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VISITING THE HANSENS

In 1991, Alvar Hansen made a documentary film of the summer workshop for Bergen School of Architecture students at the Hansen family house in Szumin, Poland.¹ The first shot shows a signpost in the garden next to the house. Along with pointing to various cities to help orient the visitor (New York, Moscow and Tokyo), the signpost indicates cities with particular relevance in the lives of the filmmaker's family members. Paris, where Oskar Hansen, an architect connected with Team 10, began his professional career as an assistant in the studios of Pierre Jeanneret and Fernand Léger; Bergen, where his student Svein Hatløy founded a school that continued the Open Form didactics introduced by Hansen in the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts; Edinburgh, where Igor, the Hansens' older son, lived. Szumin, a vacation settlement located on an oxbow bend of the Bug River, served as an axis mundi, a pole of the Hansen world, where all their paths met and where their most important architectural ideas were brought to life in the very structure of the house.

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The film can be accessed on the Filmoteka page at the website of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw: www.artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/.



FIG. 1 / P. 223

Under construction since 1968, the summerhouse was a creation of the family: Oskar, Zofia, his wife and an architect working with the Warsaw Residential Cooperative and codesigner of the majority of her husband's projects, and their son Igor. [FIG.1] The Hansens came to the village on the Bug in the mid 1960s at the invitation of friends.² They found the picturesque surroundings so enchanting that they decided to buy a plot of land. "What brought us to the Bug was our love of this place, this water, these trees, the birds [...]," Oskar Hansen would reminisce years later. "Today, there is little left of the Szumin of old. When we came here, before us lay a beautiful valley, with undulating fields of wheat, and from the house my wife could see me walking along the Bug."³ [FIG.2]



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

This landscape was the starting point for the Hansens when designing the house—a small, one-story construction with a characteristic pitched roof reaching down to the ground. [FIG.3] Although a number of designs have survived, none fully conveys the original structure of the building that came into being.⁴ A wooden house, built by the architects for their own use and continually adapted in accordance with their changing needs, provided them with the opportunity for constant improvement of their own concepts. Here, free from the oppressive restrictions imposed on them by building regulations and the dysfunctional Polish economy, the Hansens were able to experiment at will with spatial layout as well as the relationship between interior and exterior, executing ideas that would have been difficult or impossible in projects commissioned by the state. In these circumstances, the house in Szumin provided the most comprehensive illustration of the principles of

2 See Monika Mikołajczuk, "Nad Bugiem jest nasze miejsce," *Sycyna*, no. 64, 1997, p. 12.

3 Ibid.

4 The projects and nature drawings created by Oskar Hansen at various stages in the development of the house are kept in the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts Museum and in the private archive of the family.

Open Form—the theory Hansen had announced at the CIAM conference in Otterlo in 1959—and the concepts derived from it, including "absorptive background," the "active negative" and concepts introduced in mass residential constructions that served as the ground for Hansen's Linear Continuous System (LCS).⁵

The best starting point for a tour of the house is at the bench in front. A wood plank, fixed between pillars that are part of the structure of the building, calls to mind benches traditionally placed in front of Polish houses in linear villages. This bench, installed as the house was being built at the side of a road running through the fields, was, in Hansen's words, a "material gesture of friendship towards the locals who, returning tired from the fields, could rest there and interact with us on their way home."⁶ While inviting passersby to sit down, the bench was also an invitation to enter the house—this was suggested by the way in which the roof cantilevered the upper level over the bench so that those sitting on it were already "slightly inside the house." This inviting gesture continued with a white line painted on the wall behind the bench, which led visitors to the side gate.

However, the gesture of invitation was accompanied by a clear boundary demarcating the publicly accessible bench and the private interior of the house. The boundary was a grey wall with visible imprints of the shuttering timbers. Erected on the boundary of the plot, the wall leads, in a gentle curve, from one corner by the

5 See Oskar Hansen, "Forma Otwarta," *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 5, 1959, p. 5; Oskar Hansen, Zofia Hansen, "The Open Form—the Art of the Great Number," in *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*, edited by Oscar Newman, Stuttgart: Karl Kramer Verlag, 1961, pp. 190–191 (reprinted in this volume). Hansen's lecture during the CIAM conference in Otterlo (an audio recording). See the Jaap Bakema Archive, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, BAKE Av, pp. 34–35.

6 See Hansen, *Towards Open Form / Ku Formie Otwartej*, edited by Jola Cola, Warszawa: Fundacja Galerii Foksal, Muzeum ASP w Warszawie, Frankfurt: Revolver, 2005, p. 109. Hansen recalled that the bench preceded the building of the house. However, from a careful examination of archival material it is clear that the bench was made later—at the stage of laying the felt on the roof. See "Inventory of the Home of Oskar and Zofia Hansen in Szumin," produced by CENTRALA (Małgorzata Kuciewicz, Simone de Iacobi, Francesco Ronconi, Fabio Campana), Polskie Konsorcjum Inwestycyjno-Ceodziejne i Studio-Ogród, commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, www.centrala.net.pl/our-work/szumin1, date of access January 2014; materials from this inventory are available at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

driveway on the village side to the entrance of the house. This is not a structural element; the structure of the house is based on three rows of pillars made from logs, complete with bark. Two rows of these pillars are behind the wall, one row—with the bench in between—stands in front. From a structural viewpoint, the house straddles the wall, without being supported by it. As the element with which the construction began, the wall fulfills a fundamental architectural function: it demarcates and protects boundaries.⁷ It shelters inhabitants from wind (the directions from which the wind blew across the plot had been meticulously analyzed before the wall was built) while also affording them privacy. Thanks to the gap between the wall and the structure of the house, which is difficult to notice from the outside, those inside can hear conversations of passersby seated to rest on the bench, and, thanks to the raised floor level in the house, they can also have a look and decide whom to invite inside.

Another border—a Simmelesque element that simultaneously separates and links spaces⁸—is marked by an old gate, brought from elsewhere, which constitutes the entrance to the house (a similar side gate stands by the main garden entrance). The white line drawn on the wall is intended to direct visitors to the side gate; placed at the height of the gate latch, it prompts the move that would open it.⁹ However, it is only when one enters the house that the significance of the consistent line as part of the system of visual information becomes apparent. The white line against the grey background of the wall outside the house is shown in negative on the inside of the house as a grey line against a white background. In the space in which the interior and exterior continually blend, this visual information helpfully indicates in which part of the house one

7 Many theoreticians, starting with Marc-Antoine Laugier, the creator of the myth of the “primitive hut,” have considered the wall to be the element that marks the beginning of architecture. See Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam’s House in Paradise: the Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.

8 Georg Simmel, *Most i drzwi*, in id., *Most i drzwi. Wybór eseów*, translated by Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2006, pp. 248–255.

9 This is its meaning as indicated by Svein Hatløy, who continued this way of thinking about visual information in his own projects, particularly in his project for a school in Loddefjord in 1975.



FIG. 4

might currently be. Through contrast, the white enhances the effect of the natural materials used: wood, concrete and brick.

There is a continuity of time and space between the interior and exterior of the house, which is linked to the blurring and continuous negotiation of boundaries between the two, constituting the main spatial construction of the house. Once we step through the door and find ourselves inside, at eye level we find an oblong window that displays the surroundings of the house, showing the horizon and the river. [FIG.4] Today, this view is disturbed by a tree growing on a neighboring plot. A few paces farther along, the house opens onto the garden, allowing us to find ourselves outside yet again. This part of the house is the so-called social access way, with the bench placed on a platform, a twin of the roadside bench but designated solely for those living in the house, complete with armchairs and didactic apparatuses¹⁰ for daily exercises in composition.

The second smaller access way, linking spaces with domestic uses—kitchen, additional bathroom, storage space, entrance to the garage, composter and lavatory—is situated in the opposite part of the house. This division into zones, on a microscale, is reminiscent of concepts the Hansens had introduced into their designs for large-scale residential projects. There were discrete servicing zones and serviced zones in the structure of the Juliusz Słowacki residential estate in Lublin (designed 1960–1963, but not built until 1969) and in that of the Przyczówek Grochowski estate in Warsaw (designed 1963, built between 1968 and 1971), achieved through separating driveways, garages and waste-storage facilities from pedestrian traffic and recreational zones. In the Hansens’ concept, this separation was to be continued when building residential belts as part of LCS.

The distribution of zones in the Szumin house was emphasized with visual signs—the social stretch enclosed on two

10 Didactic apparatuses were introduced by Hansen and his assistants at the Faculty of Sculpture in the 1960s and were used by students to practice the basic principles of composition. Hansen constructed similar instruments for his exhibition at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in 1986. After the exhibition closed, the apparatuses were transferred to Szumin.

sides by white cardboard squares (one survives on the wall by the side gate, the other has been lost), while the domestic services stretch remains demarked by “empty spaces” or negatives of the squares. The designation of zones continues into the garden, where the two gates, situated at the opposite ends of the plot, are designated for the driveway and, on the side of the service access way, for the sewage-removal lorry, respectively.

The residential space on the ground floor is on a platform situated between two access ways. The part of the ground floor next to the wall has been left unbuilt at the sides and communicates directly with the garden—this is the “feedthrough” zone, further differentiated by the use of a white soffit made of fiberboard. The feedthrough, retained on the basis of a detailed analysis of air movement,¹¹ provides natural air-conditioning for the house. The other part of the ground floor consists of more traditional interiors—living and dining rooms, joined with the kitchen through a small service access way, as well as a hallway that was added later and a small bedroom and the visitors’ annex.

The two parts of the ground floor are linked by a long rectangular table, half of which is inside the house, the other half remaining outside, in the feedthrough zone. The halves can be joined together by sliding apart the glass in the wall that separates them. After this transformation, this piece of furniture—with its characteristic top consisting of boards with one side of each painted white, allowing for various color arrangements of the tabletop—can seat a dozen diners. Placed in the center of the platform, the table is the heart of the house—below and above the table are the “roots” and “crown” of the house, its cellar and attic. As Gaston Bachelard has put it, “The house is a synthetic archetype. In its cellar there is a cave,

11 Diagrams documenting the existing climatic conditions were reproduced in Hansen’s *Towards Open Form*, op.cit., pp. 108–109.

in the attic—a nest; the house has its roots and its crown.”¹² For the Szumin house, the significance of these two elements can be seen most clearly in archival photographs from the time of its construction—both were created immediately after the wall, described earlier. In the attic we find Bachelard’s “nest.” A narrow alternate-tread stair, situated in the center of the house, leads upward. Until recently, under the stair, there was a white tile stove, Cubist in form.¹³ On the raised platform above the stove, accessible from the top of the stair, there is a bed. From the family’s reminiscences, one gathers that this was Oskar Hansen’s favorite place—a “crow’s nest” that enabled him to watch all that took place below.¹⁴

The attic was a private space, designated for rest and work. Originally open-plan, over time it has become segregated by partition walls and bookcases, the division assigning functional zones connected with various activities.¹⁵ These divisions were not cast in stone—they kept changing according to the needs of users.

The panoramic windows located in opposite walls play a key role in the space of the loft. One opens onto the road outside and the fields lying farther away (subdivided today into further plots

12 Gaston Bachelard, *Dom rodzinny i dom oniryczny*, in id., *Wyobraźnia poetycka. Wybór pism*, Warszawa: PIW, 1975, p. 308. According to Bachelard, these elements determine the essence of the house and, made familiar in our childhood, they recur to us later in dreams and literature. “There does not exist a true oneiric house that would not climb upward; such a house, with its cellar lowered into the ground, with the ground floor, the seat of everyday hustle and bustle, with the upper story, where one sleeps and the attic high up below the roof—has everything necessary to symbolize profound fears, the commonness of mundane life and all kinds of sublimation.” *Ibid.*, p. 314.

13 The stove, the access to which was behind a wall—to start with, outside the house, and later, in the annex added for visitors—was removed years later and replaced by a free-standing stove.

14 Again, it is worthwhile to quote Bachelard: “Indeed, in our houses we have nooks and corners in which we like to curl up comfortably. To curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb to inhabit, and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity.” Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, p. XXXIV. See also: Juhani Pallasmaa, “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile. Notes on the Phenomenology of Home,” from a lecture at the symposium “The Concept of Home: An Interdisciplinary View,” Trondheim University, 21–23 August 1992, www2.uiah.fi/opintoasiat/history2/e_ident.htm; date of access February 2014.

15 Most of the subdivisions of the attic space occurred after 1996, when the Hansens moved permanently to Szumin and therefore required a greater differentiation of space.

with further constructions added), while the other opens onto the zone at the back of the house. At both are work desks. Placed quite low, the windows are an excellent illustration of how the architecture of the house is meant to connect with the activity of individual inhabitants or visitors. Someone sitting at the desk can observe the horizon. After getting up, he or she can see the ground and what is happening on the road outside the house. This touch, linking the house to the landscape, allows the user to appreciate the relationship of his body to the ground.

The structure described here did not appear overnight. The house, the construction of which began symbolically with the grey wall the house straddles, and its cellar and roof, grew over time, adapting to the altering needs of its users. Its shape was developed over the course of family discussions and was often altered on the spur of the moment.¹⁶ The greatest challenge proved to be the conversion of the house from a summer to a year-round residence when, in 1996, the Hansens moved there permanently from their Warsaw flat.¹⁷ However, alterations were carried out on other occasions. Hansen explained:

This house keeps being created. It is a field for architectural experiments, which would have never arisen if not for the surrounding nature. It opens itself up to the world and people. [...] There are no thresholds, there are no boundaries, pine trees and birds look into the windows.¹⁸

The ease with which this architecture lends itself to adaptation stems directly from the premises of Open Form, which, from the very moment of the theory's announcement in 1959, served to anchor the architectural, artistic and didactic activities of the

16 The diagram prepared by Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone de Iacobis and their team illustrates the continually growing structure of the house; it is reproduced in this volume, p. 247.

17 The sudden departure from the Sędziowska Street apartment was due to a conflict with the owners of the building, who had regained ownership after political changes. At that time, various objects from the apartment appeared in Szumin, including the table with the red top now in the attic room, the storage stools, chairs, textiles; the house was also insulated.

18 Mikołajczuk, op.cit.

Hansens. Open Form, in a spirit of protest against Le Corbusier's idea of a "machine for living" that united architects of the younger generation of CIAM and resulted in the foundation of Team 10, sought to transfer decisions about the shape of architecture to inhabitants.

The Open Form differs from the Closed Form by recognizing concrete people—not the abstract so-called "average"—by leaving a margin for evoking one's own latent essence. It is an individual-collective phenomenon and, because of that, multistratified and alive.¹⁹

The advent of architecture co-created by its users signified a dramatic change in the hierarchical relation between the architect and user. According to the Hansens, the role of the architect was to create a "passe-partout"²⁰—a framework for everyday events that would organize and present them in a suitable manner. In this way, architecture never achieved a final form but was instead subject to constant transformations or revisions wrought by its successive users. The Hansens tried to introduce similar solutions in the residential projects mentioned earlier where, although subject to the restrictions that governed the construction industry in the People's Republic of Poland (such as precise norms regarding permitted floor space and standards of accommodation), they attempted to involve residents in the design process through questionnaires.²¹

Similar thinking was integrated into their projects for exhibition spaces. The pavilions for the international fairs in Izmir (1954) and São Paulo (1959) realized together with Lech Tomaszewski, exhibition designs—Hansen's solo exhibition at the Salon Po Prostu and the exhibition of furniture, ceramic and textiles in the Redoubt Rooms of the National Theater (both in 1959)—were intended to display both the objects on exhibit and the viewers mov-

19 Oskar Hansen, Zofia Hansen, *The Open Form in Architecture*, op. cit., p. 190.

20 Hansen, *Forma Otwarta*, op. cit., p. 5.

21 Such questionnaires were to be conducted at the Juliusz Słowacki Estate in Lublin: the architects encouraged future residents to decide where to place partition walls in the plans of apartments that they had been allocated. They also had attempted to vary interiors and customize them to the needs of different residents in the two apartment blocks already built at the Rakowiec estate in Warsaw. On both projects, however, their efforts were futile, as the finished apartments were allocated on a random basis. See Hansen, *Towards Open Form*, op. cit., pp. 81, 191.



FIG. 5 / P. 219

ing through the exhibition. With some of their projects, the Hansens also intended to provide users with free choice in defining the shape of buildings or the layout of interiors—as was the case with the proposal for the Museum of Modern Art in Skopje (1966), where temporary exhibition galleries, with their umbrella structure, were intended to be opened or closed by curators depending on requirements of the exhibition being presented at any given time. This was similar to the project for the extension for the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw (developed with Lech Tomaszewski and Stanisław Zamecznik, 1958), which allowed for the alteration, both vertically and horizontally, of partitions within the proposed glass cube building.²²

However, the majority of these projects were only realized on paper or were not implemented in full accordance with the intentions of their authors. The summerhouse in Szumin and the apartment on Sędziowska Street [FIG. 5] were therefore all the more important—they turned out to be the best spaces for the presentation of the Hansens' ideas. Dwellings designed for themselves, built under their own initiative without external limitations or interference, demonstrated the extent to which the Hansens intended users of architecture to involve themselves in its emergence. In 1955, for example, they rebuilt the loft of the single-story building on Sędziowska Street, where they had lived since 1950, into a two-level open space, combining a residential space with a studio.

For Hansen, the concept of a “tool of visual impact” indicated an object made under specific geographic and historical conditions that had a particular impact on the recipient.²³

The most important function served by that instrument for visual impact was stimulating the imagination and encouraging users to remember that living spaces were meant to be flexible areas serving man [...], not the other way round, as unchanging objects; the floor is for walking, not for being polished like a mirror; the walls should not be hard structures but easily formed matter.²⁴

22 See texts by Felicity D. Scott and Tomasz Fudala in this volume.
23 See Hansen, *Zobaczyć świat*, Warszawa: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki – Muzeum Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, 2005.
24 Hansen, *Towards Open Form*, op. cit., p. 106.



FIG. 6 / P. 222

These principles were at work at the Sędziowska Street apartment:

This space-time continuum worked great for 40 years, adapting easily to the inhabitants' changing needs (from “cable railways” hung between the walls, basketball games and sparring with a boxing bag), to the various artworks displayed there, or to very frequent meetings.²⁵

Hansen often emphasized the time-space character of the interior—the theory of modernist architecture refers to both these dimensions (Siegfried Giedion's famous book *Space, Time and Architecture* from 1941, for example, as well as Le Corbusier's idea of *la promenade architecturale*, formulated as early as the 1930s)—which were the basis of his concept of the “active negative.” The “active negative” [FIG. 6] developed in relation to the Sędziowska Street apartment was a sculpture-like study of spatial impressions, an intuitive, emotional recording of the way in which an individual related to surrounding space. In line with Hansen's intention, the study of the “active negative” was to become one of the standard phases of design that would precede the technical stage and serve as the tool for shaping of time-space interiors that stimulated the imagination, guaranteed a diversity of impressions and encouraged the user to relate actively to architecture.²⁶

These dimensions of time and space are also apparent in the house in Szumin. Its architecture clearly demonstrates how Hansen's treatment of time-space differed from the architectural concepts mentioned earlier. The architecture of the Villa Savoye designed by Le Corbusier (1928–1930) reveals itself to visitors with each successive step, like a film edited in space.²⁷ Although what is

25 Ibid.
26 Zofia Hansen, Oskar Hansen, “Studium i realizacja mieszkania,” *Architektura*, no. 11, 1958. In the concept of the “active negative,” its emotional and impressionistic impact was key—this is what differentiates Hansen's sculpture studies from the negatives of space used by Bruno Zevi in order to analyze the space of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. See Bruno Zevi, *Architecture as Space*, edited by Joseph A. Barry, translated by Milton Cendel, New York: Horizon Press, 1974 (first edition 1948).
27 See Yve-Alain Bois, introduction to: Sergie M. Eisenstein, “Montage and Architecture,” *Assamblage*, no. 10, 1989, pp. 111–115; Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, London: Verso, 2007.

required for perception of the villa is a moving body (or rather an eye that is a part of that body), the sequence of events in space has been directed so precisely that there is no room for any additional activity. It should likewise be noted that although the villa has become a permanent part of the architectural canon, it was so troublesome for its users that, after years of complaining to the architect, they gave up using the building in 1937.²⁸ In contrast to Le Corbusier's architecture, which for Hansen embodied Closed Form, the Szumin house did not exist without man and his activity. The architecture springs to life with the presence of a person—just as in Le Corbusier's villa, the windows at Szumin frame space but the frames function only in relation to the moving body, whether standing or sitting. Unlike Le Corbusier's windows, they are not static, self-contained "pictures on the wall." What matters in Szumin is the entire body, the variation of its movements, and its location in relation to other bodies present in this space, which the user affects or directs by the actions performed. Here, architecture is above all a framework—an "absorptive background" for events that take place.

The pitched roof reaching down to the ground, originally covered in grey felt,²⁹ is the most important element of such an "absorptive background" against which events are displayed. Its homogenous, crude surface is the backdrop that enhances the colorful flowers growing in front. The wall has a similar function—the grey concrete provides a perfect "passe-partout" for the white lilacs that grow behind it. This measure is repeated frequently throughout the garden, the best example being the "background walls" that can be found in the orchard. These are little walls of a color and shape meant to set off the fruit ripening on the trees.

28 "After innumerable demands you have finally accepted that this house which you built in 1929 is uninhabitable [...]. Please render it habitable immediately. I sincerely hope that I will not have to take recourse to legal action." From Mrs. Savoye's letter to Le Corbusier, 1937, quoted in Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier: La Villa Savoye, The Villa Savoye*, Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier; Basel: Birkhäuser, 1999, p. 147.

29 In 2006, the roof covering was replaced with a dark grey covering in a tile pattern, which unfortunately interferes with its function as a "absorptive background." However, this replacement of the roof covering enabled the house to remain in good condition.

The garden surrounding the house likewise takes part in the ideas introduced in the architectural space. It is divided into two parts: on one side of the house, the side of the services access way, it takes the form of a freely growing wood, while on the other, the side of the social access way, an orchard grows, kept orderly by the human hand.³⁰

The designation of the zones in the garden was not just a result of a functional division; it was preceded by a detailed analysis of prevailing conditions and their incorporation into the design of the house. Hansen explained:

The utilization of the land and the garden is related to the previously existing physiographical and cultural environment. The house is situated on a border between a shady space—the forest—and an open, sunlit space. A transverse clearance in the construction means that the house is naturally ventilated in radiational weather. In inversional weather, cold air flowing down from a nearby hill is directed outside by the surrounding wall, along the road and towards the river. Strong north-western winds blowing during advective weather are mitigated by a mound formed in front of the house from earth dug out during the construction.³¹

When designing the house and its prospective functions, the Hansens wanted to use to the maximum potential provided by nature, which explains the composter in the garden and the purpose-built rainwater tanks dug into the ground. In the garden surrounding the house we find many elements meant to make "human events and natural forms" more explicit. Along with "background walls" mentioned above, against which plants become "actors," there are white stripes painted on walls and the side gate that point to

30 The orchard was set out in a special design by Oskar Hansen. He introduced a system of small mounds into it, spaced at regular intervals, with indentations for planting trees. He covered the soil with black plastic sheets to control weeds and the appearance of the garden.

31 Hansen, *Towards Open Form*, op. cit., p. 109. The Hansens treated the soil from the foundation excavations with great reverence. They frequently used it in forming new spaces; for example, this soil was added when creating the Theater of Open Form at the Słowacki Estate in Lublin.



FIG. 7

places where pedestrian traffic is situated (the car gate has no markings) or indicate how to use your hands (the white stripe directs the hand to the gate latch that must be pressed; against the background of the brick wall near the pigeon coop, there are gardening tools). The apparatuses for composing space that are placed nearby have a similar function. Hansen had made these for an exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1985.³² Like those made earlier in the Faculty of Sculpture of the academy then used for teaching composition, they enabled visitors to compose views and create a frame in which to display the works behind the apparatus. Transferred to Szumin, they became an integral part of the house and were employed in daily exercises in composition.

In the garden, there is also a steel construction from Hansen's exhibition in the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1977; it has been employed as support for a vine. It also provided the starting point for the architecture of the pigeon coop, which was created in the garden after 1991. Apart from plants, animals were important "actors" in the garden. For birds, Hansen constructed what he called "bird towers" and masts that supported various birdhouses.³³ [FIG. 7] For the dog Puryc, a gate from the old fencing was kept in the wild part of the garden so that he could jump over it. The most important element created for animals was, however, the pigeon coop. It was built in an analogous way to the house. The starting points were a steel structure—which does not, however, provide support for the construction—as well as the foundation and the pitched roof resting on a wood structure, with feedthroughs left between the brick and wood elements with a delineated service access way.³⁴

The garden was also a link between the house and the environs. Surrounded by a wood fence and partly by a wall, on the side of the river it was separated by a mesh fence, opening a vista to

32 *W kręgu Formy Otwartej; wystawa w auli Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 25 kwietnia – 23 maja 1986*, edited by Jola Cola et al., exh. cat., Warszawa: Muzeum Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, 1986; *W kręgu Formy Otwartej*, 1986, a recording in the Polish Television (TVP) archive.

33 They no longer exist today; remnants of one can be seen in the construction of the utility space at the back of the house. See "Inventory of the Home of Oskar and Zofia Hansen in Szumin," op.cit.

34 Such were the conclusions reached by Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone de Iacobis with their team during their inventory of the house, see *ibid.*

the Bug. This relationship of the house to the environment was vital for the Hansens. In their activities, they also ventured toward the village, wishing to enrich its social life (the bench intended for passersby). "We came here as intruders," Hansen would say, "so we wanted to bring some things of value with us, not only take them."³⁵

The Szumin house was intended to be, to use Hansen's own language, an effective tool of visual impact. Through its architecture, it created the conditions for a reception of the environment by users and encouraged them to co-create.

This didactic aspect—although Hansen would likely have disowned the idea of conceiving architecture as a tool of social engineering, as functionalists are wont to do, in his heart of hearts, he remained a modernist—revealed itself in the daily use to which this architecture was put. It was most fully apparent during the summer workshops organized for students of the Bergen School of Architecture. This private school, founded in 1986 by Hansen's student and former assistant Svein Hatløy, continued the didactic of his Open Form in the field of architecture. In the space of the house and garden, students who came to Szumin from 1990 to 1992 undertook exercises analogous to those carried out under Hansen's direction in the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. They analyzed the surroundings applying the method of the active negative, observed the relationships between greater and lesser mass by placing elements in the garden and, using the apparatuses brought from the academy, they learned how to make large numbers of elements more legible.³⁶ Exercises accompanied even quite ordinary activities; an excellent example was the use of a didactic apparatus, at the time placed at the top of the table, to plot the colors of the meal served that day by means of moving colored slats.

The Hansens also undertook didactic exercises in the Szumin space. They both used didactic apparatuses hanging in the social access way and encouraged their visitors to do the same. Moreover, Hansen also created compositions in the space around

35 Hansen, from Mikołajczuk, op.cit.

36 The exercises referred to appeared in Hansen's didactic program in the Faculty of Sculpture of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. See the text by Jola Cola in this volume.



FIG. 8

the house. He hung canvases he had painted on trees, creating complex “portraits of the forest” that changed over time and with the shadows of trees and clouds visible on the canvases. [FIG.8] In winter, he would create similar compositions on the frozen Bug, placing his paintings in various spots on the icebound surface of the river and use a VHS camera to film the relationships between them.

This educational aspect is important for the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, which since 2014 has been the custodian of the house in Szumin. Thanks to the efforts of the museum, the Hansens’ house has been put on the Iconic Houses Network, a list of the most important houses created in the 20th century, and the public has access to it for regularly organized guided tours. For the museum, it is vital to preserve the non-museum character of building. As a space built in accordance with the principles of Open Form, this architecture cannot function without change and openness to transformation and it demands the active presence of people. Nor will it allow itself to be treated as a traditional museum building. Therefore activities conducted in this space will be an important experiment for the museum: an attempt to preserve the principles of Open Form through conservation of this singular house and by opening it to the public.

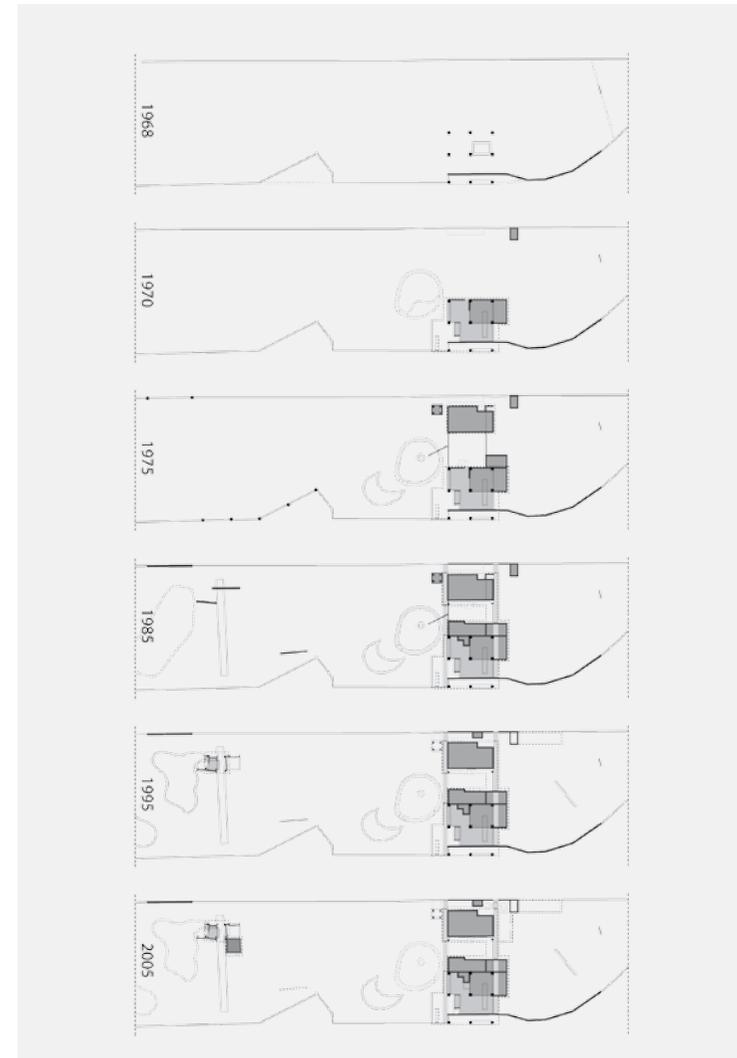


FIG. 9 SCHEME OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSE IN SZUMIN OVER TIME, RESEARCH AND DRAWING: MAŁGORZATA KUCIEWICZ, SIMONE DE IACOBIS AND TEAM, 2013