




# Architectural Space of Ideas in the Author's Structures Presented at the Fire Painted Images Art Festival: A Case Study

Agnieszka Kurkowska

Gdańsk University of Technology

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1380-4628>

## Abstract

The article is aimed to discuss the place of architecture in the space of ideas. The present work discusses a specific place, the Zaspas housing estate in Gdańsk, and refers to a specific person, namely, the author of artistic installations temporarily exhibited in the Zaspas housing estate. Also, the wider context of the specific situations in which the exhibitions were displayed is presented. The article attempts to answer the question of the importance of the quality of dwelling in the context of the quality of life of city dwellers. The work focuses on the subjective quality of life, identified most often with the feeling of satisfaction with life in its various aspects and with mental well-being. The quality of living, in turn, may be defined as satisfaction with the structure and functioning of the house and its commonly shared surroundings that constitutes the context of such living. The installations exhibited in the Zaspas estate discussed in the following article represent a potential area for activities with which to change the landscape and/or architectural elements of housing estates that refer to the living space. The essence of the research lies in the analysis of the place architecture occupies in a wider context of the intangible spaces. Homes can be perceived in a phenomenological way. In this case, the spaces of the house are inside us, just as we are inside them (Bachelard, 1994).

## Keywords

architectural space of ideas, intentional design, housing estate

## Place of Architecture in the Space of Ideas

The usefulness of the city in the 21st century is perceived on different levels and understood in a variety of ways, depending on the individual understanding of the role of architecture. Apart from the objective physicality, which is currently characterised by various deficiencies (such as lack of an individually shaped space, traditional values, or identification with the surrounding region), there exists a sphere of mental influence that transfers us to intangible spaces (understood here as spaces that go beyond the tangible physicality and geometricity of architectural objects, by means of which they may transfer their users into the sphere of sensations and reflection). These spaces include the space of ideas and the space of meetings. The space of ideas may be understood as not yet a constructed building but one for the potential shapes, form, and a character of which there already are many premises. This concept forms a special category that belongs to the field of architecture, namely, a category that requires imagination and combining facts with elements resulting from having experienced ideas in the forms that preceded the actual building object. This category calls for a phenomenological insight, together with its non-measurable aspects, to fully grasp the issue under study (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, pp. 55, 77). Specific deficiencies, including the lack of individually-shaped space, traditional values, or identification with the surrounding region, are identified in areas built up with large-panel housing estates. Such residential areas represent a major sociological and urban challenge in terms of necessary revitalisation. At the same time, they constitute a potential space for activities with which to strengthen the local community in the sphere of value.

The architectural space of an idea may be understood as the sphere where intention, perceptions, and leading design concepts are conveyed by the architect to the recipients through the erected structure (for more details, cf. Kurkowska, 2016). This can be done by means of a recording, an image, story, or an event, where the said structures constitute a tool of communication. It should also be noted that autonomy constitutes an important distinguishing feature of the forms that comprise the idea of target architectural objects. As defined by Gabriela Świtek, “the model’s independence from the process of designing an architectural work which culminates in the realisation of a work on a real scale, possible to live or be used” (2013, p. 424, trans. by the author). Other important features include the synthesis of the form and the conventionality of the material. These, however, may prove difficult to achieve in the case of a building structure. As far as they constitute tangible structures, material objects are a specific medium that participates in a complex process of reconciling their physical presence with the intangible sphere. It is important



to note that a specific building may not be an implemented one. On the contrary, it is possible to use other forms of architectural or artistic structures that include architecture as their subject matter. The creator may present initial elements of the design process, or focus only on an outline of ideas that precede the actual design and implementation stages. In this way, the architect may invite recipients to the space of ideas by conveying certain elements that exert an impact on the understanding and experiencing of architecture and its surroundings. These outcomes may provide purpose to the abovementioned activities and constitute specific objectives related to a particular thematic activity. Such a way of understanding space imbues the city with particular values required for a beneficial dwelling (habitation that is motivating and inspiring, free of shortages, acknowledging its context and people's individuality). Elements of such living conditions include design based on traditional forms, green areas, promoting native plants. Particular deficiencies, such as lack of intimacy, insufficient differentiation of architectural forms or interiors are prevalent in housing areas constructed of large-panel housing estates, commonly known as tower-block housing estates. These layouts of building development pose a major sociological and urban challenge. However, they also are a potential space for the activities aimed at modifications to the landscape or architectural elements of housing estates, and of actions indicating potential directions for these changes to be introduced. In the case of such estates, it is possible to initiate overcoming of the difficulty of revitalisation, point to the areas of scarcity, set guidelines for feasible solutions, strengthen people's sense of belonging to a given habitat. Such activities may focus upon the value of dwelling, understood as living, in line with a sense of one's identification with the place, understood in a phenomenological way. According to Gaston Bachelard, a place means more than the architectural aspect of a shelter. As he states, a place perceived as a home means that the spaces of the house are inside us, just as we are inside them (Bachelard, 1961). The house is a privileged entity from the point of view of a phenomenological study of the intimate values of its space (Bachelard, 1994). It can also provide a starting point for artistic activities whose aim is to touch the core and sense of inhabitation. According to Bachelard (1994), the house may be understood as a phenomenon in which all particular values are integrated into one fundamental one, both in terms of unity and complexity. This approach can, thus, provide a sprinboard for the analysis of values attributed to the house. Bechelard proposed that we might perhaps be able to isolate an intimate, precise essence of a house by transcending our memories of our previous houses beyond our dream houses. Perhaps, if we know what this essence consists of, we could then make its spirit



permeate different objects in which we would try to place it by means of forming these elements in certain ways.

Revalorisation of the tower-block housing estates may require activities in the space of art, including intentional projects. The intentional nature of those artistic endeavours is embedded in the space of ideas. They are also based on conveying the message between the designer and recipients. The participants experience strong impressions with regards to the artistic projects familiarising themselves with spatial and multimedia content. The architect's message is contained in spatial presentations and received by the participation of recipients in the meeting space in which the idea space is located. All the instances presented in the present article offer examples of "place making" creation and can be treated as a public art, as they provide an element of identification with the place and form relations between the recipient and the objects. Moreover, recipients are treated as participants, which helps to build an urban identity. The aim of the Fire Painted Images project was to emphasise the relationship between the quality of living and the subjective quality of life of the inhabitants. The installations implemented as part of the project were intended as a cognitive inspiration and a stimulus to act towards improving individual living conditions. The assumption of the installations was also to provoke a wider social reflection on the issues raised. It was also possible to focus the attention of recipients not only on the form of the house, its organisation, and equipment, but also on the regional context and specific attributes of the place, such as the location of the aforementioned housing estate in the area of Trójmiejski Park Krajobrazowy, Kashubia and the Polish middle seaside of the Baltic Sea. The projects were supposed to be characterised not only by cognitive values (deepening of knowledge), but also utilitarian ones – specific indications of possible changes ("houses in the clouds"), the motivation to act by reminding the role that the house plays in the life of the resident.

It must be remembered that the modern city is culturally varied: filled with attitudes and needs. It should offer a chance for these needs to be fulfilled. As noted by Joseph Rykwert (2013), the city should have many faces and refer to multiple senses. The role of art introduced to the public space is precisely to provide a multisensory dialogue between the artist and the recipient, it is the awakening of reflection. It asks questions to which we should seek answers within ourselves, it leads to the strengthening of identification, gives a hint for a better understanding of the conditions between the inhabited places. Furthermore, it provides an indication of the values that are individually selected and introduced to our homes, they will make them closer to their inhabitants.

The activities within the Fire Painted Images project are based on the thesis that, because of its intentional content, a model or sketch is an ar-



chitectural object equal in terms of importance to a building (Świtek, 2013, p. 462). In areas where investments may be difficult to implement physically, temporary architectural structures may constitute a form of social activation as well as provide a surplus of exceptional cultural value to the space. Despite their temporariness, purposefulness understood as meeting particular needs through these constructions is achieved. The content and experience gained in such houses may remain in the minds of the residents (in their memories), thus influencing their sense of good habitation. Once the physical impact of artistic objects in the meeting space has ceased, the ideas pass to exist in nonphysical reality. Recalled from memory, they can inspire; they stimulate subsequent reflections and actions. Abstraction meets the reality in the everyday experience of dwelling. This is how architecture may fulfil its role in the special category of architecture, namely, the space of ideas (not referring to an implemented building yet, but to one characterised by many premises of its potential shape, form, and atmosphere). This category requires imagination and engaging experience of the prior concepts, as well as of previously implemented structures of the building object. Liberated intention affects the permanent elements of the physical environment with its strong connotations. Abstraction meets the reality in the everyday experience of habitation.

As examples, intentional structures (projects based on a specific, important meaning, including sketches, drawings, paintings, sculptures) created as part of the Fire Painted Images art festival organised by Gdański Archipelag Kultury are presented in the article. The first project entitled *Identity Capsules (Kapsuły tożsamości, 2018)* shows the physical and nonphysical layers of the house, both its concept and image, inside ourselves. The second project entitled *Home into Clouds (Domem w chmury, 2019)* refers to the archetypical shelter and to the human need to escape from inconvenience. The values represented by the archetype of a home in our everyday lives may be identified as the feeling of being rooted, a sense of belonging to a group or a region, and being a part of a local society. Those impressions may be located in-between art and architecture. The intentionality of action is supplemented with an account of ideas and spatial creation in the shape of an artwork, which is not only based on the presented form, but also carries a message, an idea. The context of the tower-block housing estate is related to a specific human dwelling, one that provides a place for living, but may also generate a certain dose of anxiety and inconvenience from which social problems arise. This understanding of tower-block housing estates offers an important reference for the author's work. This is how the usefulness of the modern city may be discovered: its difficult context may trigger activities that add new and lost value. It may inspire and activate both designers, artists, and the local community.



The architectural space of ideas exists not only in architectural or urban design, but it also appears in artistic, participatory, and educational activities. By participating in such activities, recipients may strengthen or broaden the range of values they have experienced so far, especially those related to the quality of habitation. During this participation, the partakers co-experience a specific event or co-experience specific structures in a common meeting space. The experience constitutes somehow a confrontation with a structure that initiates a transition to another sphere of experience, and it is an important stage for them to be included in the space of ideas. The sensory involvement stimulates the recipients makes them more sensitised to the content to come. The meeting – in a sense a way of experiencing architecture by the individual reception – is understood as the act of coming in contact with the space of an actual architectural structure or of its conceptual outline. Moreover, participation in an artistic event arranged especially for the purpose of creating a space of meeting may be perceived as an abstract meeting. Social interactions that accompany the community aspect of the meeting strengthen the motivation to understand the content.

---

**space of ideas (creation).... architectural structure (physical implementation).... meeting space – availability of the space of ideas (reception)**

---

Diagram 1

*Reception of architectural structure*

Typically (as illustrated by Diagram 1), an architect builds a physical architectural structure. It is a permanent (in accordance with its actual physical existence) object in physical reality. In this case, the space of ideas accompanies the initial stage of the design process. Thus, after erecting of the structure, it is possible to participate by somehow experiencing the structure in the space of a physical encounter with it. These elements are permanent in the process of communication while designing and implementation of architectural structures is conducted. The implemented structures can be revisited in the meeting space or recalled from memory. Thus, the space of ideas, which is the place we want to return to, can be generated in our imagination, whenever needed. This guarantees the constant presence of the structure within the range of the recipient's experience.

In the case of intentional projects that constitute part of temporary events (such as the festival in Zaspá), a different situation transpires. A conceptual architectural structure that creates the content of the message, such as an architectural sculpture, or a picture, a graphic is available to the audience only during an exhibition or an event (in this case, during



a single evening). Therefore, the meeting stage is of limited and unique nature. It is only possible to recall the event by means of memory. This makes it very difficult to access the space of ideas. However, the timeliness of this situation, known to its participants, causes them to focus on a unique single experience. This may make the possible benefits of this fact as significant as it would be in the case of a temporary reception of a long-term exposure. It seems that timeliness, and more specifically the short duration of existence, does not directly affect the advisability of this type of action, other than limiting the extent and time of impact.

Undoubtedly, art plays an important role in the public space of the modern city, especially in its cultural areas, as it diversifies existing spaces by introducing new forms, colours, sounds, smells, materials, and textures into them. In this case, the diversity arises from using forms that originate from local circumstances and are rooted in the tradition and history of surrounding areas. That is why the objects of art located within a public space could enrich a city, or rather a specific district, by adding a new, symbolic layer.

Introduction of objects of art can also be taken into consideration as a part of the “placemaking” concept.<sup>1</sup> Especially when it concerns the art of the festival as a whole, including the fact that the event is of annual character, and is recognisable in the immediate vicinity of the space and the entire region. Some theorists (e.g., Lacy, 1995) distinguish public art as a category of art in a public space, determined by the relations of contexts that connect it with a public space. Oftentimes, the chosen elements of existing historical, social, architectural, and urban realities become more important than the others. Moreover, art in public space has a significant impact on the symbolic sphere, it is an element of identification with the place and helps to build urban identity. This usually happens in the case of art that befits the existing context of a place (the site-specific art).<sup>2</sup> Such artworks are related to a given space, describe it, or are testimony to events, people, or local narratives related to that area.

The events discussed in the article below are directed towards a special aim and related to the annual Fire Painted Images (Polish *Obrazy Ogniem Malowane*) art festival. The aim is to contribute to the revitalisation of the Gdańsk Zaspą housing estate by participating in artistic activities. The

---

<sup>1</sup> The concept relates “small steps method” as in “manifest” of the Project for Public Space, with attention to the identity aspect of the place which refers to the feelings and needs of residents. This concept relies on the belief that a given place is to serve people, and not the other way around, and therefore it should respond to the needs of users as much as possible.

<sup>2</sup> Online at: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/glossary-terms/site-specific-art> (access date: 14.01.2021).



estate was established in the 1970s and includes overscaled multifamily buildings. The intentional nature of the projects presented by the author of the present article,<sup>3</sup> along with the subject matter, place the art-related activities in an architectural space of ideas based on nonverbal communication between the creator and the recipient. The recipient may experience transient impressions. However, they may also familiarise themselves with the spatial and multimedia content of the presentations while participating in the meeting space where the course of the events takes place.

The article attempts to answer the question regarding the importance of the quality of living in the context of the quality of life of city dwellers. The work focuses on the subjective quality of life, identified most often with being content with one's life in all of its aspects, including mental wellbeing. However, the quality of living can be defined as satisfaction with the structure and functioning of the house and the common space surrounding it that constitutes the context of this living. According to Neil Leach (2000) involvement in the process of aestheticisation is an inevitable consequence of practicing the profession of architect. Architects are expected to see the world in terms of specific representations, such as projections, sections, elevations, and perspectives. The foregoing is the reason why their world is the one of images (Leach, 2000, pp. 9–10). While observing everyday practice, in which obtaining a superficial image seems the ultimate goal, it is difficult to disagree with Leach's concern. More so, the search for an expression of architectural concepts seems to be a trail that allows us to proceed to nonvisual areas, as it moves closer to the art-related abstraction and to reflections closer to poetry. It could be the possible direction for expanding the field of architectural influence. Especially since, as stated by Leach (2000), the consequences of aestheticisation (when aesthetic tendencies are not based on fixed axiological patterns,<sup>4</sup> but rather are simplified to embellishment and styling (Welsh, 1997, p. 20)) are serious. Privileging the image has led to an impoverished understanding of the built environment, turning the social space into a fetishised abstraction. The space of life experience has been reduced to a codified system of meanings. Due to the increased emphasis on visual perception, a corresponding reduction has followed in the participation of other forms of sensory perception (Leach, 2000, p. 10).

---

<sup>3</sup> All of the projects were created by the author, but in the cases of the chosen ones, additional cooperation took place or some participants joined in the author's workshop, which in a sense made them a part of the project.

<sup>4</sup> Aestheticisation not only amounts to the aforementioned dangers, but also presents an opportunity for free artistic activities from the current cultural canons, which allows art to become a component of life.





## The Context

We dwell in houses, housing estates, villages, and towns. Within these various events take place, our lives go on. The specific situation described in the present article occurs in the Zaspas housing estate, Gdańsk, during the successive editions of the Fire Painted Images art festival.<sup>5</sup> Activities in the nearest surroundings or slightly farther from the actual place of residence may relate directly or indirectly to the complex process of dwelling, one which we constantly participate in. It is the author's assumption that these activities may also influence the sense of local and regional, as well as social identity, which is necessary for a good dwelling.

It is important to know the broader context, cultural background, and environmental conditions of the areas one's inhabits. Moreover, by co-creating inhabited spaces and participating in events, may lead to being self-actualised as a resident. Such an effect would result from the sense of purposeful living in a specific place. As Augustyn Bańka notes, "in their living space, a person should understand its logic, the purpose of their actions and existence" (Bańka, 1997, trans. by the author).



Photo 1

*The Zaspas housing estate in Gdańsk*

---

<sup>5</sup> Online at: <https://gak.gda.pl/flagowe-wydarzenia/> (access date: 16.01.2021).

Zaspa is a district of Gdańsk mostly filled with housing estates (Photo 1), chiefly designed and built in the 1970s. These estates generally consist of ten-storey, multifamily residential buildings assembled by utilising a prefabricated building technology. The size of the flats, their furnishings, and the entire infrastructure and technical parameters complied to the standards of the time (Chomańkowska, 2018, pp. 49–56). However, they diverge from the current standards in variety of ways. This is the reason why these estates, in many aspects, are negatively assessed as a place of residence for the contemporary inhabitants of Gdańsk (Basista, 2001; Chmielewski & Mirecka, 2007). The economic realities dictate the continued existence of these structures, while convenient communication routes and sufficient provision of services seem to be satisfactory in terms of meeting everyday needs of inhabitants. Despite the on-going renovations and modernisations, little significant improvement has been made to the quality of dwellings. The density of the built-up space, which modern building developments have significantly added to, leads to a sense of crowding. People experience the lack of intimacy and differentiation in terms of architectural forms or interiors (see: Graham, 2016). However, the local community is active in many fields, including culture and art.

An institution known as *Plama* Gdański Archipelag Kultury [Plama Gdańsk Archipelago of Culture] is one of the places where activity within these categories is undertaken and remains the main animator in this area (associated with analogous Gdańsk institutions in Gdańsk Archipelago of Culture [Gdański Archipelag Kultury]). Since 1993, *Plama* has been initiating and organising the aforementioned festival on a yearly basis. The diverse themes featured in the festival are linked by the motifs of fire and light by hosting both established artists and amateurs. The event is held during a single evening in early autumn and visited by hundreds of spectators from Zaspa and adjacent areas. The festival has become a popular Trójmiasto (encompassing the cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot) cultural and artistic event. Prefabricated structures from the 1970s constitute the formal context of the event, while a group of initiators from *Plama*, along with local residents and visiting artists, create the social context. Owing to the variety of presentations hosted, the art festival awakens interest among the broadly understood community of the city.

## The Author's Structures Presented at the Fire Painted Images Art Festival: A Case Study

The proposed forms could aid identification with inhabited places, and to cater to the needs of a wider group of recipients (not only those who



inhabit this very place). Art aims to diversify, tame, and help to individualise the anonymous space by breaking the constant artificial repetition of forms and patterns and providing other formal proposals enriched with the context.

In a public space, art often accompanies the revitalisation of places in the city. This is the case, for example, with murals and contribution of such forms of art to the renewal of residential areas. In Lyon, the Cité de la Création group refer in their large-scale works to the artistic and cultural heritage of the city. In Gdańsk, a similar example is the Monumental Painting Collection in the Zaspas estate. The murals are created on the walls of the gable walls of blocks of flats. Thus symbolic elements are introduced that establish a dialogue with recipients. Moreover, the presence of murals differentiates the homogeneous, monotonous architectural tissue of the housing estate.

Objects of art located in the public space contribute to the atmosphere of the city and the urban environment, thus increasing the aesthetic value of the area.<sup>6</sup> They inspire and motivate recipients (see: the assumptions of “placemaking” concept defined as “making places, not empty spaces” and remaking a place for the city regeneration). The intentional projects presented in the present article include works of art by the author (i.e., graphics, paintings, sculptures, spatial installations, and objects transferred directly from the physical world). These result from experimenting with space, physical forms, and nonphysical values, thus they deal with the challenge of communication within the real space of ideas, which usually is the purpose of art. These projects could be treated as pieces of site-specific artwork, because of their cultural context and the content referring to the place of exhibition. Furthermore, these projects are addressed mostly to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in which the festival is set. Some objects used in the presentations could also be treated as objects based in small homeland. Still connected with the regional landscape, they serve as examples of abstract forms which resemble houses. In a way, the presented objects created by the author could be treated also as a social art (see: Nizołek, 2015), as they focus on the social context and its participatory nature, whereas the main message is the initiation of revalorisation activities within single apartments, understood more broadly as living spaces (see: Chmielewski & Mirecka, 2007).

As observed by Jolanta Brach-Czaina, everything that exists around an individual, including every object (also those of everyday use), as well as the

---

<sup>6</sup> The Zaspas space requires reevaluation in terms of elements co-creating the concept of aesthetics, such as beautiful, sublime, picturesque, or also richness and simplicity, regularity, and proportionality, which are mentioned in aesthetics as the causes of beauty (Tatarkiewicz, 1975, p. 14).



entire environment, can become a piece of art, which is great significance to contemporary art. Even the objects created as unique artworks can be reused in new creation process (Brach-Czaina, 1984, p. 199).

The author's assumption is that an idea, or a concept, a specific message may mediate through actions that border on architecture and art. It is a certain conventionality and symbolism that refers to the area of art. This also includes an intimate scope of action, one that does not match the actual dimensions of the building. Artistic activities, by their nature, are characterised by synthesis, and they often apply transitoriness and indeterminacy. The structures presented as the author's project were constructed in a similar manner. It should be remembered that, as Jeremi T. Królikowski rightly pointed out, "architecture is art when it is a work and not a product" (Królikowski, 2004, trans. by the author). It seems that this is the case when art expresses the content, as oppose to fulfilling solely the criterion of utility. Poetics is closer to art than engineering because engineering can merely become an instrument of expression and not its goal. The author is not certain whether her objects used for presentation could be qualified as works of art. Certainly, if their evaluation leads to them being qualified as products, it is still to be hoped that these would be seen as artistic products.

As mentioned previously, architecture can also be experienced through the intentions and content written into it and then interpreted. Architectural structures, which constitute an elements of the author's objects, are intentional forms that have been turned into physical objects on a small scale. Although conventionality is accepted, these objects are not physical buildings. In the context of the place and the accompanying event, the objects can be described as intentional projects. Their objective is to move people, to convey content, to offer inspiration, and to experience ideas. Certain forms occur in space, and time is required to experience them. In the meeting space, these forms are closely connected to the semantic narrative perceived in the experience process.

As Tim Ingold points out, "when we say that something has been done intentionally, we understand that an outwardly visible human action is the result of thoughts that have been born inside" (Ingold, 2014, p. 6). This is the basis of the author's attitude to intentionality, which also assumes the interpretative activity of the recipients' mind and their open attitude towards the project experienced in the meeting space during the events described in the present work. An open attitude allows for a more complete reading of the intention contained there; it permits a better expression of the conceptual message revealed in the nonphysical space.

The architect enters these projects with an intention to convey a message, to appeal to the senses, and to enrich the experience and knowledge



of the audience. The architect is motivated by an actual intention to act. These actions are thematically coherent. Their distinctiveness is determined by various forms of communication and by the objects presented in subsequent events. Forms of artistic expression are also visually related, as a homogeneous material by the same author. It seems, however, that these remaining forms of art are bestowed with a different potential and nature of the action. Certainly, the context is different, for example, taking into account the passage of time and the changeability of reality.

As specific examples, three intentional projects were presented between 2018 and 2019 as part of the aforementioned Fire Painted Images art festival. The first project entitled *Houses in Clouds*<sup>7</sup> (Agnieszka Kurkowska, workshop participant), drew attention to the issue of the nonphysical structure of the house and the concept of a dream house. The second project entitled *Identity Capsules*<sup>8</sup> (Kurkowska, in cooperation with Maciej Tryba) shows the physical and nonphysical layers of ideas and the image of the house within ourselves. The third project, entitled *Home into Clouds*<sup>9</sup> (Kurkowska), refers to an archetype of shelter and human need to escape from inconvenience. This project, being the leading motif, concerns the concept of a shelter that takes the recipient into the sphere of dreams to overcome adversity.

These projects refer to the values that the home brings into our lives to support our everyday existence and the sense of rootedness. The three activities presented above are located on the border between art and architecture. The intentionality of the activities is accompanied by an artistic record of ideas and spatial creations that depict the form, but also convey a conceptual message. The context is a block housing estate.

## Intentional Project Entitled *Houses in Clouds*

*Houses in Clouds* (Photo 2) is an intentional project implemented in the Zaspá estate in 2018. It was based on an active participation of a group of people willing to create a symbolic house in a box: a structure made on the basis of prepared materials. The collection of these elements was

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?fbclid=IwAR2qxBdH0s-r\\_7GpNp-Ofx45BIYDI3LRP8Bbmr-UkPUceJC20A-xVS9WRL8&mid=1fiaCiVbAI9ppwLoOy3LoNKc48MOpWath&ll=0%2C0&z=18](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?fbclid=IwAR2qxBdH0s-r_7GpNp-Ofx45BIYDI3LRP8Bbmr-UkPUceJC20A-xVS9WRL8&mid=1fiaCiVbAI9ppwLoOy3LoNKc48MOpWath&ll=0%2C0&z=18) (access date: 16.01.2021).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <https://www.facebook.com/PlamaGAK/photos/gm.253675132016208/10156207102367690/> (access date: 14.01.2021).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <https://www.gdansk.pl/wydarzenia/obrazy-ogniem-malowane,w,24752> (access date: 16.01.2021).



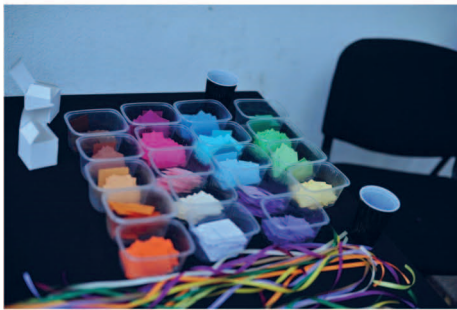
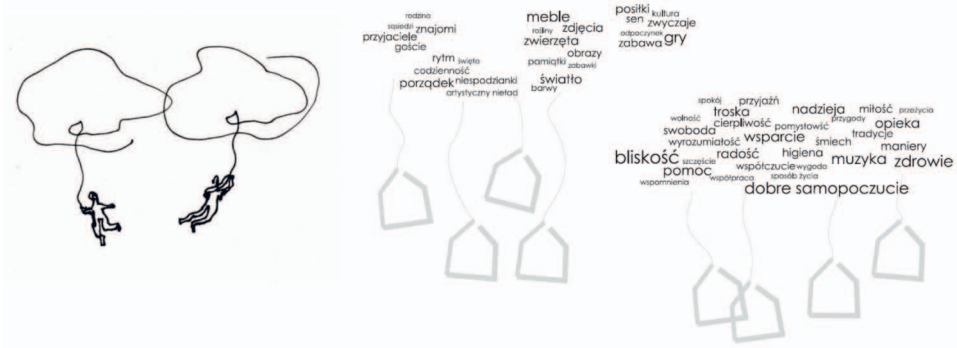


Photo 2  
*Houses in Clouds*

included in the planned event, the course of which was consistent with the previously created scenario.

The theme of the project was related to the house as a special architectural structure which is a response to the multi-faceted need for dwellings and the need for shelter. Both the manner of in which the dwelling is understood and the individual range of aspects and elements accompanying the living space, determine the individuality of the house as a physical structure and a medium of communication (which conveys meaning and evokes emotions). Any house is co-created by individually selected, formed, and juxtaposed physical and symbolic elements. It usually evolves during our lives. It is intuitively created and altered to suit current needs. A house, not necessarily an inhabited one, meets all expectations of its inhabitants. It is sometimes uncomfortable and disliked. Unadapted, mismatched. This sometimes results from ignorance and incompetence on the part of its inhabitants, sometimes also from external conditions that are too difficult to overcome.

What seems to be the most perfect form of dwelling is usually a utopian ideal home, whose image remains imprinted in our minds and souls. It is taken from the family home, or based on it. Sometimes, we have to change our house. Then, the perfect image is invoked in our imagination and called to existence by substitute means, it gives us a temporary sense of security until a new home is created. However, as inhabitants do, we often wonder what our home is and could be like? What are the values and elements that make up the house and which ones are perhaps missing? Can the deficiencies be supplemented? Sometimes, a thorough analysis and self-reflection is enough to improve the house. This is the motivation the *Houses in Clouds* event was dedicated to. During the event, prior to the happening, boxes were gathered and attached to the symbolic cloud, made of balloons, which was jointly brought onto the highest hill in between the blocks of flats of the estate, from where it let to fly (limited by the length of the rope was attached to) into the sky. Hanging in these houses under the cloud was supposed to symbolise the realisation of one's dreams. The structure drifted for a long time between the blocks, leaving the recipients time for personal reflection on their own ideas of the house, and on the possibility of realisation of those concepts. A cloud flying into the sky floating between the blocks of flats, lifted the dreams. By situating them in a real context and making them confront reality, the existence of a pattern that we are aiming for was revealed. After the flight, the houses returned to their authors so that they could be taken with them as stimuli for further reflection on the subject. It seems that the form of the proposed happening was accessible to each participant, which allowed them to participate at any level of understanding of the subject and offered a temporary situational involvement in the problem. At the same time, it remained clear to those



not directly involved in the event. By means of the project, the inspiration to improve and strengthen the quality of our current living conditions was given. The potential effects obtained are indeed difficult to measure and define precisely, but they certainly lead to broadening the knowledge on nonphysical elements that influence the structure of the house, understood as the inhabited space together with its furnishings. Those intangible elements influence the perception of space and the experience of the sequence of sensations. Enriching the decor with missing details, replacing selected furniture, rearranging attention to colors, smell, and sounds lead to the desired atmosphere. It may be unconsciously overlooked in the absence of knowledge about its importance in the everyday and long-term image of the home. Thus, the participants have a chance for self-reflection, broadening the view of the experienced aspects and their components. Verifying and completing them can help one get closer to creating the perfect home. Moreover, an individual, subjective assessment of selected properties of a residential space broadens the knowledge on the lifestyle, cultural conditions of living, and the relationship between the psychographic features of residents, as well as the perception of the living space. (see: Jansen, Coolen, & Goetgeluk, 2011).

## Project Entitled *Identity Capsules*

*Identity Capsules* (Photo 3) is the title of a project carried out in 2018 in cooperation with Mr Maciej Tryba. The context and elements of the theme included blocks of flats: multi-storey and multi-staircase houses with dozens of flats and hundreds of inhabitants. Located in the Zaspá estate, the blocks seem as if outside the natural regional context, outside the regional tradition. As such, they sometimes generate the problem of lost identity on the part of the inhabitants. However, behind the façade of a prefabricated buildings, we may find our individual and undisclosed world. An image of the outer layer reveals an intriguing depth.

The identity capsules referred to in the title constitute six independent spatial elements, each of which, according to the author's concept, shows a slightly different aspect of the potential of the environment. Under the layer of a photograph of a block covering it each object contains layered graphics showing the figures of the inhabitants and outlines of architectural objects. Each of these objects also contains impressions of forms which result from regional conditions, for which the background is provided by copies of the author's pictures. They illustrate the idea of the objects of dwelling set in the topographical and natural realities of the Kashubian region where the housing estate is located.







Photo 3  
*Identity Capsules*

The area provides the direct and intentional context of the project. Graphical elements placed in the capsules contain various visions, concepts, and facts. The capsules also include searches, hope, longings for a slightly different house, a different dwelling.

During the event, the paper curtains (the ones that cover the interiors of the spatial objects and illustrate the façades of the blocks) were burnt. They departed the area in a symbolic way: by means of a purifying gesture, their existence was discontinued. In a way, they were freed from their pushy and rigid frames. The observers were then able to see the interior perceived in an artistic manner (through the aforementioned graphics and paintings) showing the multilayered relations between the values of the natural environment and the resulting visions of architectural forms. The intertwined figures graphically complement the image of the inhabitants' connection with the environment's potential shown in this way. These images were illuminated by warm candlelight placed inside and behind them. Flickering, they additionally strengthened the impressional nature of the message. An artistic vision points out a possible direction of the search for identity. It can help complement the deficiencies experienced by the inhabitants of the block of flats. The author made an attempt to inspire the participants to looking for the missing values which could potentially be found in the regional context, as the Kashubian region is full of natural forms and regional design (a source of creative inspiration). These regional forms may also directly constitute a source of value implementable into incomplete spaces both on the architectural and town planning levels.

The spatial objects presented as part of the project symbolically referred to actual residential houses with individually inhabited capsules, that is, individual flats. These flats contain our identity. It is this identity that co-creates the houses located in the space. While blocks lack features that would identify them with a wider region, individual interiors take us into the individual worlds of their inhabitants. This concept provides the second aspect of understanding the title *Identity Capsules*.

As can be quoted after Andrew Ballantyne (2007, p. 4): "Identity is political, in that it is generated through our relations with others. It is not altogether interior, but has an external aspect." Therefore, the capsules relate also to the broadly understood surroundings. Objects, people, events, thoughts. Rather than being one's personal problem, identity is rather a social phenomenon.

The observation of images drawn with warm light in individual capsules offers a moment of personal contemplation related to complex phenomena and relations. Do they reveal the truth about us, the inhabitants of blocks of flats? Can they inspire change in their immediate surroundings? The author, whose intention was to evoke such a transformation of space,

hopes that this may happen. In any case, the proposed project, through its content, has the potential to achieve such effects.

## Intentional Project Entitled *Home into Clouds*

The last project presented in this article, also presented in the Zaspá estate in 2019, was entitled *Home into Clouds* (Photo 4). Both elements (clouds and home) return to a similar and yet different thematic and formal approach. The home is indispensable while considering the superior concept of movement in the area of architecture, hence its literal presence as a symbol of the artistic message. In the presentation entitled *Home into Clouds*, a spatial installation was used (which constituted an initial background and, ultimately, the final effect of the event) based on an artistic motif of clouds that lifted individual figures.

Both elements were made of plastic, as outlines of shapes (made of multicolour and shiny wire). Each of the figures was assigned a symbolic house (a wooden schematic element reflecting the form of a house with a gable roof) and a glass bottle with values written on carbon paper. Clouds symbolise dreams and unavailability, but also a nonphysical dimension of reality. Houses are human settlements and shelters. The characters, symbolic inhabitants in their homes, overcome their own fears and weaknesses, take up challenges, and change the world around them. In this installation, the house is a symbol of shelter that envelops human existence and releases their energy for action.

During the event, paper cases that enveloped individual glass bottles with values were burnt. Fire was a symbolic trigger of energy to act: to rise to clouds. The burning paper showed a wire outline/drawing of clouds and revealed the figures attached to them with their homes and values. Next, the bottles were given a source of light (a glow stick), which activated the values written inside, thus showing them to the recipients. It is the values that, by belonging to our homes, bring us towards our dreams. It is a value-centred home that serves as the starting point for all of our activities, but in particular, it mobilises us to overcome difficulties and to achieve our goals. Fire was what revealed and activated this concept, which at that point became the subject of individual contemplation by the audience.

Sometimes, the search for a home is accompanied by a lack, need, or fear. Once it is liberated from them, once it is purified, it becomes free: it drifts freely towards its goals, floating in an enigmatic cloud of dreams and aspirations.

The activities described above are related to the subjective and objective aspects of quality of life, such as: the feeling of happiness and safe



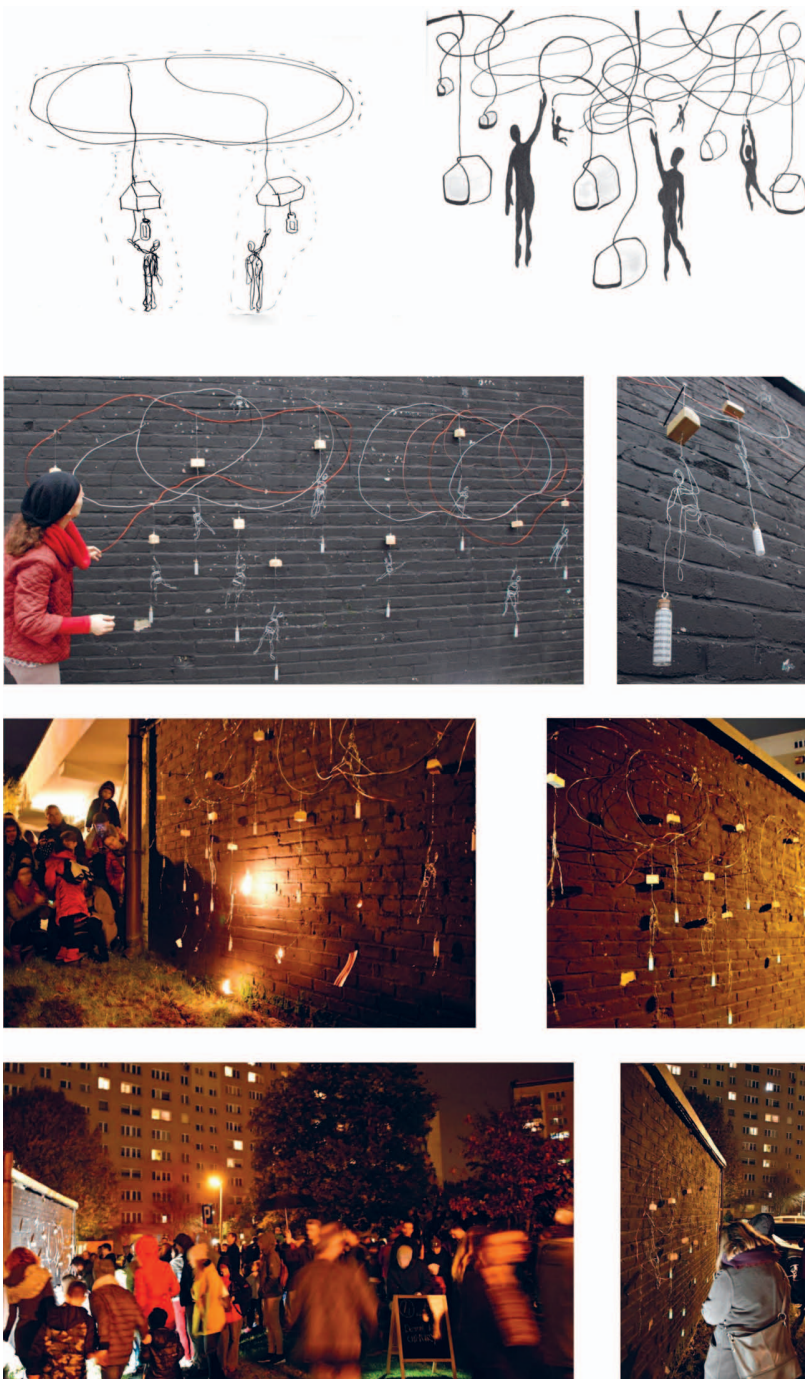


Photo 4

*Home into Clouds*

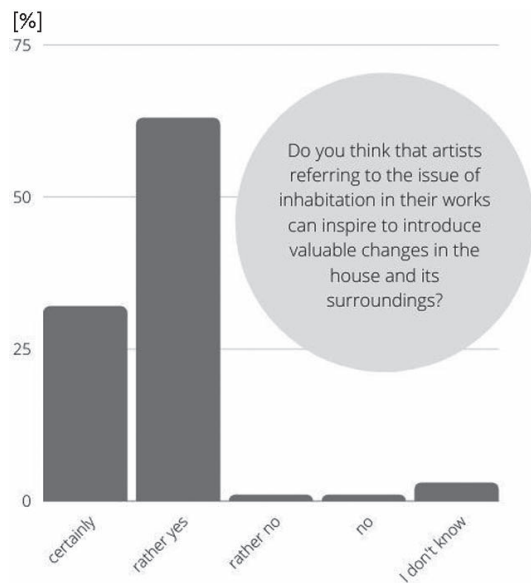
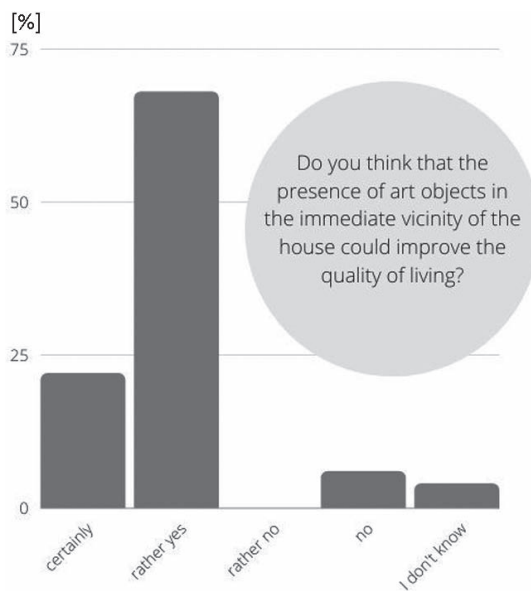
use of the bathroom – very broad topics that require a phenomenological approach and ergonomic issues with a clear usability algorithm. This quality, as a complex and ambiguous concept, requires an interdisciplinary approach. This means that the key aspects from the point of view of the research problem should be taken into account in individual cases. Here, a multidimensional and multi-faceted house is considered, which in its specific version serves as a living space, that is, a house in a housing estate built up on multifamily blocks. As noted above, both the house and the accompanying public space require revitalisation, which is the end result of the author's activities.

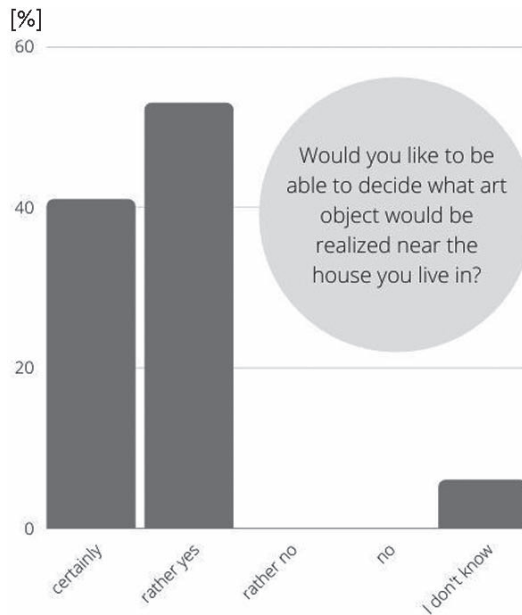
The author was surprised by the level of interest in the above-mentioned workshops, the inquisitiveness of the participants, and their commitment. The values symbolically located in the boxes and comments during the work indicated the major focus of the proposed action. The participants eagerly used the prepared hints and discussed the task. Face-to-face interviews showed that many people found this action valuable in the context of considering and reflecting on their home. The remaining activities, devoid of the participatory aspect, did not result in similar amount of feedback. However, the number of participants indicates interest in the subject matter. From her numerous post-event conversations, the author realised the audience's amazement at taking up architectural issues in the form of an artistic activity. Not all elements of the message proved clear and unambiguous, but all interlocutors confirmed that they had made a reflection on the condition of contemporary living. The local aspect of the Gdańsk block of flats, that is, the Kashubian region, was not clear in each case. The most important element pointed to by the recipients was an unconventional approach to action in the field of architecture, although some people would have preferred to receive information in the form of a text with illustrations, which they declared to have been possibly more readable. Since there were no negative opinions voiced by the recipients, barring those that suggested some improvements in terms of readability, it was concluded by the author that the presented current of artistic activities should be continued.

In 2018, a survey on homes, including the place itself and the need for art in a place of living, was conducted to study the quality of living and the place of art in it. The survey was carried out by asking questions aimed at eliciting important information on the living process from the respondents. The questions were also aimed at verifying their feelings in terms of the level of satisfaction with the inhabited house and their interest in the presence of art objects in the immediate vicinity. The group of only 46 people who took part in the survey consisted of women and men aged 19–65, living in the city of Gdańsk. Despite the small number of participants, the author decided to present the research results (diagrams 2–4) within the



scope of topics related to the issues analysed in the text. Most participants reported feeling the need for artwork in their neighborhood. Moreover, they admitted that the artist's role (referring to the issue of inhabitation) could be to inspire valuable changes in the houses and their surroundings.





Diagrams 2, 3, 4

*Survey results, the survey part concerning the place and the need for art in a place of inhabitation, 2018*

Furthermore, the majority of participants agreed that art-related events held near their places of residence could increase their satisfaction of living in a particular place. The majority of the interviewees also answered that they would like to be involved while decisions are made on the objects of art to be located near their homes. Due to the low number of participants, the author is unable to treat these results as proper research material, but these findings show a some positive inclination of people toward the analysed issues.

## Conclusions

Taking action also in the seemingly ephemeral area of art can bring about important subjective and objective effects even during short-term public exposure. First of all, such activity aims to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants, and thus improve their quality of life. It also contributes to the created or recalled image of the house as a place that is friendly, attractive to life, and fosters identification with it. Moreover, art may provide an important aspect of the possible revalorisation of space on regional, but also national and international level.

In the examples described herein, the individual objects, including architectural symbols, which co-create the described project, aim at establishing communication with the audience of this temporary artistic event through their participation in the meeting space. Thus, a platform for communication emerges. It is worthwhile to quote here Marek Janik: “[...] architecture is a craft situated between science and art. In this context, abandoning systematicity, one has to make do with some open philosophy of architecture, which still poses fundamental questions” (Janik, 2004, trans. by the author). In the activities presented, the author is asking questions on the condition of our dwelling. This is a common theme for an entire series of intentional projects. As it can be seen, they are also the subject of research analyses, and this aspect is an important element of the author’s professional work.

Following Świtek, one may ask: “Is there architecture without architectural realisation?” (Świtek, 2013, p. 441, trans. by the author). The author believes that the presented objects remain somewhat architectural in their conceptual form. Perhaps, devoid of a standard scale and precise function, they exert a less literal impact on the recipient. However, the effect is probably still observable.

The course of the projects presented above was followed by contemplation. The reflections resulting from the reception upon the completion of the project (until the official closure of the Festival, i.e. a few hours later) occurred in the space of ideas. And so did the assumed enrichment of recipients’ knowledge. Impressions experienced at the moment of the project’s completion and the reflections arising from them will be transferred to this space as an individual resource of memory and experiences of the participants. Whether and to what extent the participants will apply the experiences is difficult to assess. Yet, knowledge in the area of art perception and psychology is helpful in this case (i.e., Ingarden, 1958, 1970; Bańka, 1997). Scientific insight indicates that by referring to the analogous cases studied, a possible impact on the recipient should be assumed. Indeed, the extent of this impact is determined by numerous components, the vast majority of which are independent of the object being experienced. However, this aspect remains in accordance with the mission of general architectural education and the personal need to participate in the revaluation and other forms by which dwelling space may be appreciated. The values that the changed home brings to our everyday lives offer the feeling of being rooted, a sense of belonging to a group, to a region, and feeling of being a part of a local community. It happens both in the cultural sphere of a society and on an intimate individual scale of a single resident and their personal home.





For a reliable assessment of agency, specific questionnaire studies should be conducted. However, it is difficult to conduct such studies in a case of such short event, especially that its course is very dynamic. Viewers and participants partake in all events and watch all presentations (always over a dozen proposals) located at various points of the open space were rather unwilling to respond to the survey. Two such attempts were made (2017, 2018 with an increased number of volunteers to be interviewed).

Each time, they ended with too few interviews to be accepted as reliable analytical material. Certainly, aura of twilight on cold November afternoons and the outdoor nature of the event are not conducive to this method of research. Therefore, the conclusions are based only on field observation and a limited amount of research material. The verification study, planned for the upcoming edition of the festival (November 2021), would refer to the experiences from previous editions, where the above-mentioned projects were presented. The results will probably enrich the documentation of the actions taken, offering more precise conclusions.

## References

- Augé, M. (2011). *Nie-miejsca* (Roman Chymkowski, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Bachelard, G. (1994). *The Poetics of Space* (Maria Jolas, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ballantyne, A. (2007). *Deleuze & Guattari for Architects*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Bańka, A. (1997). *Architektura psychologicznej przestrzeni życia. Behavioralne podstawy projektowania*. Poznań: Print-B.
- Basista, A. (2001). *Betonowe dziedzictwo: architektura w Polsce czasów komunizmu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Brach-Czaina, J. (1984). *Etos nowej sztuki*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Chmielewski, J. M., & Mirecka, M. (2007). *Modernizacja osiedli mieszkaniowych*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej.
- Chomańska, B. (2018). *Betonia. Dom dla każdego*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne.
- Graham, W. (2016). *Dream Cities: Seven Urban Ideas That Shape the World*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Ingarden, R. (1966). Dwuwarstwowa budowa dzieła architektury. In R. Ingarden, *Studia z estetyki*, vol. 2. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Ingarden, R. (1966). Wartości artystyczne i wartości estetyczne. *Studia z estetyki* (vol. 4). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Ingold, T. (2014). Człowiek to czasownik. *Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni*, 45(1), 4–10.
- Jansen, S. J. T., Coolen, H. C. C. H., & Goetgeluk, R. W. (Eds.). (2011). *The Measurement and Analysis of Housing Preference and Choice*. Dordrecht–Heidelberg–London–New York: Springer.



- Królikowski, J. T., (2004). Sztuka architektury – architektura sztuki; Dzieło – fenomen – przestrzeń – obraz świata. *Definiowanie Przestrzeni Architektonicznej. Architektura jako sztuka* 101(10-A), 79–83.
- Kurkowska, A., (2016). *Urzeczywistnianie treści w obiekcie architektonicznym*. Koszalin: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Politechniki Koszalińskiej.
- Leach, N. (2000). *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*. Cambridge, MA–London, England: The MIT Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2001). *Fenomenologia percepcji*. (M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, Trans.). Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia.
- Niziołek, K. (2015). *Sztuka społeczna. Konceptje – dyskursy – praktyki*. Białystok: Wydział Historyczno-Socjologiczny Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Fundacja Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku Universitas Bialostocensis.
- Rykwert, J. (2013). *Pokusa miejsca. Przeszłość i przyszłość miast*. (T. Biedroń, Trans.). Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.
- Świtek, G. (2013). *Gry sztuki z architekturą. Nowoczesne powinowactwa i współczesne integracje*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Tatarkiewicz, W. (1975). *Dzieje sześciu pojęć. Sztuka, Piękno, Forma, Twórczość, Odtwórczość, Przeżycie Estetyczne*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Welsch, W., (1997). Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics. In M. Honkanen (Ed.), *Aesthetics in practice: XIIIth International Congress of Aesthetics, Lahti Finland August 1–5 1995. Proceedings* (pp. 18–37). Helsinki: Lahti Research and Training Centre.

#### Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article is to be addressed to Agnieszka Kurkowska, email: [agnieszka.kurkowska@pg.edu.pl](mailto:agnieszka.kurkowska@pg.edu.pl)

