

LEV
BRATSHENKO

21 GAMES
YOU CAN
PLAY

WITH A
COSMIC HOUSE

A CHOICE

You can hope for the best and pick a game from the list below or, if it's context before playtime, then eyes down, ignore everyone – head for the Sundial if you're in The Cosmic House – and start at page 29.

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THE COSMIC HOUSE

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* Some of these games must not be played at The Cosmic House for safety reasons. Look for alarm to appear on the faces of the staff and let it guide you. A few others are best enjoyed off-site or online. Please talk to The Cosmic House staff if in doubt about rules.

CAPTIONS GENERATED
BY REAL HUMANS

For one or more players.

Jencks thought that a visual form isn't 'entirely complete until it is given a caption', and his book *Daydream Houses of Los Angeles* is full of telegraphic and ambiguous captions such as 'Mission style lighthouse with Belvedere hello.', 'Ronchamp ski-jump with mushroom overtones.', 'Copper coated mansardic with corner happenings.', 'Topiary fascist.', 'Predatory mansard.'

Variation 1: This game can be played online. Players each choose one image from a selection of photographs of The Cosmic House. These photographs should be cropped so radically (or rotated, etc.) that they are not easy to recognise – or you can play with people who haven't been to the house. Caption your image in a way that is simultaneously enthusiastic and critical.

Variation 2: Search online for an image of 'worst house' or 'perfect house' plus the current year minus 20 (e.g. 2002). Pick one image and write a Jencksian caption. Do you think people from that year would agree or not? Why?

Variation variation: Write a second caption for the same image but pretend that you are a computer.

‘DANCE LIKE AN EGYPTIAN’
AKA ‘CHINESE SCHOLAR ROCK’

For one or more players.

This house makes a point of incorporating the kinds of non-Western visual references that Modernism largely ignored, and it does so with the casual confidence that is typical of unselfconscious cultural appropriation. It isn’t concerned with *how* ideas, motifs or objects actually came to exist in a wealthy London borough, it’s too busy playing with them.

It is full of references to imperial history, from the Egyptian study and Indian summer kitchen to the collection of Chinese scholar rocks. One (non-destructive) way of reacting to this is to give the house a soundtrack.

Using the plans in the guidebook, pick three or more rooms. Go to each room, sit down and listen to it. Maybe close your eyes or lie down on the floor. Look around, especially for objects or images that seem ‘foreign’. Think about what that means to you.

Now pick a music track to accompany this room, like a side salad. Perhaps it represents how you feel in it; maybe it’s music that fits the logic of its design and decoration; or could it be an answer to it, a way of pointing to what or whom the room leaves out?

Write down your playlist, identifying which track goes with what room. Leave it at the desk on your way out.

THE IDEAL HOUSE GUEST

For one or more players.

Umberto Eco is filed in the library under ‘MY IDEAL POST-MODERNISTS’, and he wrote about an ‘ideal reader’. You might imagine that Jencks was the ideal inhabitant of the house he designed, but I wonder if he’d agree. Either way, we’re talking about a special affinity between creator and receiver – the author and the reader, or the architect and the inhabitant.

This game should be played after taking a tour of the house. Find a comfortable corner and think about a real person (living or dead) whose life would *not* change at all after living in The Cosmic House for six months. Assume they are provided with everything they need to live comfortably – but they aren’t allowed to leave. Who is this person? Why would they feel so much at ease living here? Who is immune to The Cosmic House?

This is a game to be played in your head. It’s over when you’re bored of it.

UH OH, LOGORRHOEA

Best played alone.

According to the internet, uncontrollable punning can be a sign of both relentless intelligence and head trauma. In this game, rename all the rooms of The Cosmic House using the most cringy puns you can think of. The Solar stair: the Health and safety stair. The Jump room: the Bump room. Hunt the symbol: Look for a loo. The Winter room: Medium-density smorgasbord. The Spring room: Drink colonnade. The Dome of water: Chilly Borromini.

Bonus points for puns that suggest alternative readings or criticisms of the house.

JARGON-JOG

For one player on a treadmill. There is no treadmill in The Cosmic House.

Jencks liked to listen to recorded lectures while jogging around his bedroom.

To play this game, select a trigger word that annoys you because it is often meaningless, such as 'smart', 'net zero' or 'affordable'. Find a recent piece of architecture journalism online and use the text-to-speech function on your computer to read it out loud. Start the treadmill at your normal jogging speed.

Each time you hear the trigger word, increase the speed by 1 km/h. Stop when you must, catch your breath and write the author an email.

THE ARCHITECT AND THE CRITIC
AND THE CLEANER
AND THE MIGRANT AND THE ...

For three or more players.

Each player picks a character from this list: Architect, Cleaner, Critic, Migrant, Plumber, Construction Worker, Planner, Five-year-old Child, Arthritic Grandmother, Nurse. You can also make up your own. Now pick a room in the house, go there together and introduce yourselves as your characters.

The least shy player begins. They start telling a story that can be made up or based on something real. They must immediately capture everyone's attention with something extraordinary – or at least a tantalising mystery – that happened to them in *this very room*. Whenever they want to, they introduce the next character, ideally in an unexpected way ('That's when I realised I wasn't alone, the Planner had been hiding behind the curtain the entire time.').

As soon as you hear the name of your character, the story is yours. Give it a twist. This is a game of unreliable memories, so what really happened in this room? Did the first player get it right or have they conveniently left something out? Continue for as long as you like before introducing the next character.

The game ends when somebody says the word 'money'.

FAKE OR REAL?

For exactly two players.

This house is a built rebuke to Modernist and classical architectural virtues of 'honest' materials, which do not pretend to be something they are not. This concept doesn't really hold up but that hasn't made it less useful in architectural debates. Recently things have gotten even more complicated as architecture faces up to its complicity in social and climate crises, which gives notions of material honesty other positive attributes.

To play this game, one player points at something in the house (an object or piece of architecture) and asks, 'fake or real?'. The second player guesses. Then both try to figure out the right answer. Please touch gently.

When the guesser guesses wrong, switch roles. Continue playing until both of you are confused or annoyed.

Variation: guess which materials are known to be hazardous.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY GAME

For two or more players.

In this game, players race to complete everyday tasks in this house, which hides its domestic infrastructure. The first player sets a task, for example 'make your daughter an egg sandwich with the crusts cut off', and times how long it takes the other player to mime doing it.

Cooking time does not have to be realistic, but all the correct tools must be found and 'used', e.g. a plate, fork, frying pan, loaf of bread, etc. Items not found add an automatic penalty of ten minutes.

For the next stage, the roles reverse and the other player sets the task and times how long it takes the first to pretend to complete it.

The winner has the lowest time after The Cosmic House staff have told you to stop.

Variation: guess how long each task would take if you had servants.

EXPERTEASE

For two or more strangers.

Pick a room in the house. All players except one read the entry for that room in the guidebook. The player who hasn't read the entry takes the role of the Tour Guide. They must invent and perform a five-minute tour of the room, explaining design decisions, details such as colour and material choices, and telling stories about what the room was used for. Please include 'quotations' by Jencks.

If the Tour Guide accidentally says something that the other players know to be true, they must stop the tour immediately. Then they can pick another room and a new player to be the Tour Guide. Repeat until satisfied.

POST-IES

A quick game for three or more strangers.

Countless books have been written about Post-Modernism (a non-definition that describes something by referencing what it is not) as well as on its claims to break with modernist architectural thought, and whether it was really post- anything. And it wasn't quite, but let's go with it: in this game, each player renames themselves with a neologism that includes the prefix 'post'. For example 'Post-oxygen' or 'Mr Post-gender'.

Introduce yourself using your new name and explain why you chose to be *post* this particular concept. Why do you think we need to get past it? How is this concept holding you – or society – back?

This game works well played before other games. Keep your Post-its and use your new names the entire time that you're in the house. If someone steals your Post-it, they become you.

BAD NEIGHBOURS

For two or more strangers who felt a bit funny walking here.

Located in a city with one of the greatest concentrations of international wealth in the world – and in one of the most unequal local authorities, which brings together the poorest with the ultra-rich – from the outside, this house seems to fit in seamlessly in its immediate privileged context. Let's take these architectural appearances as an opportunity to treat the exterior as a camouflaged duck-hunting hut: judging from its exterior, The Cosmic House is unlikely to be suspected of harbouring troublemakers.

However, imagine that this house is actually the secret headquarters of a local revolutionary organisation. What are its goals? That's up to you – direct climate action or higher fat content in butter, whatever. What is the most outrageous protest or revolutionary act that you could organise in *this* neighbourhood? The suffragettes broke a lot of windows, you know.

Write a one-paragraph press release describing a successful action after the fact. Go and read it in the garden as loud as you can.

SABO-TOUR

For two players and an audience.

One player must be very familiar with *The Cosmic House*, this is the Accomplice and they lead the tour. The second player is the Sabo-tour Guide. They can either be another expert on the house or a great liar. The audience is told that they are going on a tour led by the two characters, but they are not told which player is which.

The Accomplice gives a tour of the house and explains its history accurately. The Sabo-tour Guide intervenes whenever they like: casting doubt on the narrative, pointing out inconsistencies, creating doubt by suggesting alternative possibilities, and generally sowing confusion. They demonstrate the potential for alternative interpretations to accumulate until the truth is lost or replaced with something that's more useful today.

Continue the tour until all the audience has given up and left.

MARGINALIA MARINADE

For one or more architecture nerds.

The books in the house are insect-free but crawling with Jencks' marginalia. Even the newspaper clippings are covered in diagrams and underlines; reading and writing seem to collide into the same activity.

This is a welcoming environment for other voices. Each nerd takes one bookmark and chooses an object, book or element in the house to comment on. Keep your comments brief and pointed: think of them as warning labels on dangerous products. This is an opportunity to caution the reader/visitor. What do they absolutely have to know about this thing?

Every night the bookmarks will be collected and archived. This game should be played for the next decade, until the house is fully marinated in new interpretations, or until there are no more architecture nerds, whichever happens first.

INSTANT CUP OF THEORY

For three or more architecture nerds and a cup of instant noodle soup.

This game begins and ends in the kitchen. Each nerd has two minutes (the time it takes to prepare a cup of instant noodle soup) to pick out three books from the library. Then – using *only* these books – each player gives a five-minute talk (the time it takes to eat a cup of instant noodle soup) explaining why every architect’s education should begin with these three books.

At the end of the game, the nerds decide whose book selection was the most convincing. The winner gets the soup.

LECTURE LECTURES

For two players and an audience. This game must be played in the Room of doubles.

The first player is the Lecturer. The second player is the Interpreter. The Lecturer gives a 20-minute illustrated talk that is simultaneously interpreted by the Interpreter, who interrupts every two or three sentences to explain, in the same language, what the Lecturer really means.

GENEROUS BURGLAR

For an institution.

Invite an artist to make or add an existing work to one room in the house or the garden, to enter into conversation with it. The new work does not need to camouflage itself, but it should feel at home somehow.

Once the work is installed, ask visitors to guess which artwork in the house or garden was just added. Visitors may ask questions but the institution is not obliged to answer honestly.

Collect a list of all the objects that visitors thought could be potential additions. Create a tour focusing on just these objects.

Variation: At the end of each year, the object with the most votes identifying it as the addition is destroyed.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY HOROSCOPE MACHINE

For one or more players.

The central staircase is an astrological spine running through the house from the darkest black hole tailbone at the bottom to the musical scholar stones and sky above. In this game, we think cosmologically to predict the architectural present.

Each player takes a bookmark and selects a book from the library (or another shelf in the house), placing their bookmark in the chosen book's place so it can be later re-shelved without upsetting the library order. Please do this – I've already put the Archivist through enough.

Next, each player subtracts their date of birth from the current day (e.g. it is 25 May, I was born on 23, so the result is 2. Were I born on 31, it would be -6). Then open the book at random and flip forwards (if positive) or backwards (if negative) this number of pages. Pick a paragraph from this page and rewrite it into a horoscope. Think about what you need to hear today, or what you think architects need to hear today.

Finally, each player stands on the step on the staircase that corresponds with their zodiac sign and reads their horoscope in an authoritative voice.

STIBRO (OUT OF CONTROL) MISSION HUMAN RESOURCES IN ELLIPTICAL ORBITS

For a brave institution.

Redraw the Jencks Foundation organisation chart as a ‘cosmic oval’ with the most senior role connected to the most junior or lowest-paid role. Rotate roles according to the celestial cycles. At each iteration, people shift roles to the next position in the organisation’s cycle of life: some people make small moves while others make big jumps, the cleaners become the curators, and so on and on and on.

Variation: select specific days in the year when a wild-card employee can be hired if they fit specific criteria. For example, if on 21 June there is someone wearing a hijab in the kitchen, they are automatically offered the job of director for six months.

MISSION (OUT OF CONTROL) TORLNOO

For one player in the house and four or more others on a video call.

The player in the house is the Rover. They are exploring this new world. They wear a video camera or hold their phone in front of them so the other players can see what the Rover sees.

A Cosmic House staff member selects an object or detail in the house for the Rover to find and communicates this goal to the players on the call – but not to the Rover.

The other players must guide the Rover to the goal using only non-verbal communication: hooting, growling, weeping, etc.

If the Rover doesn’t find the goal in 20 minutes, they get a biscuit and must lie in the sun for a while (finding sun may require leaving London).

FIND THE HIDDEN ROOM

For up to 15 patient players.

Find the hidden room in the house. The hidden room is found only when all the other players agree that it has been found.

These games came from the feeling of a body in various museums rather than from academic studies, which has created a translation problem that I've tried, unsuccessfully, to resolve by procrastination. The other problem is formal, since my interest is in creating situations or atmospheres for people to inhabit, and the linear and fixed essay isn't very useful for this. I'd rather be talking with you in The Cosmic House, wearing my bathrobe maybe, and sitting somewhere in which we both feel comfortable and where the light is right.

I'd start out by saying something like: museums are interesting places to think about human behaviour. A museum is a particularly suggestive or strong environment, though this suggestion is often expressed in the absence of suggestiveness, in superficially characterless white cubes, for example. Houses are also strong environments. Like museums, they come

with sets of expectations, rules and roles. In any house, but especially in the house in which you are standing, a cosmic one – a house with a name and many attitudes – the suggestions for your behaviour are easy to notice. Some of them are even written on signs that tell you what to (not) do. You can reject or accept them – like putting on a mask, assuming a role and trying on a different perspective. Situations that slip between the ordinary (a house) and the odd (this house) can be liberating; they can make us question some things we otherwise assume to be normal.

All games have their specific histories and many once had agendas too, a purposefulness that can seem incongruous, at first, with the idea of play. Some are so pretentious and intellectual, like a ‘seminar’, that it sounds wrong to call them games at all. If you abstract such familiar forms and break them down into their basic objectives and rules, you see how truly arbitrary they are and how easily they could be organised in other ways. What could be a good way to think in public about some problem or a question? How many people should be involved? What kind of relation should they be in – hierarchical, flat, fixed or free? Should the rules of the game be implied or announced? Can they change? Are they improvised or imposed? An important factor in the answers to these questions is the character of the game’s ‘host’, which like the word ‘game’ I use quite loosely. A host can be a person or

a place, like this house. A house that is many things: a live-in manifesto, a spatial argument spiced with architectural elements and objects. Another, equally important factor, is the attitude of the ‘player’. There is a lot in this house for interpretation and misinterpretation; it’s also just a fancy house and you can try to react to its house-ness as normally as possible. In the first attitude you’d be acting like a curator and in the second like a child.

The games in this booklet were created through conversations with the house and the people in it during my short live-in residency. How much should these new games extend ideas already present in the house – for example, cosmologies; polyphonous references; material, architectural and linguistic jokes; mythologies; marginalia; puns; Post-Modernism – and how much should they introduce new ones or contradict what the house is ‘saying’?

Houses shape the behaviour of their inhabitants in concentric circles of decreasing intimacy: the family first, then guests and relatives, and sometimes strangers, i.e. the public. So opening a house to the public is, first of all, confusing. The visitor rightly wonders, ‘Is this for me?’ ‘Am I allowed in here?’ Signage helps, but it’s only needed to counteract the deceptively familiar domestic interior and to answer the question: ‘Am I in a house or not?’

Nobody, of course, arrives at The Cosmic House and is surprised to find a museum. Expectations are set long before, so this

ambiguity, like a tickle of domesticity, can only start after you arrive, when the house-ness of the house has had time to work on you. And I suspect that for many visitors the feeling never arrives at all, because they aren't the kind of people who try to eat or sleep in museums. But once you cross some personal limit then even banal activities can take on new importance.

You notice your body differently as a visitor to a museum than when you live in one, even for a few days. Fumbling with double door handles because I couldn't remember which one was real, my feet unfamiliar with how many steps to expect in the dark, stumbling every time I entered the library with its little carpeted step were constant reminders that my body did not know this place. 'How much longer until I start to feel comfortable here? And what about others?' I wondered what kinds of bodies have been welcomed here. What shapes and colours? What kinds of food have been cooked in this kitchen, and by whom?

Particularly when I was alone at night I had the unsettling feeling that I didn't know how I was supposed to be. The house has familiar parts to other houses, but I'm supposed to treat it differently. I even signed papers to that effect. As a guest bumping around sleepily inside a historical object I was terrified of leaving signs of my presence. A single hair left in the sink was ghastly.

Toast crumbs took on some terrible new aspects like evidence of a crime. I was unable to leave any room without first checking it for signs that I had been there and obsessively removing any that I found. I was constantly trying to erase myself, to be like a ghost.

Except in 'my' room – nanny Ann's bedroom, on the top floor – where I felt the most at home. My clothing and bags and rubbish, which were so inappropriate everywhere else, felt reassuring in there. I even enjoyed it when visitors tried to come in on the days when the house was open to the public, because I could greet them from bed. Surprise! But then, why can't someone live in a museum?

As a little child in the Soviet Union, I remember the sullen grannies who glared from the corners of museum rooms. I think they could have been prompted to speak, but nobody seemed to think this was a good idea, so they weren't there to interpret the art. And they were not armed, not obviously, so their security responsibilities were light. Perhaps putting them in rusty chairs in every room of the Hermitage museum prevented them from forming vigilante morality gangs in the streets, but I think they were there to set the *tone*. To shush teenagers giggling at Renaissance flesh. To make sure that you acted and felt the way you were supposed to in the presence of serious art.

You've probably experienced other kinds of coercion – this depends a lot on your race

and gender – designed to socialise you into knowing how to behave in a museum. The no-talking, no-touching, no-sitting, no-playing traditional rules of the museum game are few and obvious. They exist to enforce a regime of sight, a disembodied looking that we used to think was the best or only way of appreciating art and artefacts. And because museums don't exist to make money – unlike the majority of spaces in our impoverished world – they stand out as thresholds, like islands in the sea of 'normal' capitalist behaviour whose rules express different values.

It's possible to look at museums in general and easy to look at The Cosmic House in particular as sets of rules – suggestive environments – that were set arbitrarily by relatively few people – or maybe just one family! But nobody would be hurt if the rules of a museum suddenly changed, which makes them some of the best places we have for play. You could say that every museum is also a theatre, except it's even better, because the people there don't know that it is a theatre and there is awesome potential in this confusion. We can use The Cosmic House as theatrical sets, props and scenarios; as a place to question rules by using rules.

I read several books while I was here. Some I looked for and others the house-host brought to me, for example David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* on a shelf in my bedroom. Batchelor writes that the minimalist home

'shows no exchanges with the outside world and the doubt and the dirt that goes with that'. In The Cosmic House the exchanges appear to be everywhere. Dirt and doubt: even the toilets are playful, once you find them. And the hidden cupboards and kitchen appliances seem less like they're ashamed and more like they are playing hide-and-seek with you. In this anti-minimalist manifesto, the apparently overcomplicated is quite simple and sometimes ridiculous; the environment is intensely ordered and disordered at the same time (and this is *after* its museumification).

Is carefully curated abundance just another kind of control, one that looks like omnivorous curiosity? Is it really more open than 'closed' minimalism? It is certainly easier to engage with an anti-minimalist house; there is so much more conceptual surface area for association and reaction, like a ribbed condom. And there is some heavy ambiguity lying around too. A museum house (house museum?) can't, by definition, be used for the domestic activities it was designed for (was it?). Instead, today, it is supposed to be used, played with, by you.

Games can, but don't have to, be played as if they exist apart from the rotten world. They can reflect the rot back to us in helpful ways. You should take this pamphlet like a sandwich; something left in embarrassment on a culinary school prep table, uncorrectable

but still technically food: thoughts about games and rules, and games created for The Cosmic House and in the house and because of the house. They are written like recipes with ingredients and instructions, and you can read them as evidence for the soundness of these claims about games (the baloney in the sandwich?). But they might just be for fun. I hope it won't be clear which is which.

** As part of its inaugural programme 'Architistics: Architecture's Linguistics' (2021/22), the Jencks Foundation hosted Lev Bratishenko as a live-in resident at The Cosmic House. In response to the polyphonic potentials of curatorial interpretations of the newly inaugurated house museum, Lev's week-long residency focused on inventing new public-event formats specific to The Cosmic House and Charles Jencks' archive and library – an environment loaded with ideas and primed for interventions and interpretations. This pamphlet is the result.

Lev Bratishenko (b. 1984, Moscow) is a writer and curator. His curatorial inventions include the *Come and Forget* (2017) series proposing benevolent acts of mass amnesia, and *How to*, a workshop that brings strangers together to produce interventions in architectural culture: *How to: not make an architecture magazine* (2018); *How to: disturb the public* (2019); *How to: reward and punish* (2020); *How to: not become a 'developer'* (2022); *How to: do no harm* (2022); *How to: mind the moon* (2023). He was inaugural Curator Public at the Canadian Centre of Architecture (CCA) in Montreal and has been contributing to CCA exhibitions, publications and online projects since 2007, including curating *The object is not online* (2010) and co-editing *It's All Happening So Fast: A Counter-History of the Modern Canadian Environment* (2016). He regularly writes on architecture, classical music and opera, and he also writes fiction. Sometimes the two become confused.

21 games you can play with a cosmic house

is published by the Jencks Foundation

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A FRIENDLY BLANK PAGE
FOR GAMES THAT NEED ONE

