



“Tenderness, personalises everything to which it relates, making it possible to give it a voice, to give it the space and the time to come into existence, and to be expressed. [...] It appears wherever we take a close and careful look at another being, at something that is not our 'self'.”

Olga Tokarczuk



Marysia Lewandowska

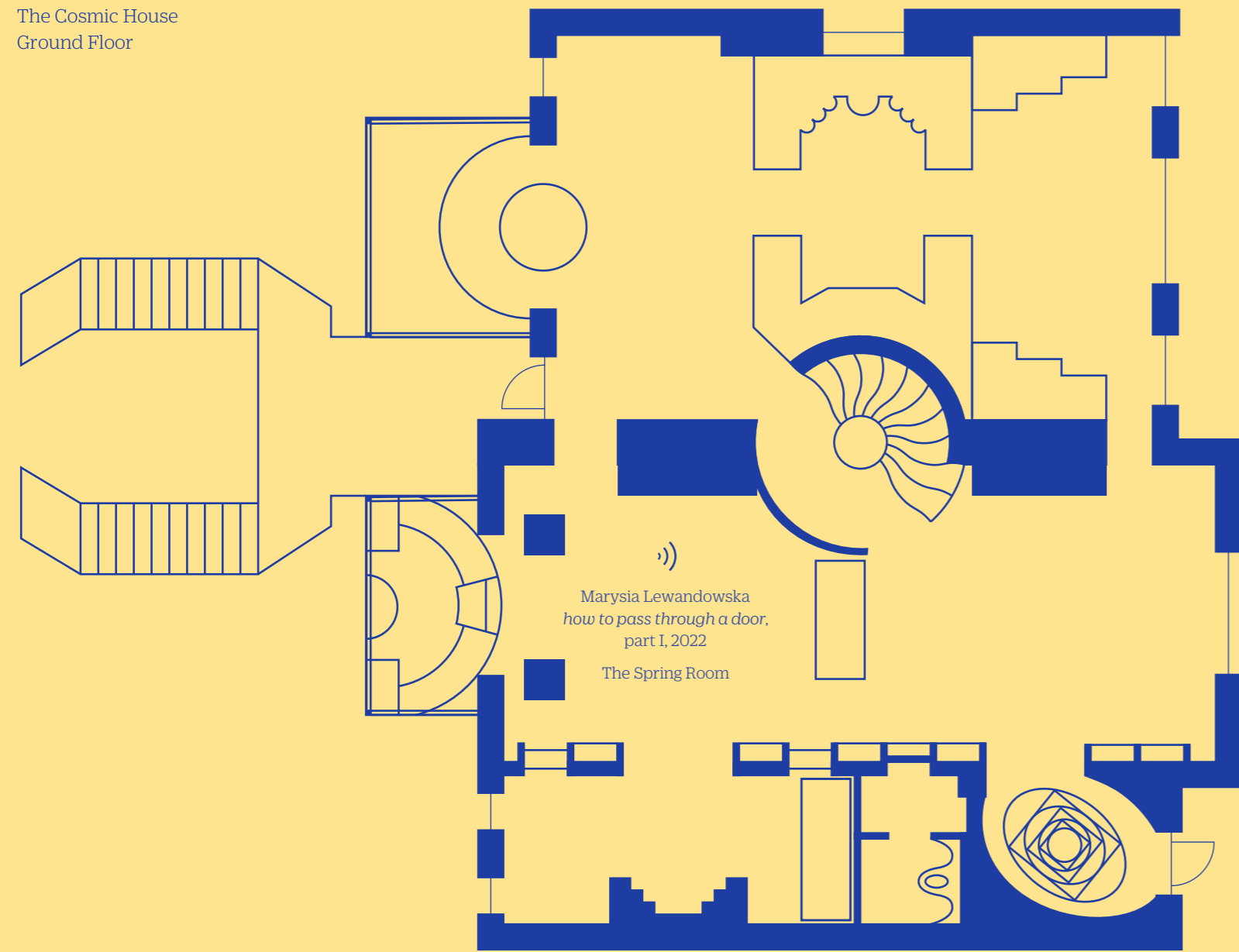
how to pass through a door

What is the role of chance in excavating the archive? Allowing randomness, slippage and closed eyes to act as a guide amongst tenuous threads that often don't lead anywhere. An intended rigour and search addiction collide with the architecture of storage — a cupboard-full, an unopened drawer, a cardboard box, an unidentified file, a sealed envelope, another notebook within a notebook, a loose page, audio cassettes, Super 8 reels, VHS tapes and DVDs. The analogue mixes with early digital formats, while material traces are transferred into digital codes. The meaningless and the meaningful objects desire to be identified and brought back to the level of speech.

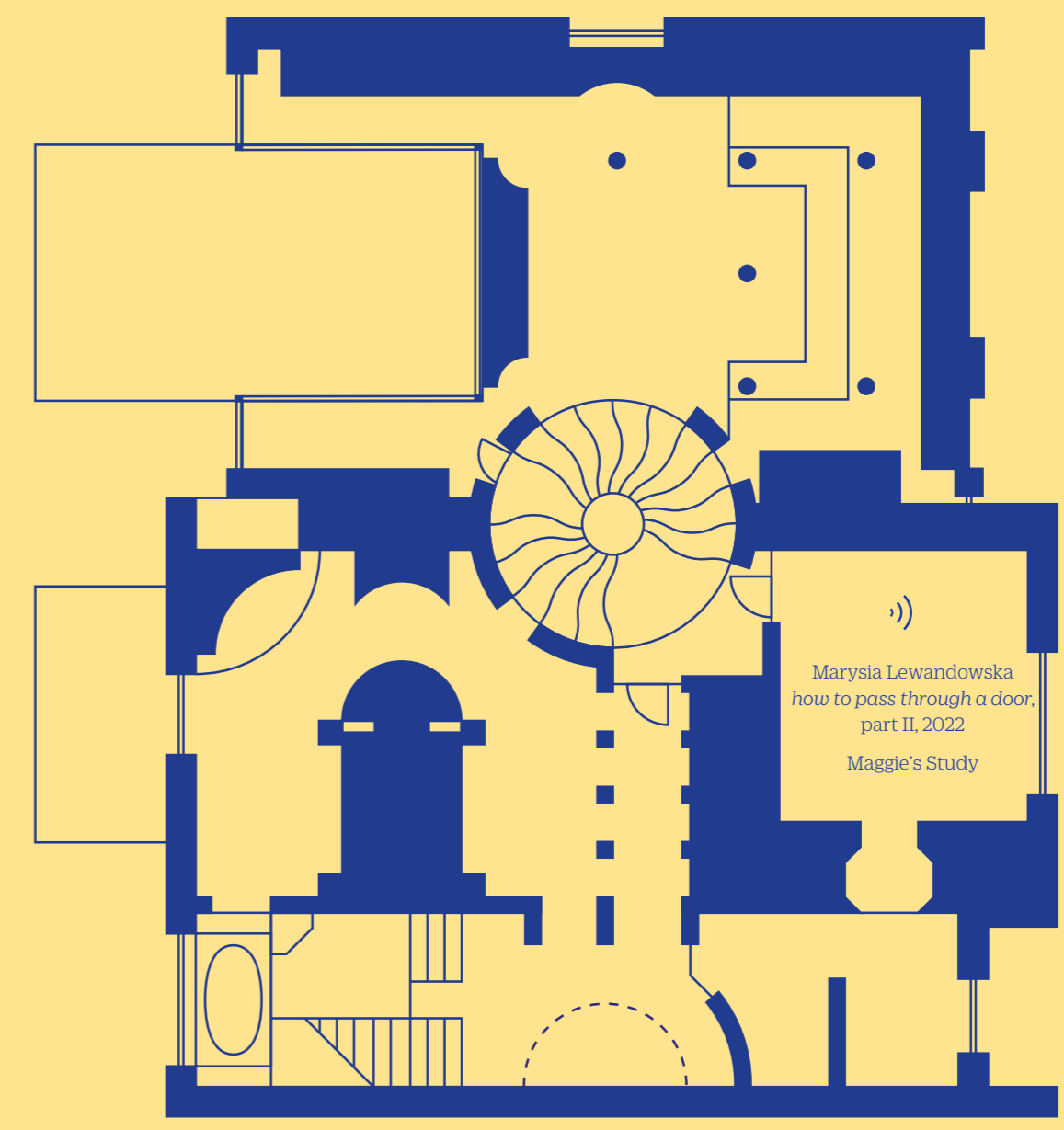
*how to pass through a door*¹ is a sound installation culminating a year-long research residency. It has been conceived as a tribute to Maggie Keswick Jencks' (1941 – 1995) little-known contribution to designing, managing and collaborating, between 1978 and 1983, with her husband Charles Jencks (1939 – 2019) on the transformation of their family home, now The Cosmic House. By placing the voice at the centre of the project, the house acts like a well-tempered instrument accelerating its most recent transition from a former home to the current museum status. As we lack recordings of conversations between its original inhabitants, or rather if these cannot be found for now, the project stages such exchanges through the act of listening. The voice can never be mistaken for another, once heard, it secures an immediate recognition, as it forever belongs to that person and beckons its owner into being. By exploring the existing notes and archival recordings, the project acknowledges Maggie Keswick's cultural presence as an intellectual while bringing to attention care and precision with which she approached all her endeavours. The installation consists of two new recordings, the first one has been strategically positioned in the Spring Room on the ground floor, the second occupies Maggie's Study on the upper level. Both are attempting to connect the imaginary with the actual in a quest to find a proper place where representations are embedded rather than imposed. What follows is a script of the Spring Room recording, conceived as an alternative introduction to The Cosmic House. The two sound waves account for the editing process tracking changes in the original recording in order to conceive a new soundtrack. The affective space of exchange between an artist and an important female figure fulfils my desire to re-inscribe her presence in the public realm.

¹ Thanks to Ella Finer for suggesting the title.

The Cosmic House
Ground Floor



The Cosmic House
1st Floor



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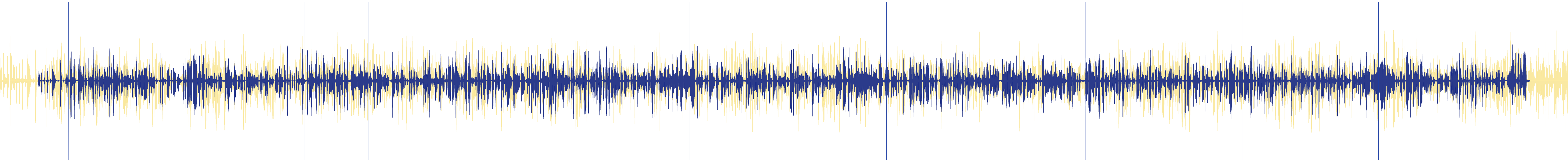
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— Marysia Lewandowska, *how to pass through a door*, part I. Duration 14:41
— Maggie Keswick Jencks, Lecture at the Dr Sun Yat-Sen Garden Society,
Vancouver, BC, 1987. Duration 1:17:55

Marysia Lewandowska
how to pass through a door, part I

[00:00:15]

Now, can you hear this? Is that working? Yes? Can you hear now? Could you raise your hands at the back if you cannot hear. You can. Is that any better? Yes? All right. Well, I will try it and see how we get on. Now, it seems to me that what the designer is doing is saying, you are in the middle of the city; you go through a sort of decompression chamber and you are beginning to slow down and leave behind you the noises and the mess of your everyday life outside; your boss has been yelling at you and you have got all those things to do, but you leave all that behind; and slowly, working your way slowly through, you begin to cool down and to calm down and to get more simple. You start concentrating on the things that are presented to you: the simplicity of patterns, the light and dark, the enclosure of a small space and extra height, the light coming in, from small to large, from dark to light, and so on. All those opposite patterns played against each other in a very subtle way.

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It is a place which is very physical and very sensuous, but it is also a place for the imagination and for the mind. It has a very profound view of the world built into the way in which it is made. Look at it! It is difficult to say it is natural, I must say. But you can say that it is interesting. If you look at it as a magical place, you can see that in these strange evenings when you get lights reflected off after a hot day, where it has been sultry and heavy and you get a steamy feeling, and part of this disappears. I think, it is walls that really define these different spaces. Obviously, it is walls, the beautiful white walls... We will see the corner here. You enter a series of zigzag galleries, which lead you through certain open

spaces and closed spaces and through another one and there are some walls and you pass through them, and you are led into a whole series of stages. Walls become a whole kind of language of their own. There is a labyrinth of different walls.

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I think walls are very important, really, for releasing the imagination. A wall that, in fact, encloses you in this white, hard enclosure can become an invitation to the mind, to transform that into something else. Standing, looking out over this great expanse, which perhaps is not much bigger than this room. Now, the artist is saying to you, look, this wall is there, white; we know it is there, but why do we not imagine that it is not really there. Let us imagine that the mind can leap over the wall and turn that wall into the white silk of the landscape painting that you look at. It represents the infinite space. You can see the repetition, the straight lines, the right angles, a kind of suggestion of the formality of life and how you have to regulate and organise in the right way and then of the spontaneous informality. But one would not want to take that too far, because all these things are so mixed up and one does not want to use a kind of Western idea of separating things too much from each other. The very simple idea that underlies all these philosophical thoughts is that the yin and yang are polarities of a whole. If you think of it as a pendulum swinging between the extreme of yin and it goes back to the extreme of yang, and then it comes back in again. Everything is in this constant state of motion. So you can spend a great deal of time going around, looking at the shapes, saying this is one and this is the other. And of course, as you move, they change and become something else.

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I think what is very noticeable in this type of work is that your eye has nowhere to rest. Do you see how your eye runs restlessly across these strange crunchy shapes, these peanut candy bits?

It is tremendously active. Your eyes are forever wandering restlessly, looking for a place of rest. Do you see how it moves and jerks? Human beings being so curious, what we cannot resist is the idea of not being able to see something around the corner. The architect is saying, right, now I want you to stop and concentrate; you are coming into a much more intimate and perhaps magical space. So you have to step up onto this, which is irregular, and you have to step over, so that the act of entry into this place becomes one person at a time having their own experience. The simple shadows, the white wall, very simple white with a nice edging to it here. They are simply done. It looks as if it is a kind of carpet spread out to welcome you. It is a very formal arrangement here. The white walls going round the edge, vary in height. Because, of course, if you have white walls all the way around a rectangle at the same height, you are going to feel as if you are in a box with a lid taken off. So, the height will vary at the sides, the shadows of the sun will make those beautiful wave patterns that repeat themselves.

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Now, one of the pleasures of this, of course, is to sit there and watch the sun moving on this and changing, but also to sit down and shrink yourself. What happens if you are this size and you walk through this? There is no reason why you could not sit there for two or three days at a time and just look at one little bit and have a whole series of wonderful experiences. All you need is little imagination, and you could be way out in the wild for weeks at a time. You have a rock presented to you like a piece of sculpture, but one can also see these things as shapes with powers of their own, not just as nature sculpture, but as a force of nature itself. But what you are really seeking is the wildness of rock, the fact that it is not made by man and yet has these wonderful... Look at the spiral in this! This is a tiny rock on a scholar's desk. Look at the way it spirals up, the beautiful shape of it, the strange, scenery tendon here, and the softness of some of the shapes in it. It has

got a wonderful dynamic quality to it. Then, as you walk through, you suddenly see a poem. You read it and you think that man who wrote this poem was standing in this place and looking at that same bit of water and he made a link with the past. So that as well as the complexity of the labyrinth of spaces, you get a sort of labyrinth of ideas and poetry and literature and references to things, which all become part of the richness and beauty.

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One can think of the Dao itself... As you know the word Dao just means the way, but the way of the Daoist was to try and become so tuned, so finally attuned into the rhythms of the natural world that you really became at one with them. Death itself became just another transformation. No more frightening than the sleep of a butterfly. Because in the very long run, even this absolutely hard rock will gradually be worn away and become dust and become part of that cycle of change that is the Dao. Keep that in your mind and now look at this and see what the designers try to do. It is to get the same sort of feeling, the same sort of flow. Even the shape of this... This foreground repeated in the shapes and movements of these rocks and the way they were placed together. You know, you have half an hour to see this and you rush pass, you take a photograph, rush, and next time... Well, these things are meant to last for a lifetime! Imagine on a hot day, when you get a lot of sun sparkling and it is reflected onto there, and there is reflection down here and the lights are reflected in between. Everything is moving and sparkling and shiny. You get black shadows and bright sun. Above you get the shadows from the leaves, and everything is moving. You get this tremendously active feeling. I like that, because when you walk up and you look up, you see that the window open. It looks as if someone might be standing there looking out and able to see the distance, and the fresh air might be blowing in through that window. Now the importance of that is those very gentle articulations and changes in height and level, in with very small things, are all cues, which I do not think you

particularly notice, but which have their effect on you gradually. They add up that great delicacy.

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What the architect is trying to do all the time is to make you totally lose all sense of space and time. You have no idea which direction you came in, or how many times you have been round in a circle, or how you are going to get out, or how long it has been. The whole thing becomes an experience of its own with its own time and its own space. And you lose all sense of the outside world. You look at a very beautiful shape, very simple, but this one is saying something else. This one is suggesting that you step into a much more intimate and interesting space. And then here is the entrance to the house itself, which is a very fine, beautiful up swooping, so that you feel as you go along this corridor as you enter a place. It is beginning to be a different sort of space. This very, very simplified version, in which you are walking into the unknown, into perhaps the expanses of the landscape painting. Nothing behind there, something around the corner.

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All the time, the architect is very carefully leading you through just by the use, for instance, of this one wall. If he had not done this little return here, we do not think you would have had the same feeling about turning the corner and going on. You will see what that very small little bit of detail does to the simplicity of the whole. If you take this away, you will lose a great deal. I think that you have to take it slowly. You get indigestion if you go too fast with these things. Inside there was also an intellectual part of it, and a very much profound relationship to the world as well. And then, when you get there, you realise that it is almost as if the designers were saying this is too beautiful to see it all the time. And they are beginning to restrain you and hold you back, so that you only have views at certain times.

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Very charmingly, the designer has put a mirror behind, so that you can see the back and have the effect of it from the other side. Then, when you get there, you find it is not a mirror. It is a hole cut in a wall. You have the idea that there is something delicious just back there. If you could just get through, there would be something wonderful behind it. Even if it is not there, maybe an illusion but anyway, the illusion of giving more space is often achieved by actually making the space smaller. There were many tricks. Faking is certainly not something new in this world. It is really a pun, a visual pun. You walk in and it suggests peace inside. This perhaps gives one the sense of arriving in the centre better. The great use of architecture, very clear here. The centre, the heart of the garden is always composed of rocks and water. But in order to get the feeling of water, the reflection, the smoothness, the surface quality, the designer has decided to take you in. In this case, you walk along like this and what you are looking at is the water. You take the memory of the water and have that water with you. It is water that makes the soft, the contemplative, the gentle, the passive. And rocks that are the hard bony structure of the earth that are balanced in it. You feel a pleasant and harmonious and simple and calming balance.

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Also, what I have not quite touched on is the celebration of the different seasons. Essentially you find that the different seasons – from the rich opulence of Summer, expressed with those wonderful leaves, the heavy sense of Summer, and the rich growth of trees, right through to the emptiness of Winter when you get these very pure and abstract effects, almost like calligraphy against this dark background – all those are celebrations of time and change and part of the meaning and use of very profound themes. And then, coming to a series of wonderful windows, with that thickness in the tiles, which means that unless you are absolutely straight on you cannot see the

garden inside. And even then, it is like a layering of veils, because you are constantly being lured in, pulled in by something that is just beyond the next wall. Maybe it is a sound. Or maybe it is the knob of something over the top. Maybe it is a little bit of green. Sometimes, it is the patterning of the shadows reflected on the ceiling. It is meant to be taken slowly. It is like eating a lot of thick, black chocolate with the spoon [laugh]. It is all too much.

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These very intense spaces, I think, are actually incredibly elegantly put together, if you really look at them architecturally. You pause and walk and find a new thing and pause again. There are lots and lots of experiences packed into a small space. If you think of it... Take away for a minute in your mind, just remove this, you are left with something lacking, a certain focus and attention and importance. Because again, with those beautiful views we just looked at, it is rather extraordinary that very often the designer cuts you off from the views, does not allow you to see it all the time, and takes your eye up into the blue skies, enclosing you and showing you only the way up as a possible outlet for the imagination. Thank you all very much for coming.

[00:14:41]

Marysia Lewandowska
how to pass through a door

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Archival sources: Maggie Keswick Jencks lecture recording, Alcan Lecture Series, Vancouver, 1987; MKJ notebook, 1982–1984.

Front and back cover: Maggie Keswick Jencks, China trip 1974. MKJ Archive, Portrack, Scotland. Photo: Claire Keswick. Courtesy Jencks Foundation.

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