It Safe

Olga Drenda



←
Straw mobile from the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw: Włocławek county, photo: Eugeniusz Frankowski, 1921–1939, photograph from the collection of Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, zbiory.etnomuzeum.eu (accessed 25 March 2025), CC BY-SA 3.0

↑
Response of a divining rod approaching a water vein; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990

→→
Radosław Kaźmierczak, *Untitled*, 2016, © Author

‘Attention, this site is monitored’ — this sort of warning now blends naturally into the surrounding landscape. This is not when it comes to particular buildings or spaces; driving into Wasilków, Zabrze or Wadowice, as soon as we cross the city limits we are told we are being monitored. We spend our nights and days watched by cameras, which are there so we can sleep peacefully — or so we believe, no one has really ascertained how many installations around us are fakes. Their actions are sometimes partly magical — they do not record threats, and their task is perhaps less to discourage would-be lawbreakers than to evoke a general sense of calm and stability.

In 2025, despite the international upheavals and the war being waged across the eastern border, Poland is, in historical terms, surprisingly and unprecedentedly safe — both on a global scale and compared to the situation in its very recent past. Crime statistics when it comes to health, life and property in Poland are among the lowest in the European Union, and have dropped every year since our accession in 2004. The numbers are remarkably consistent with the general mood: according to Social Opinion Research Centre studies in 2023, ninety-six per cent of respondents thought their neighbourhood was safe, and eighty-eight per cent has a similarly positive feeling about the whole country.❶ At the same time, Poland has an extensive security folklore — in other words, ordinary practices independent of the law of the land and which people apply voluntarily. This includes the use of objects, the organisation of spaces, and customs and ‘precautionary’ and ‘good luck’ practices. This mass of information makes us ask, only half-seriously: Is the abundance of peace we now enjoy in Poland the result of a reasonably stable economy, the enforcement of the law, or is it more the shared enactment of a collective will that makes even the fake camera a trusty guardian?

↑
Television set in a house in Podhale, 1984. Zofia Rydet,
from the *Sociological Record 1978–1990* series, *Objects and Decorations*,
© Zofia Rydet Foundation/PAP

PROTECTED BY THE EVIL EYE

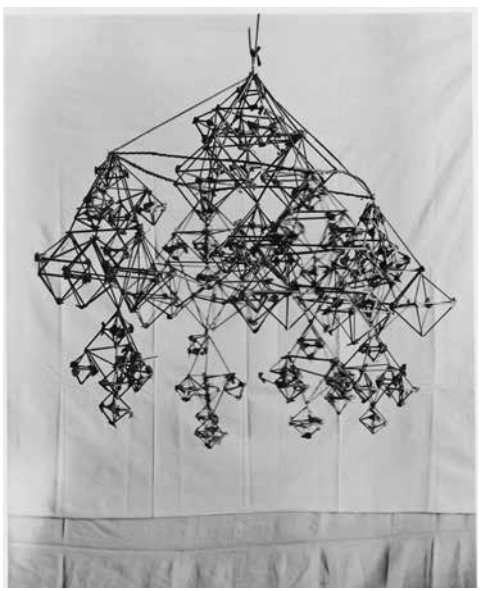
‘Better safe than sorry’, says the old chestnut. In many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Polish churches we find wall paintings of the Eye of Providence, an image of the Holy Trinity as an all-seeing eye that began spreading in the Renaissance. The modern Enlightenment, in its European and then American renditions, placed this image on the American one-dollar bill and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This was also a time when the idea of constant surveillance was born, symbolised by the panopticon of Jeremy Bentham, which showed it was enough for people to be convinced they were being observed for them to behave as though they actually were. Omniscience, theretofore interpreted as a divine intervention, guiding people on their way, acquired a second, ruthless aspect, both utilitarian and supervisory. This duality is an inextricable part of any conversation about security (suffices to think of the tone we hear in the phrase ‘it’s for your own good’) and must be remembered as we think about the omnipresence of cameras, monitoring and biometrics.

We should pause, however, on the very symbol of the eye, which is older than modernity. Here too, we find paradoxes and ambiguities. The blue glass *nazar* medallion, formed of concentric circles and found everywhere in the culture of the Near East and the Mediterranean, protects us from the workings of the evil eye, the envious gaze sowing discord and undoing happiness. Traces of faith in the evil eye are at least as old as the written word, and convictions of the existence of this force transcends cultural boundaries. Long ago, it reached as far as Poland. Piotr Szulkin based the script for his 1976 film *Oczy uroczne* (*Bewitching Eyes*) on an anonymous folk tale. His protagonist, a nobleman, decides to blind himself, fearing the sinister power in his gaze. Usually safety from the evil eye does not require such drastic measures, as a ‘protecting eye’ generally proves sufficient. This may also explain the popularity of the fake cameras: it is a psychological solace, a part of a panopticon, but also an eye against another eye — that of a thief, an envier who would do us harm.

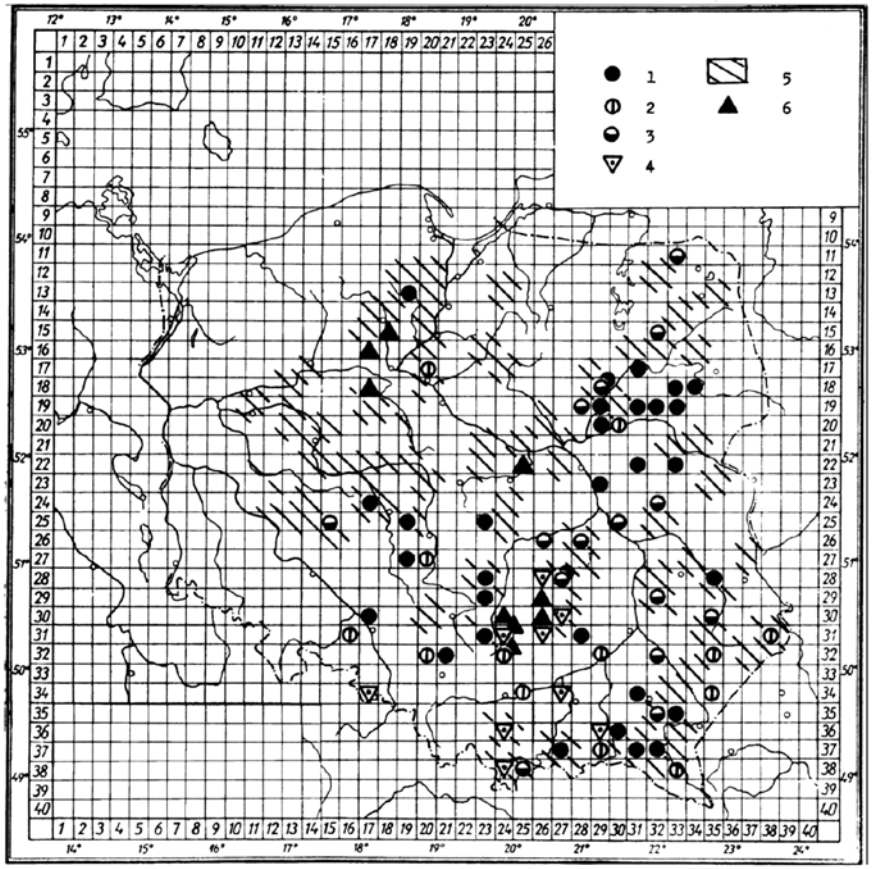
↑
Eye bath sign, ISO 7010

The old Polish saying tells us that God will not help man tend to his own well-being. Yet the unpredictable and chaotic nature of the world means there is no way to predict danger. The evil eye, curses, crop failure, sickness, fire, bad weather, thoughtless self-inflicted damage: in the traditional world view, all these misfortunes could arise from objective causes or from subtle bumps in a faraway dimension. This is why security means constant negotiation and transaction. Apotropaions come in handy here, that is, objects or gestures to ward off evil forces. These actions are particularly visible in setting up the home space, the personal cosmos. In a folkish world view they had a typical structure, based on symbolic codes examined in detail by Danuta and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz; this is essential for us, given that Polish society is predominately of rural origin. Its subtle echoes can be found even many years after moving to an urban block of flats.

The traditional peasant home was a space arranged by design, its various areas were saturated with symbols to varying degrees, just as when apotropaic magic was practised. One place of special danger was the threshold, in which the household space came in contact with the outer world. It was here the placenta was buried after birth, to bring good fortune to the family, and the coffin was knocked upon before going to the funeral, to chase death from the house. 'You must not greet someone at the threshold, as that brings misfortune. Nor may you eat on a threshold, or you shall never escape your debts. . . . Never pass someone a drink across a threshold, drink only before or after the threshold if you wish to serve God. You may not pour water through the window, nor over the threshold, for in this way you douse your guardian angel'❷, we learn from the notes of Oskar Kolberg (the custom of not greeting people over a threshold remains common to



↖↗Straw mobiles from the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw: Ciechanów and Łowicz county, photo: Eugeniusz Frankowski, 1921–1939, photograph from the collection of Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, zbiory.etnomuzeum.eu (accessed 25 March 2025), CC BY-SA 3.0



Threshold symbolism in Poland. Prohibitions against doing things on the threshold. Chopping wood on the threshold means: ① — keeping poverty at home, ② — endangering the home to a lightning strike, ③ — bringing down an illness, the death of the woodcutter, or a member of their family, ④ — chopping up the souls of ancestors. Sweeping garbage over the threshold means: ⑤ — sweeping away good fortune or household success, causes sickness in the family, ⑥ — causes insects to multiply in the home

this day). The space of the home must be forever reestablished through holidays, renewing the protective pact: this was the aim of gestures performed on holidays and important family ceremonies, like circling the home with bread or blessed Easter palm. Care for safety involves not only warding off evil forces, but also inviting good ones in. Especially vulnerable parts of the home, such as the table, doors, threshold, crib and hearth, were given apotropaic safeguards: a red thread tied on the cradle protected the child from curses, the table was set with consecrated knives, the power of the fire in the hearth helped the childbirth go smoothly. Remnants of these customs today include the horseshoe over the door for luck —

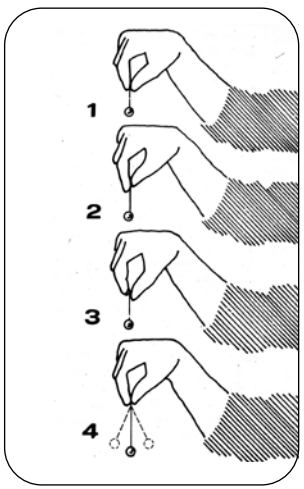
↑ *Magia szkodząca związana z progiem / Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego (mapy)*, ed. Mirosław Marczyk and Janusz Bohdanowicz, Cyfrowa Etnografia, https://cyfrowaetnografia.pl/items/show/8560 (accessed 25 March 2025)

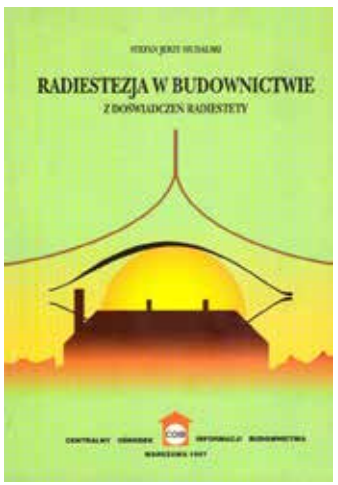
now only miniature. It is often accompanied by a cross or small devotional items, an image of the Virgin Mary or a Guardian Angel, modern-day echoes of what were larger galleries of portraits of saints (first paintings, later reproductions), which wealthier homeowners placed under their ceilings or in a special part of the house, known as the 'holy corner'. Apart from demonstrating the homeowner's status, these pictures served specialised protective functions: Saint Anthony was protection against losing things, Saint Florian kept watch against fires.

ESOTERIC ENGINEERING

In post-war Poland many customs tied to establishing a safe and blessed home space quickly vanished as the folkish world view eroded. In place of traditional living quarter arrangements, universalised rural/urban practices took hold. Traces of old ways can be seen in archival photographs, particularly in Zofia Rydet's *Sociological Record*, which managed to capture the last phase of a vanishing way of life. This does not mean the need to secure the space of the home decreased, only its nature changed: the focus shifted from symbolic gestures to objects. Devotional items became less prominent and were happily joined with secular items: ceramic elephants or good-luck trees made of semi-precious stones, displayed in glass cases. The decorative serviette, flower vase and glass fish were joined by a stately new resident — the television set — hearkening back to what was once the holy corner.

The presence of this sort of accessory grew particularly prominent in the 1980s, when Poles opened up to new, global varieties of unorthodox faiths, adding a new repertoire to a typical religious hybrid. Paging through handbooks for builders and home decorators from the 1980s, we find advice to hire a radiesthetic consultant. Czesław Spychalski's popular *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie* [Radiesthesia in the Home and Garden] of 1983 was later reprinted and expanded; the author





↖ Radiesthetic research with a pendulum; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990 ↗ Cover of a book by Stefan Jerzy Siudalski, *Radiestezja w budownictwie: z doświadczeń radiestety*, © Centralny Ośrodek Informacji Budownictwa, Warsaw, 1997

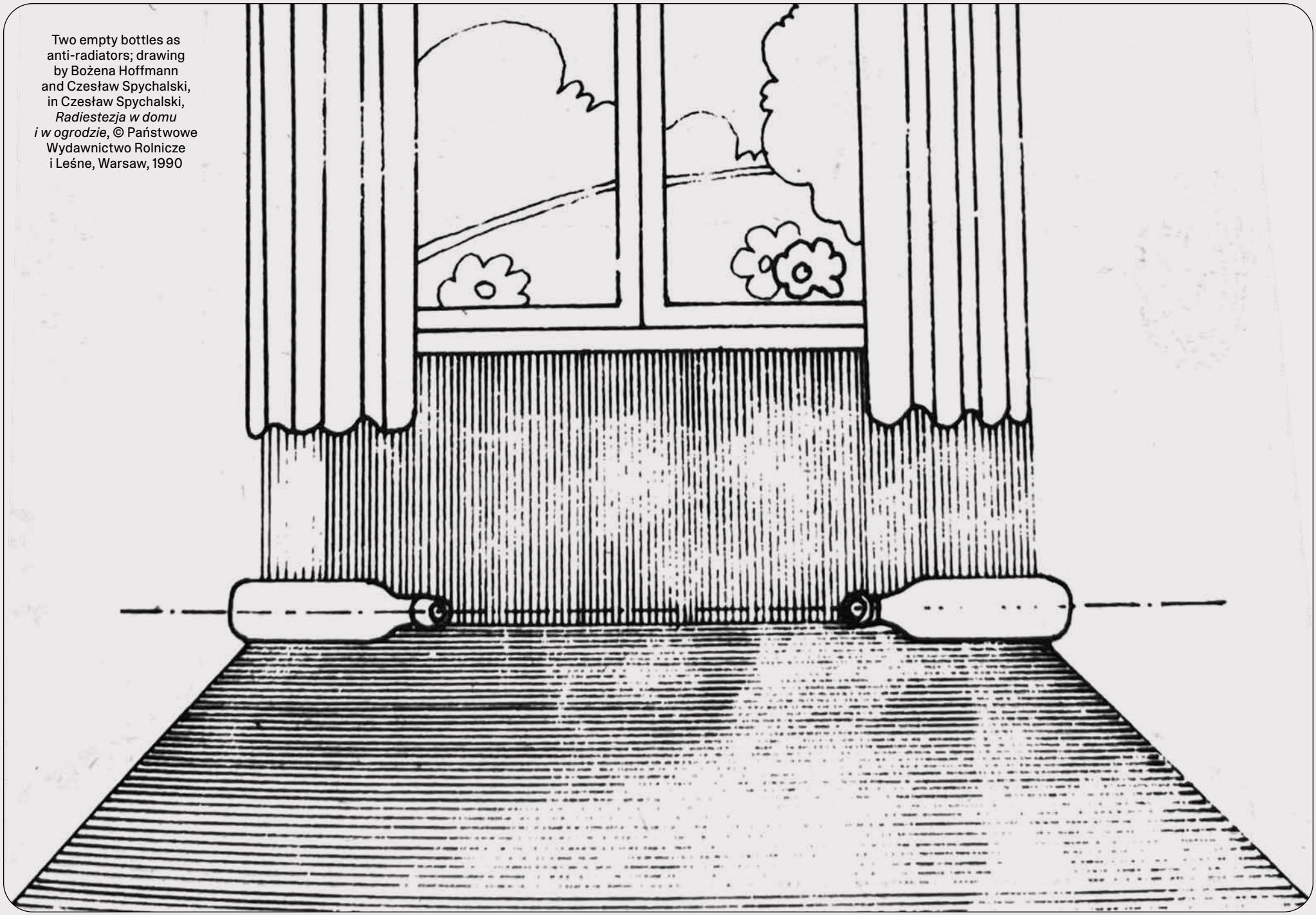
explained that avoiding mysterious rays not only improved your health, reconvalescence or everyday well-being, but also benefitted hens, which are reluctant to roost in a radiation field, and increase the quantity of honey gathered from an apiary. 'Cucumbers are exceedingly sensitive to radiated water veins; when grown over them, they die in a summer', Spychalski warned.❸

It was not just a small group of esoterics worried about the hazards of radiated water veins at the time; these concerns were shared by engineers and technicians, who advised probing areas with a divining rod or pendulum. Small-time artisans swiftly responded to the new need, producing dowsing screens — tiles or pyramids made of properties that, when placed in the proper spot, could counteract the nefarious influence of water veins. Dowsing screens of varying technical sophistication can be bought in New Age shops to this day, and the range of their efficacy has vastly increased: they also protect you against 'electromagnetic smog' or the impact of geological anomalies. Here is the description of a device called Aronit, copied from the producer's web site:

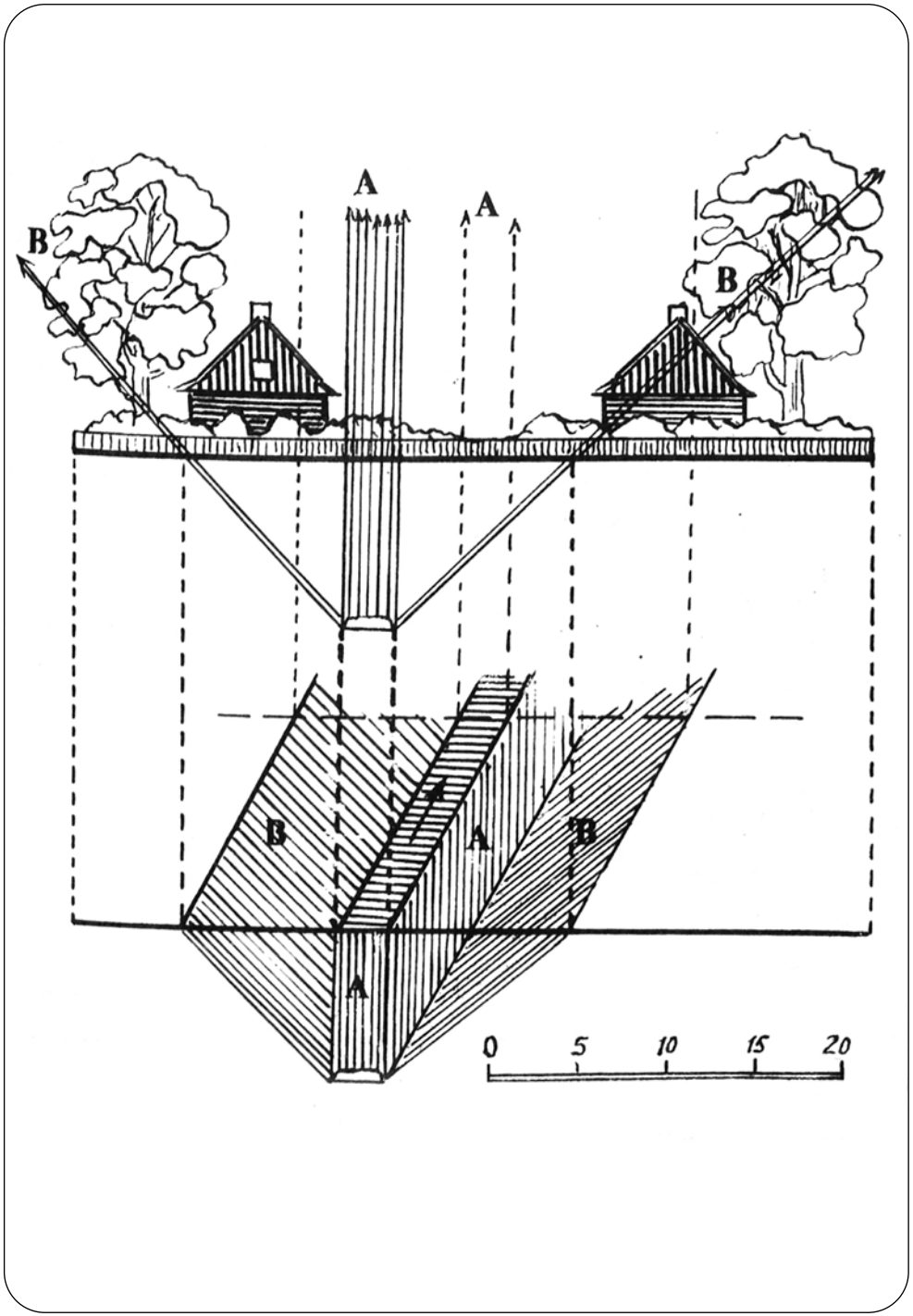
> In nature, most shapes are rounded, and these are very advantageous or neutral for you, but there are also natural faults and sharp shapes that burn up energy in you (such as plants with sharp leaves, the edges of rocks) or corners that suck energy (typical shapes in our flats!) and make holes in your aura, exposing you to people's attacks (perhaps a troublesome boss or colleague) or making you feel bad or sick. The stream of water deep beneath the ground of your home or workplace — either can have a harmful effect — need only be flowing in the wrong direction.❹

After 1989, the unorthodox home-security methods of dowsing and parapsychology were joined, briefly, by the Chinese *feng shui* method, which promised health, happiness and wealth through proper arrangement of a space. Essentially, these practices do not differ radically from a perception of the world as saturated by symbols, in which you have to watch your step and negotiate with higher powers.

↑Rathlan anti-radiator. According to the information on the reverse, it 'protects you from water leaks, geological slips, soil layering, psychotronic phenomena (connected with "wall memory", for instance), and safeguards you from electrosmog that comes from television and computer monitors, mobile phones and electric devices'; courtesy of Olga Drenda



Two empty bottles as anti-radiators; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990



97 In her research on 'Polish New Age',❺ Dorota Hall finds the syncretic and folkish nature of mass religiousness *favours* the natural adaptation of practices from seemingly disparate ways of understanding the world. Central to the solutions found in esoteric engineering is that they protect us from the new ailments of civilisation: sleep deprivation, chronic fatigue, mental issues. Traditional methods are probably ineffective against these new perils.

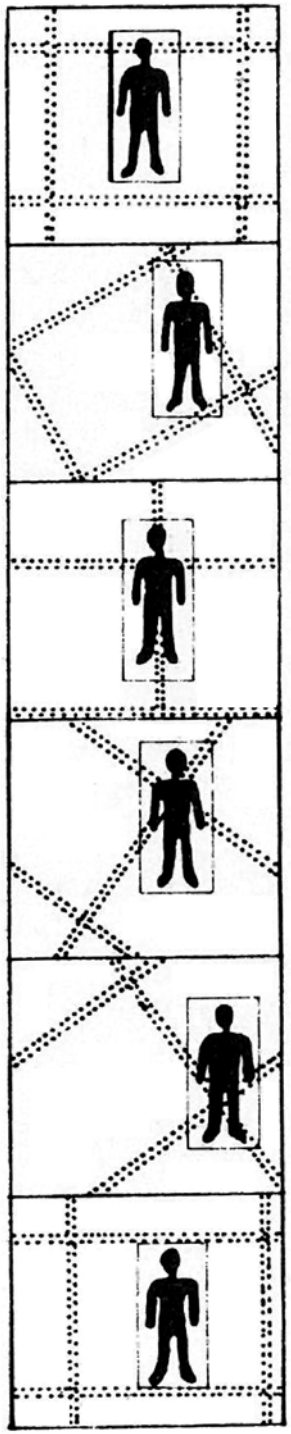
An outlier in this new repertoire is an image that conjures mixed feelings and scholarly interest — the 'lucky Jew'. Resembling nineteenth-century reproductions of moneylenders or craftsmen with their stereotypical accessories — a money bag, abacus, gold coins — these pictures are found in shops, beauty salons, workshops, or anywhere a proprietor needs good fortune. Despite a declaration that the 'lucky Jew' serves as a good spirit, the choice of this 'mascot' — and in the most stereotyped and sometimes caricature form, to boot — in a country ravaged by the Holocaust prompts a flood of uncomfortable thoughts. It is no accident that Professor Joanna Tokarska-Bakir called this phenomenon the 'return of the repressed'.❻

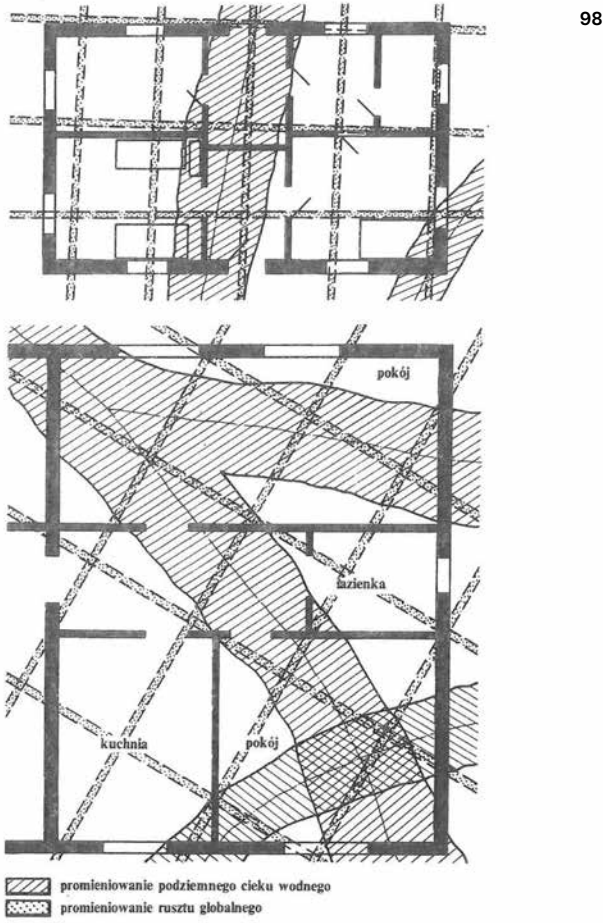
COMMUNIST POLAND'S PROTECTIVE SPELLS

While pre-World-War-Two Poles mainly led traditional rural lives and, as such, held a folk-oriented world view, in which the presence of the sacred was taken for granted, communist Poland was officially secular. It was also a state with a high level of supervision — not out of a desire to protect its citizens, naturally, but in an effort to hold onto power and reorganise society in its own image (the most outstanding example of this dissonance is the fact that an organ called the Security Service was created to repress Polish citizens).

In this system, there were codes that served as protective spells. Symbolic protection from the evil eye was provided by signs prohibiting photography in purportedly strategic places, but in neutral public spaces as well. Militia men exorcised the evil eye of amateur cameras. Warning posters and Work Health and Safety (in Poland: BHP) signs were a recurring feature in public spaces — doctor's offices, labour centres, schools. Some of these used the stratified, baroque, bureaucratic language for which this era is renowned ('failure to report an incident immediately after its occurrence deprives the injured party of their right to initiate remunerative proceedings'); others, in turn, appealed to the common sense and the self-preservation instinct of a worker who might otherwise by tempted to cut corners ('The head is not a rock', 'Careful, it bites', 'Remember, you were born without spare parts'). The pictorial, sometimes tongue-in-cheek mental shortcuts and compositional appeal of these posters, designed by some outstanding Polish artists, turned these purely functional objects into collector's items. The signs now decorate bars and hostels, giving their pastiche décor an allusion to a bygone era. In either case, they have lost their safety functions. This is partly because communication styles have changed in places where these signs serve a practical function, that is, the workplace. The necessity of observing BHP signs is now generally marked by simple messages based on a traffic-light code: yellow is a warning, red prohibits, blue is an injunction.

← Protecting objects from the radiation of underground water veins; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990





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Examples of the distribution of friction zones in two homes; Mieczysław Swaczyna, *Radiestezja a przyroda*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1991

←
A kind of illness that occurs depending on the placement of a bed on a geobiological grid; from the top: dizziness and headaches, heart attacks, tumours of the internal organs, affliction of the mobility organs, lack of symptoms or illnesses; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990

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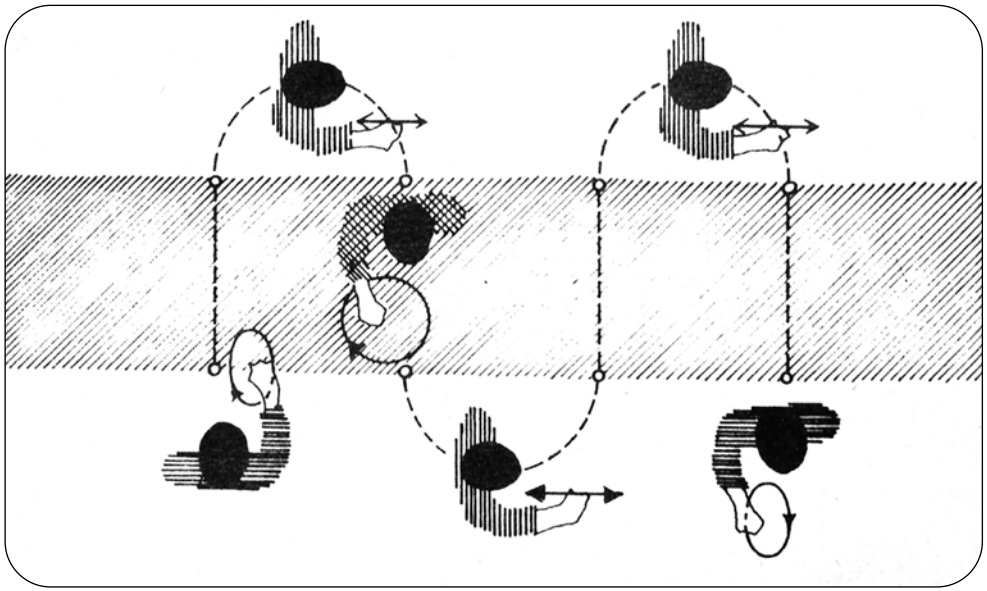
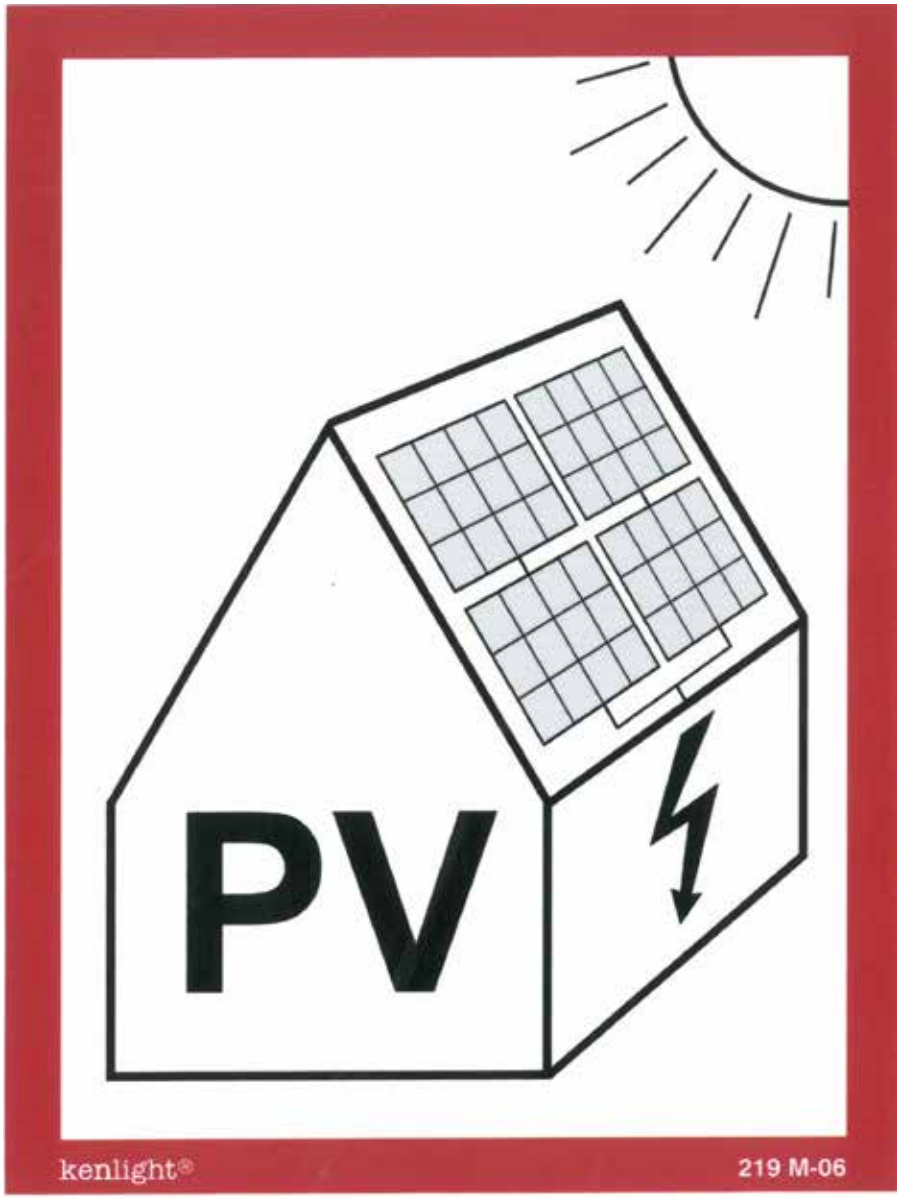
A pendulum's response in exploring the banks of a water vein with a serpentine movement; drawing by Bożena Hoffmann and Czesław Spychalski, in Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warsaw, 1990





†Solar power installation sign, PN-HD 60364-7-712 standard

† Bars on the Przyczółek Grochowski Estate in Warsaw, photo: © Marcin Czechowicz, 2004

GATED ARCHITECTURE

For a body with such a powerful need to exert control, communist Poland was bold and experimental in its architecture. The extension and growth of cities prompted a society accustomed to observing limits on property and symbolic 'boundary wars' to reimagine its customs. Flats had a square-meterage imposed from above on the one hand; on the other, there was relative freedom in designing the space of housing estates, as much from the designers' intentions as from the natural entropy of a country that was not economically demanding. This gave rise to a new dynamic between the public and the private. It also introduced a new type of danger.

The case of the Przyczółek Grochowski housing estate in Warsaw has been described by Filip Springer, a reporter who knew it from the inside, as a resident. Designed by Oskar and Zofia Hansen in an idealistic fashion, as a space accessible to all, to meet and easily interact, in practice it caused problems for its users right from the beginning. A feature meant to make life better and easier — convenient access to the flats through long strolling galleries — had a reverse effect even in communist times, and caused true pandemonium after 1989. In his book on the Hansens, Springer writes:

> You can enter the flats on the ground floor through ordinary balcony doors, and through the kitchen — on any floor — via a window leading straight onto the gallery. This made escaping child's play, so long as you knew the way. You just had to change direction a few times in the labyrinth of galleries and staircases to shake anyone following you. Thieves took advantage of these indisputable assets for many years. Theft and mugging was a real plague here throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. This is why the residents decided to close housing estate to outsiders.❼

To prevent break-ins, bars were installed to divide the galleries into sections and separate the various staircases. This effort at least somewhat bolstered a psychological sense of security against robberies, but shortsightedly aggravated another danger — it blocked fire evacuation.

Above all, this is symptomatic of the Polish tendency to maximise security after 1989. A steep rise in crime was immediately felt at this time, seen even before the system change (watching the archival episodes of the *997* militia programme is instructive here, as we can observe how armed robbery and break-ins become increasingly brutal as we approach 1989, escalating thereafter). Underground passageways, hallways in blocks of flats, housing estate passages and communist-era conduits to organise traffic were backdrops for Klaus Mittfoch's song *Strzeż się tych miejsc* [Beware These Places] ('dark places, late hours, crannies, staircases, lifts . . . '), places tailor-made for muggings. Blocks of flats with identical, symbolic security systems were no match for attackers. This state of things gave rise to new security practices. People began installing double doors to their flats with more secure locks and speaker

† Przyczółek Grochowski Estate in Warsaw, designed by Oskar and Zofia Hansen, photo: Olga Drenda, courtesy of the author

phones became standard at entrances to blocks of flats. This new method of verifying a guest's identity affected our customs — this small, but pronounced barrier put a stop to spontaneous visits and meetings, the uncontrolled flow of people through housing estates, and provided new entertainment for children, who crank-called random numbers. People swiftly figured out who was worth admitting to the staircase and who was not (salespeople, flyer distributors, Jehovah's witnesses, people posing as acquaintances). Cars were secured with special care, installing alarms, detaching the radio upon leaving the vehicle, buying steering locks. Although the crime rate began to drop in the new millennium, the experiences of the previous decade made the use of extensive, though not necessarily effective security measures common. Housing estates were divided by barricades installed by various communities, making it difficult to move between blocks of flats, while multilevel security systems became popular incentives in developers' packages.

† Przyczółek Grochowski Estate in Warsaw, designed by Oskar and Zofia Hansen, photo: Olga Drenda, courtesy of the author

One souvenir from millennial times is the housing estates where, after a porter verifies your identity, you need to punch in a code, and then a second code before entering your own, not particularly exclusive block of flats. This world is the backdrop for Marek Koterski's film *Day of the Wacko* (2002), a brilliant illustration of the state of the Polish spirit in those times. And although the film's protagonist, Adam Miauczyński, would probably fit some diagnostic criteria with his baggage of anxiety and frustration, and could certainly be called a suffering and unhappy man, his extensive repertoire of rituals before leaving his flat or going to bed can also be read as the by-product of life in an atmosphere of constant vigilance against danger and perpetual prevention that was the fate of citizens of the new Poland. 104

JUST IN CASE

Does the fact that, according to statistics, Poland is among the safest countries, and the declarations of residents themselves on surveys, translate into a lower level of anxiety and tension in society? Unfortunately, I have found no sustained research on this topic, and so we are only left to surmise. We can be certain — and here Polish society is much like other countries in Europe — that we are susceptible to fear mongering, when political propaganda escalates probable or entirely invented dangers. Perhaps — though this is a hypothesis — the safer we are, the greater our sense we must secure ourselves in every possible way, and that without our barricades, cameras and dowsing screens everything would fall apart. If this turns out to be true, the best illustration of our collective spiritual state would be a photograph by Radosław Kaźmierczak, depicting a typical classroom: over the chalkboard we see the Polish crest and a cross, and over them — who knows if it is real — a closed-circuit camera. Better safe than sorry.

→

Rathlan anti-radiator. According to the information on the reverse, it 'protects you from water leaks, geological slips, soil layering, psychotronic phenomena (connected with "wall memory", for instance), and safeguards you from electrosmog that comes from television and computer monitors, mobile phones and electric devices'; courtesy of Olga Drenda

105 ❶'Polacy czują się bardzo bezpiecznie', Informacyjny Serwis Policyjny, 19 May 2023, https://isp.policja.pl/isp/aktualnosci/17369,Polacy-czuja-sie-bardzo-bezpiecznie.html (accessed 4 February 2025). ❷Oskar Kolberg, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 53: *Litwa*, Wrocław and Poznań: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1966, p. 392. Quoted from Danuta Benedyktowicz, Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, 'Symbolika domu w tradycji ludowej', *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1990, p. 14. ❸Czesław Spychalski, *Radiestezja w domu i w ogrodzie*, Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Rolnicze i Leśne, 1990, p. 18. ❹https://energy-aaron.shop.pl/pl/p/ODPROMIENNIK-NA-DUZY-DOM-BIURO-ARONIT-HOME-OFFICE-MEGA-PACK-neutralizator-szkodliwego-promieniowania-do-mieszkania-i-biura-1/75 (accessed 7 February 2025). ❺Dorota Hall, *New Age w Polsce — lokalny wymiar globalnego zjawiska*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2007. ❻Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, 'Żyd z pieniążkiem podbija Polskę', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Kultura* supplement, 18 February 2012, p. 17. ❼Filip Springer, *Zaczyn. O Zofii i Oskarze Hansenach*, Warsaw and Krakow: Wydawnictwo Karakter, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2013, pp. 10–11.

KATARZYNA PRZEZWAŃSKA

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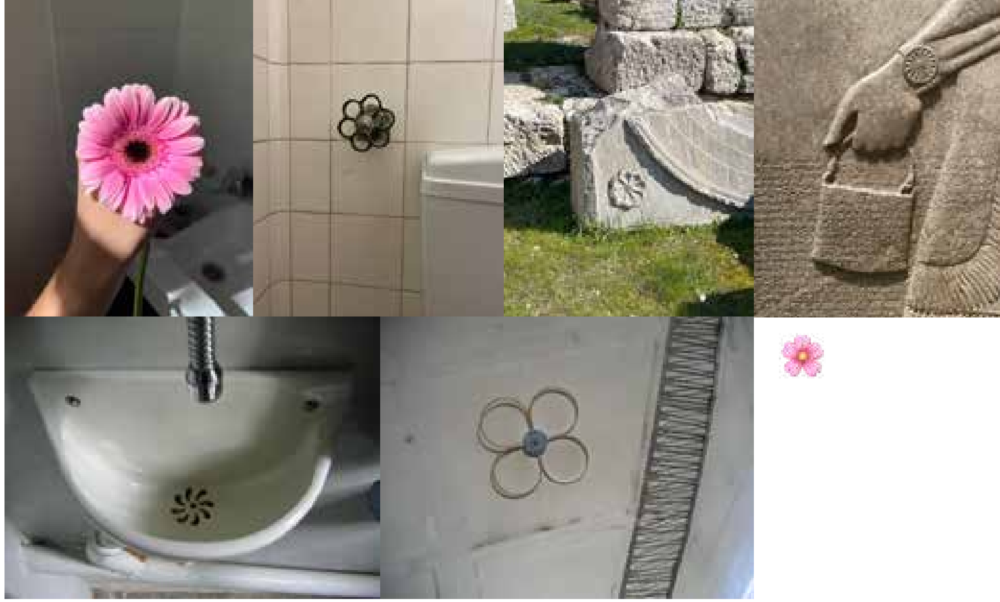



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PALM SPRINGS CITY HALL

Agency in a Time of Polycrisis

Tatjana Schneider in conversation with Aleksandra Kędziorek

ALEKSANDRA KĘDZIOREK:
At the 2024 International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, the MOULD Collective, of which you are a part, presented a huge, embroidered diagram. Addressing architecture's entanglement with the climate breakdown, it depicted a quasi-geological structure: the outline of a mountain slope made of sediment from centuries of CO_2 emissions. The successive layers were marked with a rhythmic string of verbs (or rather gerunds): ignoring, separating, accumulating, exploiting, band-aiding, violating. The use of verbs is not unusual in your research projects — it seems to be a conscious choice to accompany the changing narrative on architecture.

TATIANA SCHNEIDER:
It is inspired by the work of feminist scholars, mainly J.K. Gibson-Graham. By shifting the focus to verbs, we begin to understand the things we do as actions. This is a step away from detachment, from a long-standing conviction that things are outside of our active realm. As humans, we have an intense impact on the things around us; we are all involved and complicit in their making. Numerous contemporary feminist and climate scholars, such as Kathryn Yusoff, Isabel Stengers and Donna Haraway, have called for us to acknowledge our role in those processes. By recognising agency and possibilities for action, we can begin to understand the world not as something that is done to us, but is made by us. The focus on gerunds tries to focus on just that. It is no longer only describing an action, however; it makes it a point.

AK:
There were also some cracks in this embroidered structure, to which we will return, but first let's focus on its title: *Architecture is Climate*. For a long time, architecture situated itself outside of climate and architects saw themselves as experts in crafting solutions to respond to it. Now you claim the time has come to say: architecture is climate. Why?

TS:
In architecture, formal considerations tend to drive decisions. Lines are drawn, but there is hardly ever a relationship between those lines and what they actually mean. Critique of this disconnection used to focus on society, so we all know now that a line can make the difference between something being inclusive or exclusive. But these lines don't just have social implications, they also have climate ones as well, given they help create it (in terms of weather, but also when it comes to labour, resources and other factors). To say that 'architecture is climate' makes these entanglements visible and connects them deeply with the consequences and challenges they imply. For too long, this has been ignored; we are trying to make these connections unavoidable.

Architects have the capacity to become agents, but only if they stop addressing the symptoms and begin to fully interact with the consequences of what they do.

AK:
The notion of 'agency' leads us to the book and research project *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* you published with Jeremy Till and Nishat Awan in 2011. This was a moment when the notion of 'agency' entered architectural research; there were several publications and conferences on this topic around 2009. Your book mapped different spatial agents, mostly collectives, who were 'doing architecture' in unconventional ways. The understanding of 'agency' in this book was based in part on the writings of Anthony Giddens and his concept of mutual knowledge. How has it evolved, and how do you understand it now, when you confront agency with the hyperobject — to use Timothy Morton's term — that is the climate breakdown?

TS:
The ideas of and behind spatial agency are still very much present in everything I do, though they have evolved, of course, to include other considerations. In my own work, it emerged out of studying architecture in the late 1990s and the rather limited canon of architectural history and theory back then. That was when my fellow students and I founded Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space (G.L.A.S.), an architectural workers co-operative that sought to challenge those narrow perspectives. In doing so, we found many accomplices — many others who were working in ways that did not focus on architecture as the object beautiful, but on other things that make architecture or have an impact on it. As such, *Spatial Agency* became a way of not just saying, but of demonstrating that there are many different ways of doing architecture that ought to be taken seriously and made the centre of attention. I continue to be interested in these *other ways of doing*, of attempting to understand architecture's means and mechanisms of production. This thinking permeates *Architecture is Climate* as well. Despite the importance of climate, it seemed to play a minor role in architectural teaching. While spatial agency speaks clearly about politics and ethics, investigates social, physical and organisational relationships, my work now uses climate as a lens. Our critique of architectural practice and education has become more pointed, and consequentially, the practices and projects we talk about are much more diverse, as well.

Along with broader geopolitical changes, the frameworks of reference have also shifted: away from Eurocentric ideas, notions and concepts and towards anti-colonial frameworks and thinking. Though I haven't referred to Giddens in a long time, mutual knowledge as a concept — in the sense of abandoning the

hierarchies embedded in most professional relationships and welcoming everyone's contributions instead — is still present.

AK:

Your research mainly focuses on the work of collectives, activists and urban practitioners, active individuals who can inspire and provoke change in architecture. In the *Lares and Penates* exhibition, we look at the communities — the average users of spaces and the ways they construct their sense of agency in a built environment. Do you think anyone can become a spatial agent in the way your research understands it?

TS:

In principle: yes. But not everyone has the same prerequisites, they are very unequally distributed. You can't talk about agency (or becoming/being an agent) without talking about privilege and the capacity to act, whether personal, financial or otherwise. If you work two or three jobs, if you have care responsibilities, if you have limited financial resources and cannot really choose where and how you want to live, your degree of agency — that is, the power to negotiate existing conditions and at least partially reform them — is constrained. So, theoretically and ideally, yes, everyone has agency and can be and become a spatial agent. Take for example urban and guerilla gardening or urban care practices: there is a sense of agency. *Spatial agency*, however, is also always about structural questions. I would always ask: How does a specific practice relate to power? Is the practice addressing and attempting to fundamentally alter the conditions it critiques? Spatial agency isn't spatial agency without this component.

AK:

In *Spatial Agency* you refer to spatial agents as 'acting with, or on behalf of others'.

TS:

Architecture is Climate is very critical of the binary divisions created by those who had the power to drive the advancement of the modern project. The rational/emotional dichotomy is one that emerged. The rational in architecture comes disguised as an expert, an engineer, an entity that operates on logic. Decisions are based on reason and everything that cannot be explained through the framework of the modern project is deemed unusable, unworkable, invalid. This is mostly done with the best of intentions, but the patriarchal structures and logic often fails to sufficiently critique the status quo.

Bringing emotions into the discussion is our way of acknowledging these other dimensions: practical and everyday knowledge, for example, but also a necessary critique of the very structures that have led to the climate breakdown we are experiencing today.

The call for making these dimensions visible is a call for thinking outside the box, for seeing the interconnectedness across scales, the limits of certain methods and tools. bell hooks wrote that 'empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable'. As someone who works at a school of architecture, this means making my own limitations visible, the range of human experiences that exist, and that professionalism also means being sensitive to these different positions.

AK:

In *Architecture is Climate* you refer to vulnerability in the context of the climate breakdown — the vulnerability of human and non-human beings, the vulnerability of systems we need to acknowledge and treat as a starting point for our future agency. Maybe we still lack the tools to incorporate affects into architectural research?

TS:

I would agree with that. Yes, in our part of the world especially we seem to have lost a sense of connection to a planetary scale, or have forgotten how to pay attention to other voices — human and otherwise, and to other forces — politics, culture, economics. Yet, the tools and mechanisms already exist — in other disciplines and in non-disciplinary settings.

AK:

The MOULD Collective looks for different tools, for interdisciplinary ways of doing architecture. You collaborate with people from various disciplines and build networks to connect different practices: from science, literature and film-making to future studies. Does the shift in architectural discourse need new tools (from other disciplines or newly invented) to happen?

TS:

As I just said: I'm not sure it needs new tools (which would mean we'd have to invent the tools before we could use them). We already have plenty of tools to make the limits and challenges visible, and we know enough to act in ways that don't incessantly harm the planet. What we are saying though is: look, architecture with a capital A, you are still missing something, you are too limited in what you see and do, and whom you serve. We work with others, for they can point to those gaps and those challenges much more clearly than my own discipline does (though this is finally beginning to change). So, coming back to the question of tools, I believe that we need each other to make noise, to reach beyond a certain circle. The question then is not so much about tools, but about connections: how do we do this together and what can we learn from past and present practices in terms of *organising* encounters, situations, critical mass.

AK:

In *Architecture is Climate* you tried to address and capture some future scenarios. They are represented on the website summarising the project — which also contains an overview of different examples of spatial agency in terms of the climate breakdown — in the form of an ever-changing cloud of hypotheses. Moreover, in the embroidered piece we referred to at the beginning, there are some cracks in the diagram of the mountain, where there is a potential for change and futures can happen. You consciously use the plural form of Futures: 'we emphasise that multiple futures coexist in gaps of the present. The two sides [of the diagram] are joined through cuts in the embroidery, suggesting that viable Futures are only found through a critique and transformation of the past Foundations'.

TS:

Understanding the systems and structures that have shaped the present is a crucial tenet of both *Spatial Agency* and *Architecture is Climate*. Both projects point to challenges and many factors that are wearing us down and keeping us in check. However, both also point to examples that create worlds in more empowering ways. The cracks are a really beautiful metaphor — cracks show the limits of a system or structure, and nurturing what emerges from the spaces of those crevices will make those cracks bigger and bigger.

The Futures part of *Architecture is Climate* was inspired by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's card-based method Oblique Strategies; we too have produced a set of cards to help you think outside the box, to prompt future scenario building, to act, and to activate different ways of thinking. They are meant to encourage disruption, and slowing down, stopping you in your business-as-usual tracks. That's what interests me: ways of supporting the disruption of thinking that things can't change, and — to bring the term 'agency' back into the mix — to say: we all have agency, we have the power to do 'otherwise'. But don't do it alone, seek out and work with others, build alliances and networks to challenge and transform the powers that be.

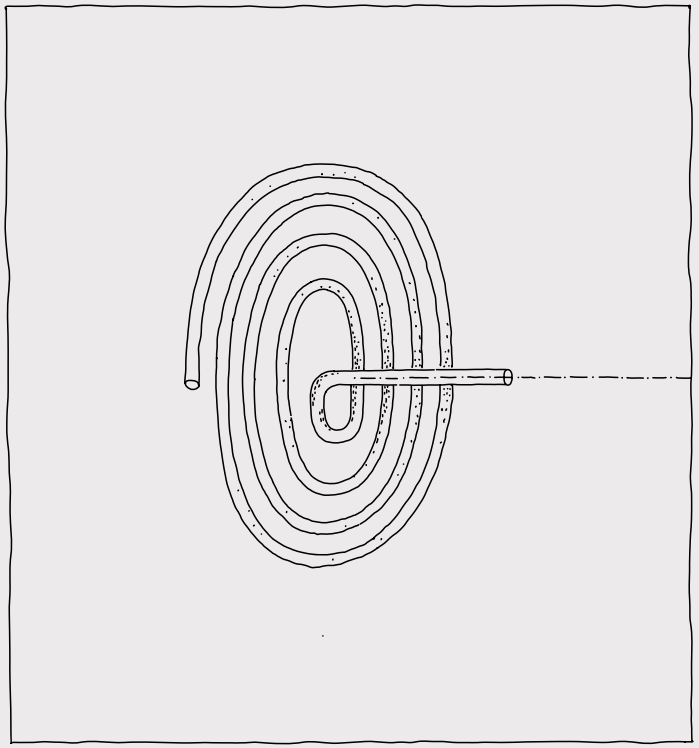
Krzysztof Maniak, *Untitled*, 2025

Atlas of Things

research: Julia Bujak

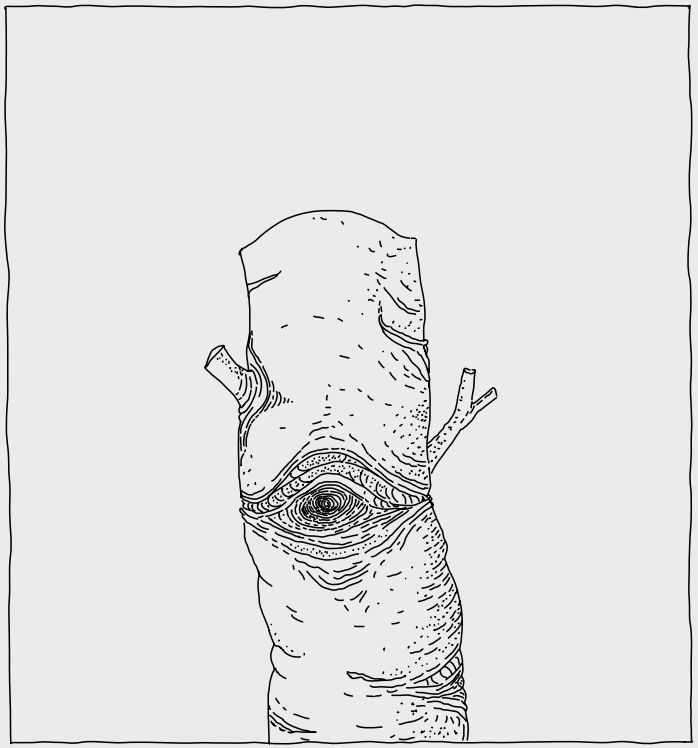
texts: Aleksandra Kędziorek

drawings: Maciej Siuda



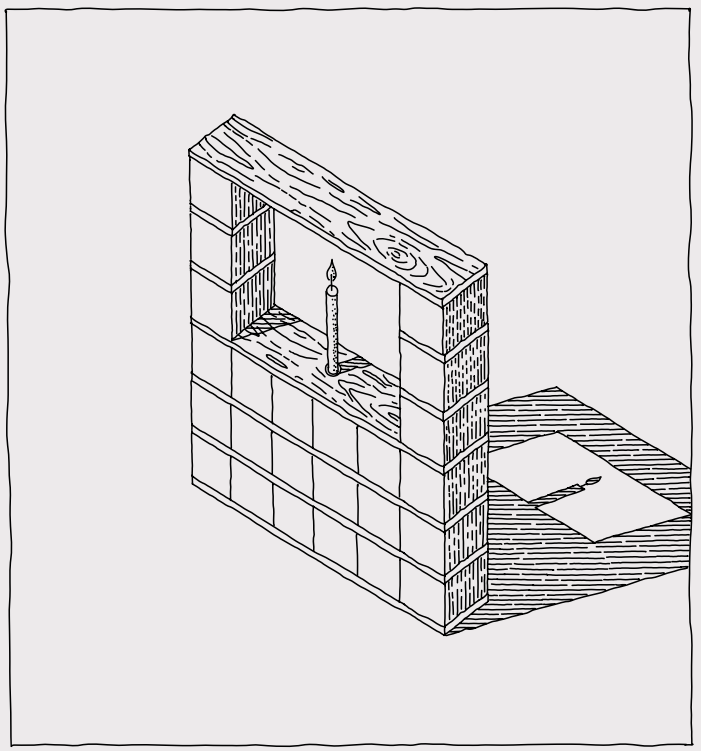
ANTI-RADIATOR

Harmful radiation discovered with a radiesthetic rod or pendulum can be neutralised in various ways. Before building the house you can put stones under the concrete floor, such as pebbles, which are natural anti-radiators (radiesthetic specialists point out the link between this method and the tradition of inserting a cornerstone). Inhabitants of buildings touched by harmful radiation got DIY solutions from radiesthetic handbooks of the 1980s and 90s: placing pebbles around or in the base of a couch, putting chestnuts near a television set or radio, hanging copper spirals on the wall. At present, new-age shops offer anti-radiators to shield you from electromagnetic smog generated by high-tension lines, routers or smart phones.



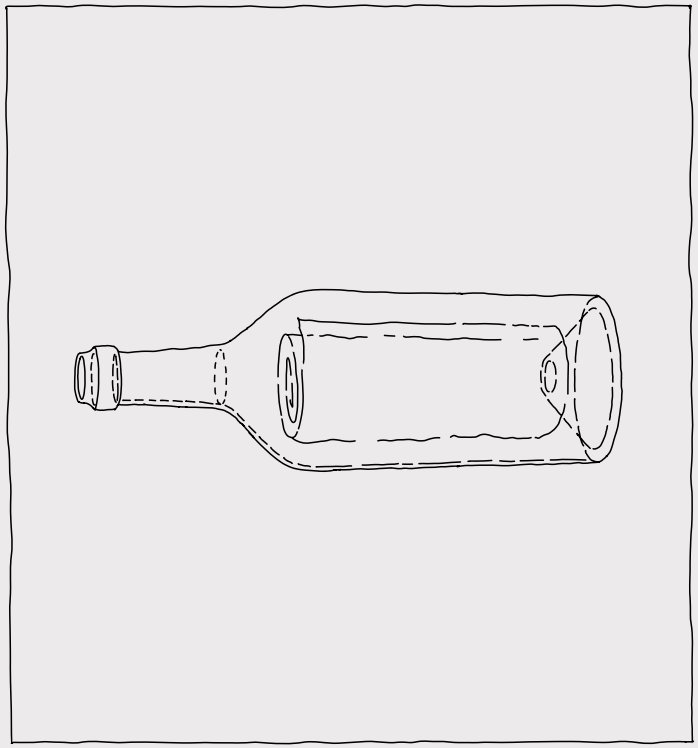
BIRCH

A holy pagan tree symbolising life and abundance, associated with spring and rebirth. Birch wood was used to make amulets to ward off evil spirits. Birch switches were good for staving off illness and demons. Birch cradles gave protection against the evil eye, and birch crosses on graves sheltered their souls. The leaves and branches of a young birch decorated the home on Pentecost to protect it from disasters and ensure a good harvest. It was believed no lightning would ever strike a birch tree. Its branches were used to decorate altars for Corpus Christi; after the procession they were gathered up and taken home as protection from storms. Faith in the birch tree's fire resistance has a basis in botany — owing to the structure of the crown, the higher water content and lower content of flammable sap, leafy trees burn less readily than pines. Rows of birch trees in a forest often create natural fire-proofing.



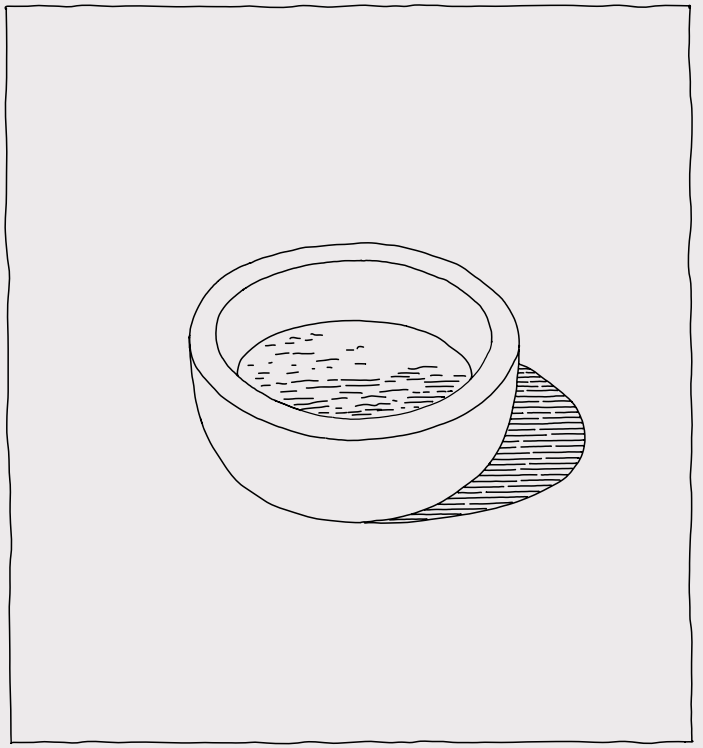
BLESSED CANDLE

A beeswax candle (*gromnica*) protecting the house from lightning (or thunder — *grom*), it was blessed during the Candlemas Day (2 February on the Catholic calendar, 15 February on the Orthodox one). If its flame stayed lit on the way home from church, this was a good omen. After arriving home, you were meant to circle the building and the farmyard with it, and then burn the sign of the cross on the middle beam over the door to your room to protect you from evil. The candle was kept in a place of honour and lit on special occasions. During storms, it was lit and placed in the window to protect the house from lightning. It was used in rites of passage (e.g. it was placed in the hand of a dying person) and in healing rituals (to help with headaches or sore throats). Pieces of the candle were scattered on boundary lines to keep wolves at bay.



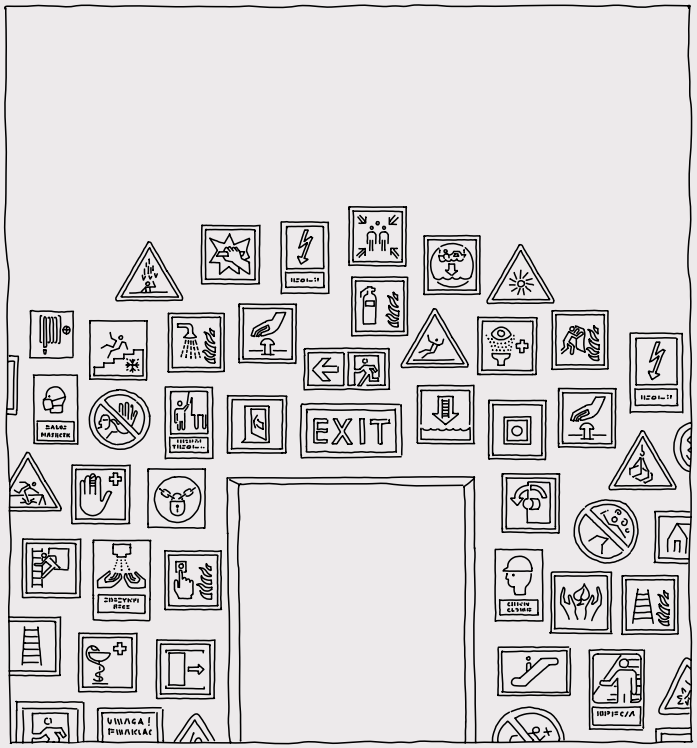
BOTTLE

Walled up, stuffed with a piece of paper with workers' signatures and a newspaper from the day of construction, it points to builders' urge to leave something behind in the building they make. This is an offshoot of the act of building — a document initiating construction, which, after being signed by the founders and initiators, is hidden in a metal tube and walled up for posterity. Cultivated to this day, this tradition reaches back a long way: Antoni Magier, a nineteenth-century chronicler of Warsaw, states that in 1776 the workers installing lightning rods in the Royal Castle found a parchment in the knob in the tower flagpole with signatures of their precursors and the date the castle construction was finished: 1 September 1622.



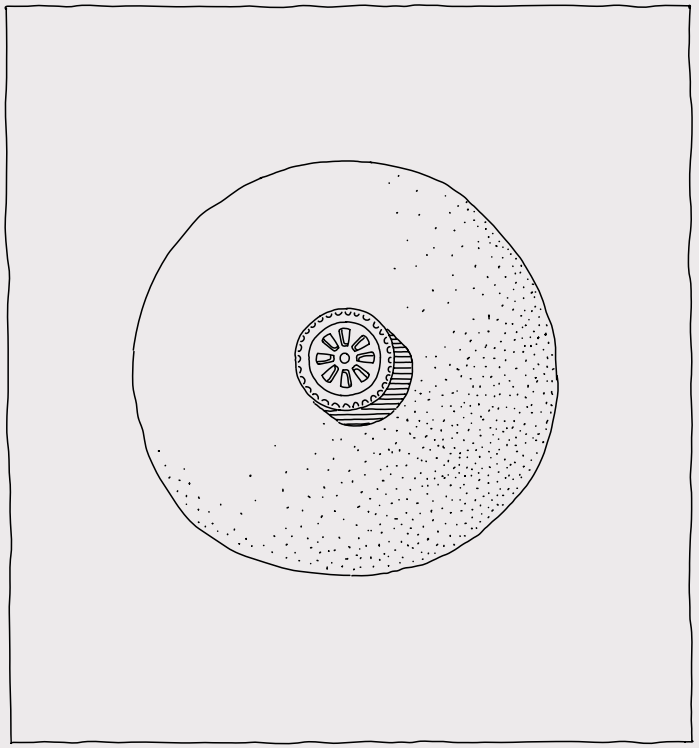
BOWL FOR HOUSEHOLD SPIRITS

Slavic homes were full of spirits and demons that inhabited various nooks and crannies. Sounds gave away their presence: scratching, rustling, howling, footsteps. The snake, caretaker of the house, lived under a high threshold, and in the attic, the household devil. Around the stove there were protective *domowiki*, *ubożęta*, *chochliki*, *popelniki* and *piecuchy*. The *domowicha* helped women do their work, and the nasty *kikimora* clattered the dishes and tangled the threads at night. An invisible household demon circled the farmyard, which is why you couldn't toss dirty water outside in the evening, as you could soak him by accident. If properly tended to, household spirits were useful. Groats were left in the holy corner, millet was scattered in the corners, a spoonful of Christmas-Eve meal was tossed in the stove, drops of vodka were spilled on the floor. The spirits repaid these gifts by multiplying grain and money. If neglected, they could bring misfortune to a home.



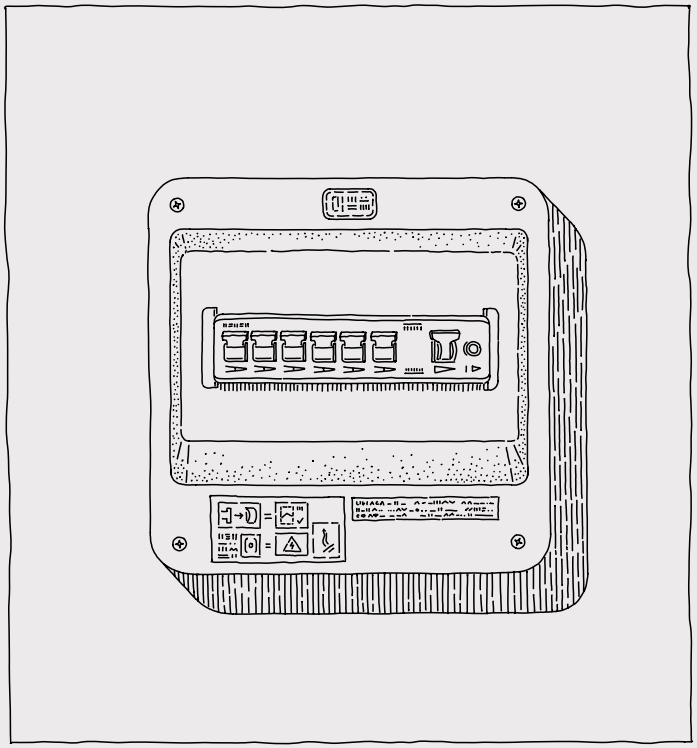
EVACUATION SIGNS

These are signs and pictograms that let you quickly find your way through an area in the event of an evacuation. Often illuminated by a separate power system, they show evacuation routes, doors, and ways of opening them. Following international ISO 7010 standards published in 2003 and with several amendments, they are to be green with white pictograms and white frames. Their form is meant to make them easy to read in stressful situations. They are filled by red square fire safety symbols, indicating the location of hydrants, extinguishers and alarms, and yellow triangular warning signs. The use of basic colours (yellow, red, blue, green) and shapes (circle, square, triangle) has been mandatory since the first effort to internationally standardise the signs at a Viennese road sign and signal convention in 1968.



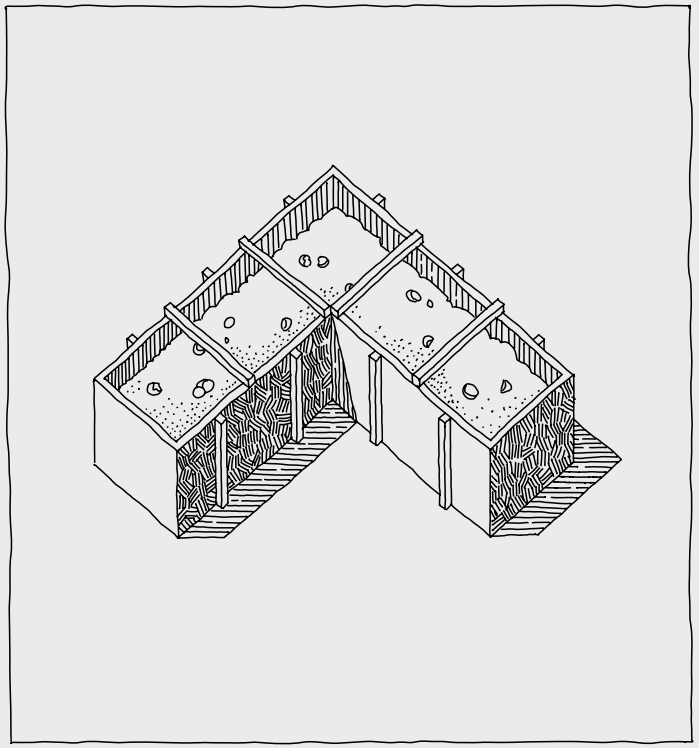
FIRE SENSOR

Installed in an interior, generally near the ceiling, it detects and responds to a fire before it spreads. Sensors can react to different things, such as heat or smoke. They detect the presence of smoke with the optical method, emitting and then registering a beam of infrared light. If the beam in the space encounters smoke, this absorbs or scatters some of the light and the device registers this change. When a fire is detected, the (visual or sound) alarm goes off, and some devices, particularly those found in public facilities, automatically inform the fire station. The first devices to automatically detect fires appeared at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — Francis Robbins Upton, a co-worker of Thomas Edison, patented an electric fire alarm in 1890, and in 1902, George Andrew Darby came up with a heat detector. The smoke detector came about by accident — in the 1930s, Swiss physicist Walter Jaeger failed to develop an electrical poison gas sensor, and irritated by his failure, lit a cigarette. Sensors designed for private spaces appeared in the 1960s and 70s. This was also when the now-popular smoke detector came to be (patented by Donald Steel and Robert Emmark of Electro Signal Lab, 1972).



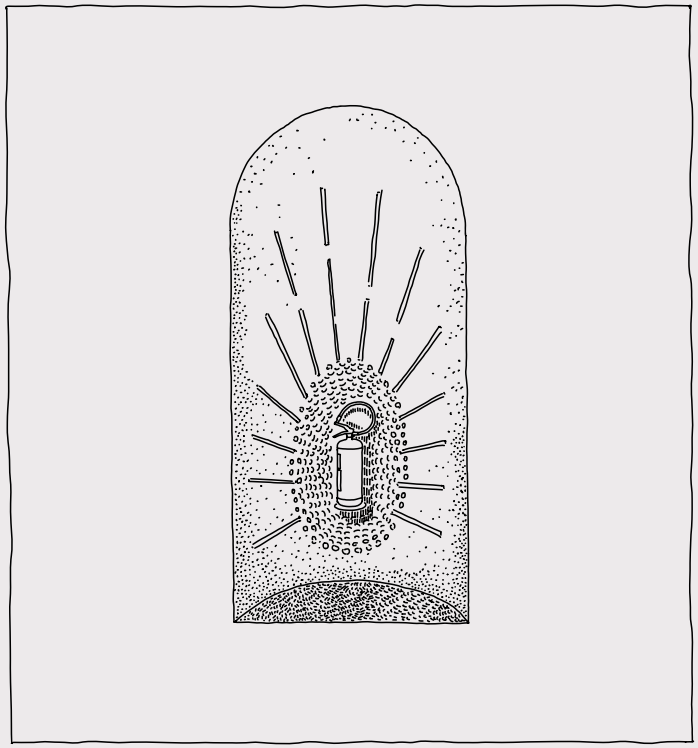
FUSE

Part of an electrical installation, patented by Thomas Edison in 1890, which prevents a short circuit or overload from causing damage to devices, explosions or fire. Part of it is made of a thin wire that melts when power surges through it, causing the circuit to break automatically. With their oblong shape, the old fuses recalled porcelain corks (thus their Polish name, *korki*). Today's automatic fuses take a different form; a power cut is signalled when a little switch drops, though they are still commonly called *korki*.



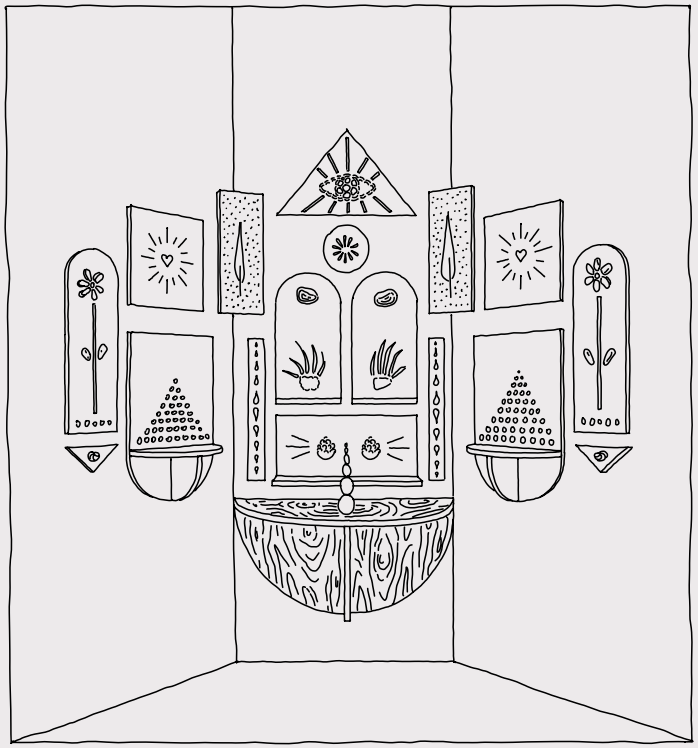
FOUNDATION OFFERINGS

After the building site was established — a process which observed animal behaviour (choosing, for instance, a favourite place for cattle to rest or the site of anthills) and local prohibitions (against building on a fire pit, for example) — it had to be properly secured. This was done with foundation offerings (*zakładziny*). Under the home's cornerstones they buried eggshells (a symbol of life), bread, grain and money (so it should never run out), a rosary, bits of Easter and blessed candles (for protection against evil forces) or wreaths and objects blessed in the church (such as salt blessed on St. Agata's Day and butter on St. Lawrence's Day). In some areas, the corners were smeared with honey or sugar (offerings for spirits). Food and drink were consumed with the foundation offerings. The celebration was meant to bring blessings to the home and safeguard it from evil forces.



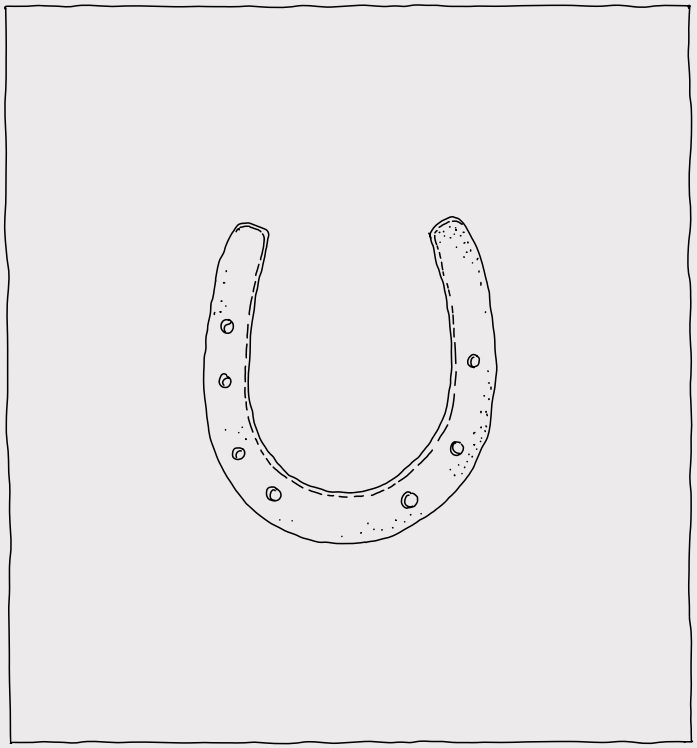
HAND EXTINGUISHER

Fires have been an ongoing threat to human domiciles. Buildings have been protected by lightning rods (invented in the mid eighteenth century) and fire walls (*Brandmauer*), separating the roofs of tenement houses. People fought fire by pouring water or sand from buckets passed in human chains ('bucket brigades'). This was improved by various kinds of stirrup pumps, devices with a water receptacle and hand pump. Fire flappers, flat brooms made of fir, birch, or wicker branches and covered with burlap sacks, were also used to stop flames before they grew. The 1930s saw the advent of 'fire grenades' — glass vessels filled with water and table salt with ammonium chloride, thrown right into a fire. The first extinguisher was patented by Ambrose Godfrey in 1723. This device, made of a container with fluid and a chamber with gunpowder, was started by lighting a wick. In the early nineteenth century the portable extinguisher with 'pearlash' (a potassium carbonate solution) was released, in 1881 came the cartridge extinguisher, in 1905 the foam extinguisher, and in 1928 one that used powder. The CO_2 snow extinguisher used to this day was developed in 1924 on a commission from Bell Telephone, which serviced phone headquarters — it let you swiftly put out a fire in places full of electronic equipment.



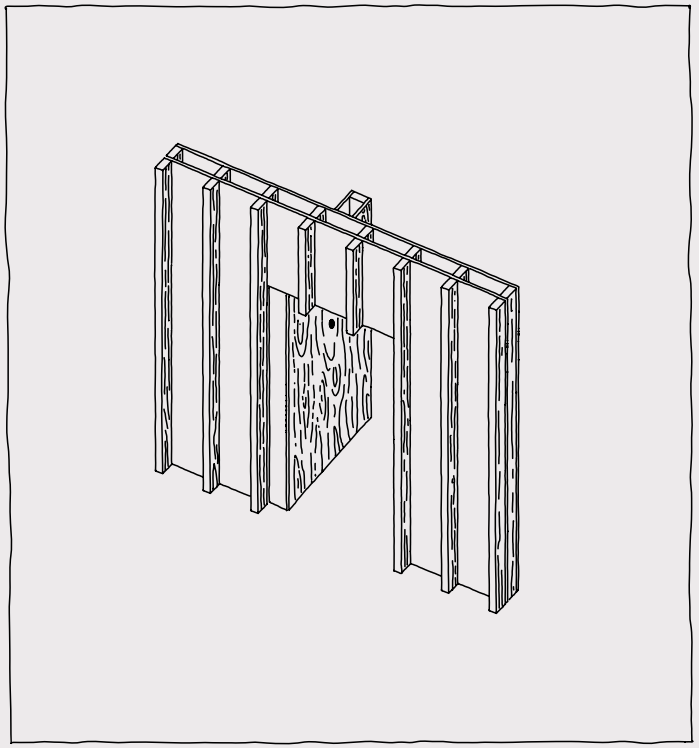
HOLY CORNER

Also known as the *pokuć*, a blessed place inside the traditional Slavic home, by the eastern wall at a diagonal from the entrance. This was the home's sacred zone. When one moved into a house, pictures of saints were hung in one corner, up near the ceiling. They were decorated with fabrics, mainly linen, hand embroidered, with flowers and herbs. Its location at an angle from the entrance meant that everyone who entered bent their heads to the saints (this was also encouraged by the low doorways, forcing you to stoop as you entered). Apart from the icons the holy corner had a cross, a prayer book, a rosary or scapular, and valuables stashed behind the icons. With the spread of mass media, the holy corner evolved — first the radio was installed there, then the television set, covered with a lace doily, with family keepsakes displayed on top of it.



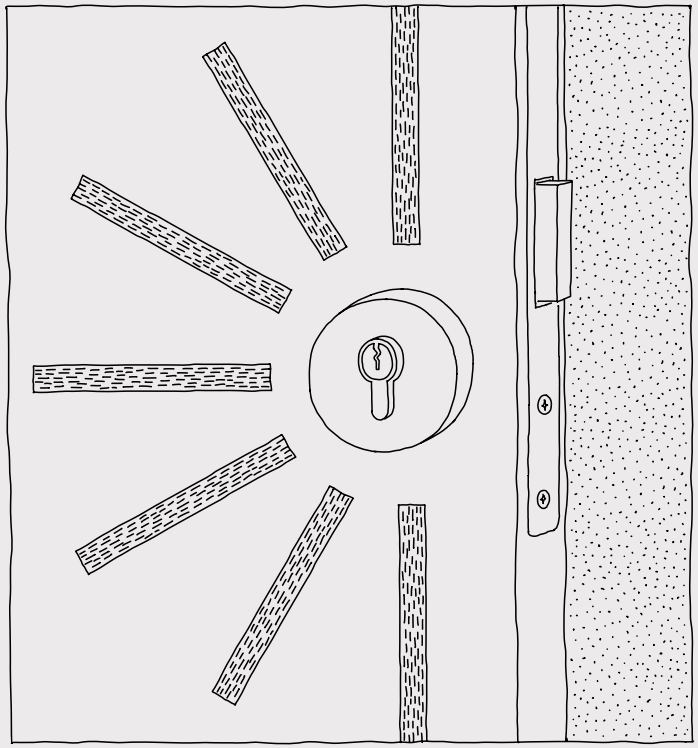
HORSESHOE

Hung over the doorway for luck, most often with the tips upwards, in the shape of the letter ‘U’ (so the luck won’t pour out), more seldom pointing downwards (so the good luck flows onto the person entering). It should be found by accident. Its power is enhanced when it has seven holes (a lucky number) and is made of iron (a metal that staves off evil forces). In Great Britain the horseshoe’s power is explained by a legend of Saint Dunstan, a monk who outwitted the devil. He horseshoed him and only pulled out the nails when the devil promised not to cross the home’s threshold if a horseshoe was hanging there.



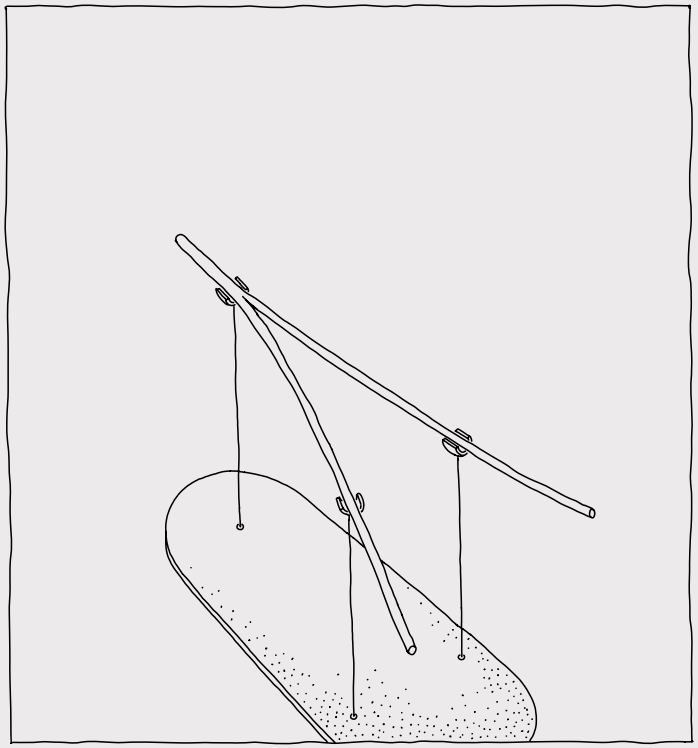
PEEPHOLE

Invented by George Winningham in 1932, in Poland also called a ‘Judas’, it lets you see what is happening through a door without stepping outside. Placed at eye level, the peephole is made of a lens system that provides a wide-angle (or ‘fish-eye’) view and one-way visibility. This means that, unlike the earlier sliding peepholes at front gates, the identity of the looker is kept hidden. Like the later intercoms and electronic viewing devices, it protects homeowners from undesired guests.



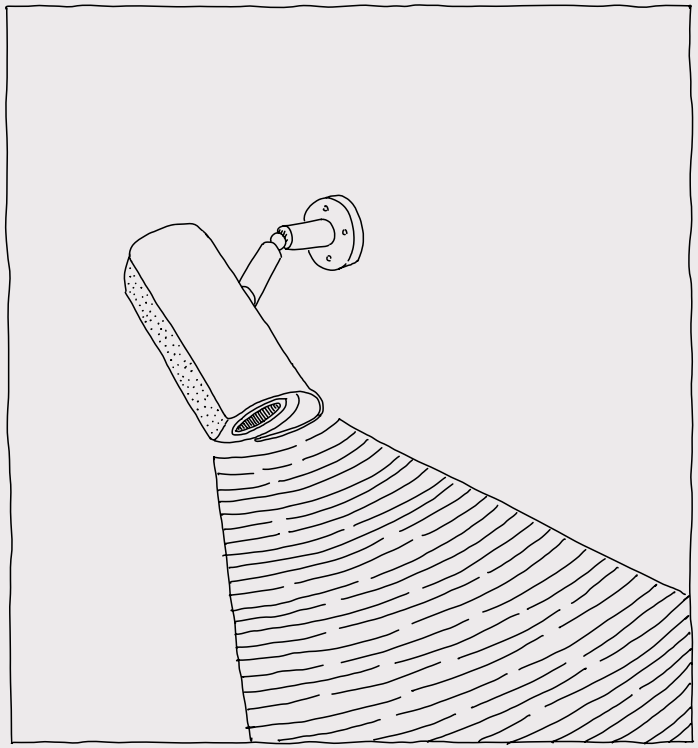
PIN TUMBLER LOCK FOR THE DOOR

The contemporary pin tumbler lock was in invented in 1848 by American mechanic Linus Yale Sr, but the roots of the concept reach back to Antiquity. Archaeologists have found wooden locks in the lands of what was Mesopotamia (the oldest surviving wooden bolt, dating back to around 2000 b.c.e., was discovered in the ruins of the Palace of Khorsabad, near Mosul in Iraq), Egypt or Greece. Yale Sr was directly inspired by a lock used in Ancient Egypt — a sliding bolt raised parts that blocked the mechanism. He perfected this idea. A key inserted in the lock raises the metal pins inside the tumbler and only the key that fits raises them to the correct height, thus unblocking the mechanism. This solution was developed over a dozen years later by Linus Yale Jr: he created a flat key with serrated edges and introduced pins of various lengths into the tumbler. Despite technological advancements such as the advent the master key system or electric, magnetic or biometric locks, pin tumbler locks remain widely used to this day.



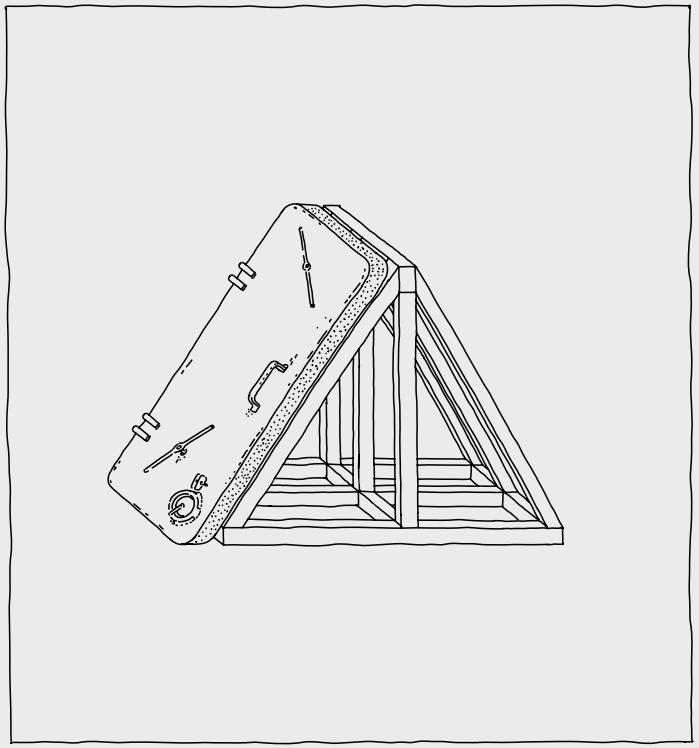
RADIESTHETIC ROD

Made from a forked branch (willow, hazel, maple, oak) or of metal (copper), it serves to find underground veins of water and locate zones of geopathological radiation. The ‘Y’-shaped branch should be carved during the full moon, when the wood has the most sap, which makes the rod more flexible. Metal rods have a cap for a ‘witness’ at the tip — you can hide an object of importance for the dowser there, and thus improve its actions. The dowser holds the ends of the rod in both hands and observes its movements. When it moves, the rod reveals the presence of water veins — it shows where is right for digging a well or wrong for building a home (especially where not to put a bedroom). Today considered a pseudoscience, in the 1980s and 90s radiesthesia was used in Poland by design bureaus and popularised by handbooks. This was based on embodied knowledge: the body of the dowser receives the radiation, and the rod (or pendulum) and its motion serve to register the interaction.



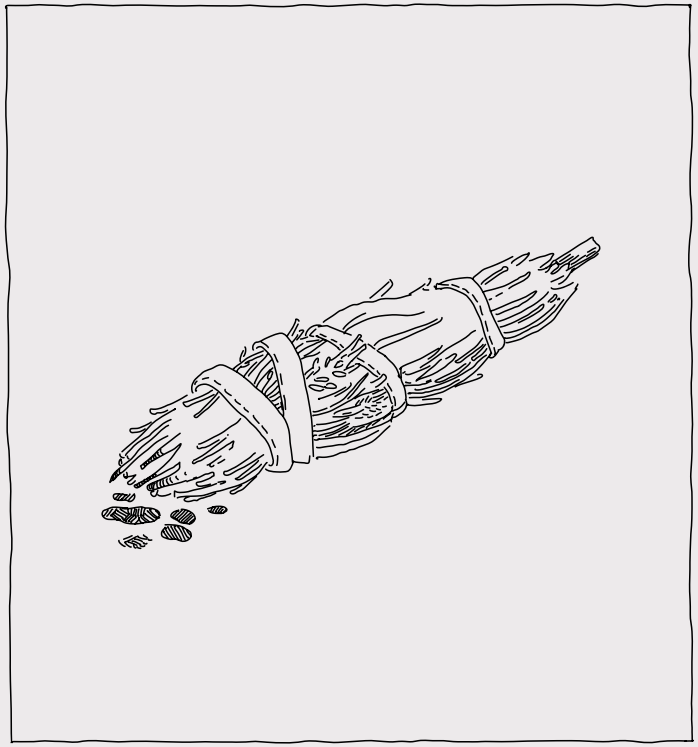
SECURITY CAMERA

The aim of visual monitoring, also known as CCTV (Closed Circuit Television), is to enhance security by the recording and non-public transmission of an image in a given range. The system is made up of cameras, video recorders and monitors, and since the 1970s, of devices to record and store data as well. A monitoring prototype was created in 1927 by Leon Theremin, a Soviet physicist and cellist, creator of the theremin, to monitor visitors to the Kremlin. In 1942, German engineer Walter Bruch used a similar system for military purposes: monitoring the take-off of V-2 rockets. It was released for commercial use (mainly to prevent break-ins and theft in banks and shops) in 1949 by America's Vericon. It was first used in the private space in 1969 by Marie Van Brittan Brown, a Black nurse from Queens, New York. Fearing for her own safety, she and her husband developed home monitoring system, by which you could see who was lurking around your home, communicate with an uninvited guest, and, should it prove necessary, inform the relevant services. Though monitoring has often brought an improvement in safety statistics, we now are paying more attention to its flip side — joined with Artificial Intelligence and facial recognition technology it can be used for mass tracking.



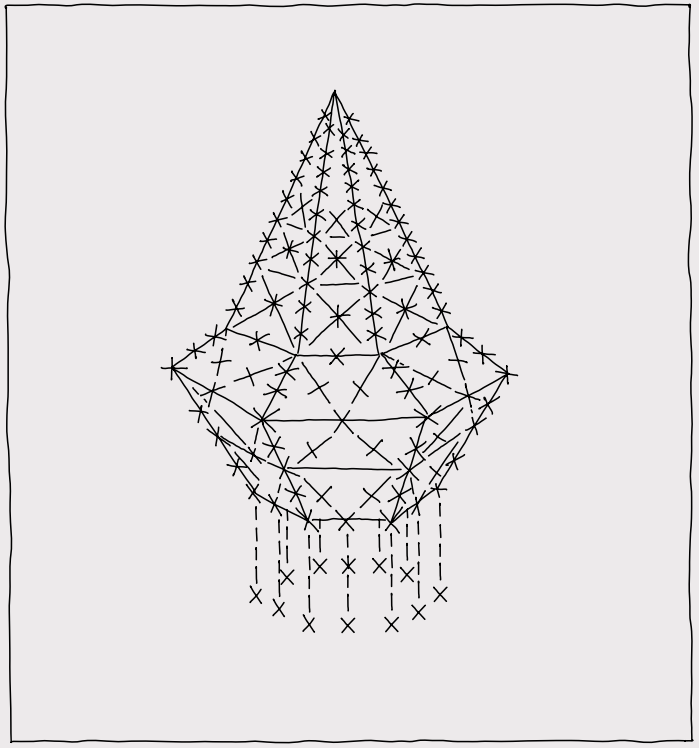
SHELTER DOOR

Hermetically sealed armoured doors are essential to the proper functioning of a shelter — most often underground spaces used to protect people during an armed conflict. A shelter's reinforced concrete construction must be strong enough to hold off the shock waves after a bomb drops, and nuclear shelters must block radiation. The ventilation, power supply and gathered provisions and drinking water are to help people survive for long periods of time. The shelters built during World Wars I and II played a major role in the architecture of the Cold War era. In Poland, for the most part, they come from the World War II period (the largest is the ex-German Stettin HBF-Kirchplatz near the central train station in Szczecin, built in 1941 as a shelter for 5,000 people, today a tourist attraction) and the communist era. According to the Main State Fire Fighter Command report of 2022, the existing shelters and hideouts in Poland have room for less than four per cent of the population (impromptu shelters, such as cellars, will fit everyone). With the growing threat of an armed conflict, the 'shelter act' was passed in 2024. It lets people make household shelters without building permits, and beginning on 1 January 2026, developers of multi-family buildings are obliged to design underground floors and garages to serve as hiding places should they be necessary.



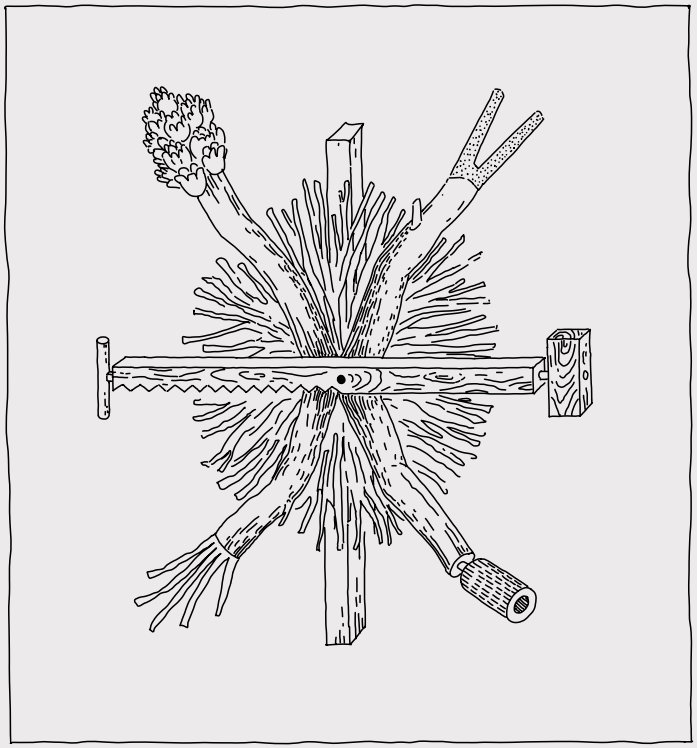
SMUDGE STICKS

Bundle of herbs, Slavic incense — these serve to ‘smudge’ the house or flat to cleanse it of negative energy. Made of cut herb bouquets tied with natural twine, they are ready to use when the herbs dry. Then you light the end of the fragrant stick, blow on the flame, and, with circular movements, spread the herbal fragrance around the house. The herbs can be composed according to your needs. Juniper berries help with sickness, lavender and marigold aid sleeping problems. Sage cleans away bad energy, tansy and Aaron’s rod protect from evil, common wormwood drives off the evil spirits that cause a storm, and periwinkle and thyme protect the farmyard animals from bad spells. At present, smudge sticks are coming back into fashion as part of the mindfulness trend, as a local equivalent of *palo santo*.



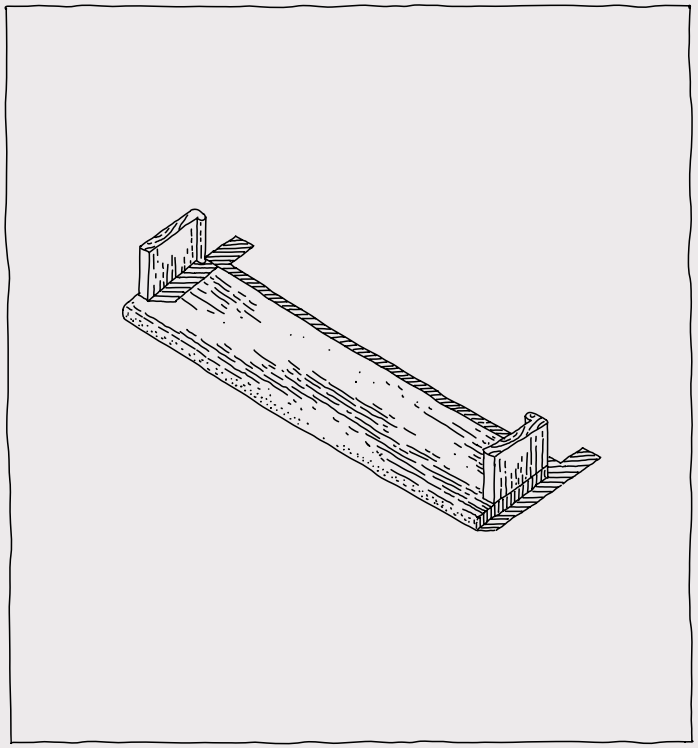
STRAW MOBILE

A spacious, open-work decoration known as ‘spider’ (*pająk*) was made of straw, yarn, coloured tissue paper and other paper hung in the house near the ceiling or in the holy corner before the Christmas holidays, sometimes before Easter as well, and meant to bring good fortune and prosperity. It spun in the breeze. It adopted various shapes, depending on the region. Round spiders (known as ‘worlds’) were made from cut straw stuck into the clay, dough or a potato. The crystal ones were created by threading the straw together into larger constructions on pyramid bases. The discs were supported on woven frames of straw. The richly ornamented, colourful spiders were shaped like church and court chandeliers. Straw mobiles that bore a resemblance to the Slavic spiders also appeared in the Baltic countries (the Lithuanian *sodas* — gardens, chandeliers) and in Scandinavia (the Finnish and Swedish *himmeli* — sky).



TOPPING-OUT

A ceremony tied to the completion of the main building stage (in frame construction this moment came with the building of the rafters, at present when the building has roughly taken shape). This involves hanging a wreath of branches (*wiecha*) decorated with colourful ribbons on the top of the construction. In Poland the workers traditionally add symbolic representations of tools: a saw, a hammer, an axe. Placing the branches on the roof is meant to win over the spirits inhabiting the trees used in the construction. This custom, going back to the fifteenth century, is also widespread in the Baltic states, Germany, Scandinavia, Great Britain and the United States. Topping-outs come in a variety of forms. In Denmark they are made of three horizontal wreaths, in the United States it is a beam signed by the workers. In Scandinavia they used to also use coniferous tree cuttings. This had a practical purpose: when their needles fell, they knew the construction was dry and ready to be covered with a roof. The topping-out is also time for a rousing celebration, with food and drink for the workers. The Dutch *pannenbier* is a similar tradition where the contractor treats the workmen to beer when the building is finished (when the tiles were put on the roof, a flag was hoisted; it flew until all the beer had been poured and drunk). Today this is also a PR opportunity, a chance to boast of a finished construction in the media.



THRESHOLD

A symbolic boundary between the space of the home and the outside world, with all its dangers. Unlike the walls, which ensured constant protection, the threshold was a boundary that was often crossed, and thus was vulnerable to evil powers. There were many protective practices and prohibitions connected to it. Under the threshold lived a snake, a protector of the home fires and the souls of the dead. Owing to their presence, it was forbidden to greet a person or talk over the threshold, eat on the threshold, or pass bread or pour water over it. Nor were you to chop wood here — you could cut the legs of poverty, who would stay in the home forever. You could not walk backwards over a threshold, return home for an object you forgot, or pass someone else on the threshold, as this could mean breaking the boundary and letting in evil spirits. The threshold acquired special significance at births, nuptials and deaths. It was a place to bury a placenta or a dead, unbaptised child. Carrying out a coffin, you knocked several times on the threshold for the deceased to bid farewell to the home. Using objects buried under the threshold, you could ensure good fortune or bring someone misfortune. Iron, such as a nail or horseshoe attached above the door, helped seal this magical border.

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Julia Bujak is a designer and scholar. She studied at the MISH and Artes Liberales Faculties of the University of Warsaw, and in 2023 she graduated from the School of Form of SWPS University. She is presently studying at the Design Faculty of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. She is a member of the texpol collective, whose *weaving* exhibition was featured at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art (2024/2025). Her work has also been presented at the Łódź Design Festival (2021, 2023) and Designblok in Prague (2024), and published in *Textile Textures: Multithreaded Narratives* (2024).

Olga Drenda is a writer, essayist and translator. She graduated in ethnology and cultural anthropology from the Jagiellonian University. Her books include: *Duchologia polska. Rzeczy i ludzie w latach transformacji* [Polish Hauntology: Things and People in the Transformation Years], 2016; *Wyroby. Pomysłowość wokół nas* [Self-Made Goods: Ingenuity All Around Us], 2018, nominated for the Polityka Passport and the Gdynia Literary Award in the essay category; *Słowo humoru* [A Word of Humour], 2023. She has also co-written books of interviews *Czyje jest nasze życie* [Whose Is Our Life], with Bartłomiej Dobroczyński, 2017, and *Książka o miłości* [Book about Love], with Małgorzata Halber, 2020. She has been running the *Duchologia* [Hauntology] page on Facebook since 2013, and is a frequent contributor to *Tygodnik Powszechny*. She joins Jacek Paśnik in hosting a weekly programme on Radio Four. In 2024, she became the creative director at the Conrad Festival in Krakow.

Aleksandra Kędziorek, an art historian, curator, editor, graduate of the Art History Institute at the University of Warsaw and CuratorLab at Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, her work sits between architecture, design and visual arts, both for institutions and independently. In her curatorial practice she tries to take into account historically-conditioned and thought-provoking contexts. She uses her research strategies to seek inspiration and creative responses in the past for the challenges of the present. Most recently the focus of her interest was the use of textiles in interiors before the spread of electricity (the *Clothed Home* exhibition, created with Alicja Bielawska and Centrala for the London Design Biennale, 2021) and the role of water plants in modernist architecture (Centrala's *Nenúfars blancs* art intervention at the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion in Barcelona, 2022). Before that, she coordinated an international research and exhibition project on Oskar and Zofia Hansen at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and tended to the summer house in Szumin (2013–2017).

Krzysztof Maniak, a graduate of the Intermedia Faculty at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, he defended his PhD in 2018, and works in the Intermedia Art Phenomena Institute at his alma mater. His artistic practice is based on work in the landscape — these are most often simple, discreet gestures and interactions with nature. He makes art as he wanders through the forests, meadows and hills of Tuchów, where he lives. These are a backdrop for his actions and material for temporary installations, as well as a source of props for his performances. He is the winner of the 14th edition of the Hestia Artistc Journey Competition, the Grand Prix of the 5th Spring Salon at the BWA Gallery in Tarnów and the 10th edition of the *Views* competition at Zachęta — National Gallery of Art. His works have been seen at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, SALT Ulus in Ankara, BWA in Katowice, BWA in Tarnów, Bielska Gallery BWA, BWA Bydgoszcz Municipal Gallery, BWA Warsaw, ABC Gallery, Biała Gallery in Lublin, Baltic Contemporary Art Gallery, State Art Gallery in Sopot, El Gallery Art Centre in Elbląg, Contemporary Art Gallery in Opole, MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, and at the Postartistic Congress in Sokołowsko.

Andrzej Marzec is a philosopher, film critic and editor of *Czas Kultury*. He lectures at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, University of Fine Arts in Poznań and SWPS University. His research interests focus on: speculative realism, ontology turned toward objects, environmental humanities, dark ecology and contemporary alternative cinema. His books include: *Widmontologia. Teoria filozoficzna i praktyka artystyczna ponowoczesności* [Hauntology — Postmodern Philosophical Theory and Practice of Art], 2015, and *Antropocień — filozofia i estetyka po końcu świata* [The Shadow of the Anthropocene: Philosophy and Aesthetics after the End of the World], 2021.

Katarzyna Przezwańska, a graduate of the Painting Faculty at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, she makes sculptures, architectural interventions, installations and pictures, in which she often uses natural materials, such as rocks, minerals and plants. Her works often pertain to nature and architecture, joining these two spheres in an effort to improve the quality of human life and make her art useful. She is inspired by both vernacular architecture and the twentieth-century classics, as well as geological phenomena and vegetative processes. Her designs include a playground in Lublin and a square for students on the grounds of the University of Warsaw, and contributions to a design for the state elementary school and preschool on Zaruby Street in Warsaw (with Maciej Siuda's Studio). She has taken part in many art exhibitions in such institutions as the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Zachęta — National Gallery of Art, National Museum in Warsaw, Kunsthalle in Tallin, Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach, and the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art. She lives and works in Warsaw.

Tatjana Schneider is Professor of Architectural Theory at the TU Braunschweig. Prior to her appointment in Braunschweig, she taught at the Schools of Architecture in Sheffield and Glasgow. She was a founding member of the Architectural Workers Cooperative Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space (G.L.A.S.), which critiqued capitalist (re)productions and uses of the built environment on both a theoretical and practical level. The author of numerous publications, Schneider aims to promote critical engagement with architecture as a tool for social transformation, contributing to discourses on spatial agency, feminist futures, radical pedagogy and climate justice.

Maciej Siuda is an architect and designer, his work blends architecture, the humanities and art. He is interested in joining research and practice, experimentation, the potential of collaboration, work with mock-ups, drawings, ideas, as well as shifts in scale. He creates objects, installations, exhibitions and structures. He was the co-creator of the *MYCOsystem* Polish Pavilion at the 22nd Triennale di Milano (2019) and the *Devebere* pavilion at Biennale Architettura 2012 in Venice. He created the architecture for the *Reconstruction Disputes* exhibition at the 7th Warsaw under Construction festival (Grand Prix Architectural Award from the Mayor of Warsaw, 2015; Talking Buildings Down award from the Storefront for Art and Architecture institute in New York, 2016), as well as part of the *Polish Table* installation at the Expo in Dubai (2020) and the *Basic Forms* exhibition in Chiang Rai during the Art Biennial in Thailand (2024). His architectural projects include: an elementary school and preschool in Warsaw and as part of the Balon collective, a school in Jacmel, Haiti (Acknowledgement Holcim Awards in Columbia, 2014). He has designed exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Zachęta — National Gallery of Art, National Museum in Warsaw, Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź and Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. He is presently collaborating on an exhibition for London Design Biennale 2025.

ZACHĘTA

ZACHĘTA — NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art is an institution whose mission is to popularise art in all its current manifestations as a vital part of culture and society.

The gallery organises temporary exhibitions, presenting the most interesting developments in twentieth and twenty-first century art, with both solo exhibitions and widely-discussed thematic exhibitions. It also promotes the work of young artists, who are displayed, in part, at the Zachęta Project Room, a laboratory space for art experiments.

One of the foremost tasks in Zachęta's social mission is to promote contemporary art, and thus provide contact with it for viewers from all walks of life. Pictures of works from the Zachęta collection, documentary and educational materials, and most of the publications are made available on Creative Commons licences on the gallery web site. This is part of the Open Zachęta project, ongoing since 2011, within which the gallery conducts its openness policy.

Zachęta runs educational activities geared toward children, young people, and adult viewers as well. It also organises series of accessible events, taking into account viewers' diverse needs. It releases publications on contemporary art and gathers information on the present-day Polish art scene.

Zachęta holds a collection of over 3,700 works of painting, sculpture, installations, video, graphic art, and performance. The gallery is also tasked with overseeing the content and organisation of the exhibition for the Polish Pavilion in Venice at Biennale Arte and Biennale Architettura.

ADAM MICKIEWICZ INSTITUTE

THE ADAM MICKIEWICZ INSTITUTE (IAM)

The Adam Mickiewicz Institute (IAM) brings Polish culture to people around the world. Being a state institution, it creates lasting interest in Polish culture and art through strengthening the presence of Polish artists on the global stage. It initiates innovative projects, supports international cooperation and cultural exchanges. It promotes the work of both established and promising artists, showing the diversity and richness of our culture. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute is also responsible for the Culture.pl website, which is a comprehensive source of knowledge about Polish culture.
More information: https://iam.pl/en.

EXHIBITION
Lares and Penates: On Building a Sense of Security in Architecture
authors: Aleksandra Kędziorek, Krzysztof Maniak, Katarzyna Przezwańska, Maciej Siuda
Polish Pavilion at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia
10 May–23 November 2025

organiser:

ZACHĘTA

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art
pl. Małachowskiego 3, 00-916 Warsaw
zacheta.art.pl, labiennale.art.pl

Polish Pavilion commissioner: Agnieszka Pindera
Polish Pavilion office: Anna Kowalska, Michał Kubiak (deputy commissioner), Aga Mandziuk
design assistants: Adrianna Gruszka, Szymon Kassowski, Maciej Moszant
research: Julia Bujak
visual identification: Krzysztof Pyda
exhibition production and assembly: Ferwor — Dawid Aniśko, Antoni Bartochowski, Andrzej Burek, Aleksandra Gryc, Adrian Jermacz, Sławomir Kalbarczyk, Mateusz Lipiec, Jakub Mierzejewski, Wojciech Musiałek, Paweł Paciorek, Piotr Paciorek, Rafał Paciorek, Marcin Papiernik
artistic painting realisation: Michał Szudrawski
straw mobile realisation: Katarzyna Dorota
communication: Zofia Koźniewska, Milena Liebe, Maria Nitek, Alicja Malicka, Aleksandra Sienkiewicz, Alicja Sznajder, Justyna Wydra

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