

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration in shades of green and yellow-green. It depicts a landscape with a winding path or road that curves through the scene. To the right, a stream flows through a cluster of trees with rounded, leafy canopies. The overall style is that of a hand-drawn sketch or a textured print, with fine lines and cross-hatching used for shading and texture. The word 'PLOT' is superimposed in large, bold, black letters at the top center.

PLOT

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FILTER

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GRADUATE LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM

BERNARD AND ANNE
SPITZER SCHOOL OF
ARCHITECTURE

THE CITY COLLEGE
OF NEW YORK

FILTER

RUSTLING

OF

THE

LEAVES,

WHISPERING

OF

THE

PEOPLE

Elisabetta Terragni

Imagine a house in a dense city with a garden that doesn't appear on any map. Even from the sky, there is just a black spot in its place. It is simply not there.

There are many sites of this kind in history and in the present: military installations and strategic institutions, sometimes factories, remote farms, territories for nuclear experiments, and landfills for toxic waste.

On the ground, these places are heavily fenced and precisely demarcated, often with a wide perimeter keeping the curious at bay. Warning signs are as clear as the thresholds between what it is accessible and what is off-limits.

But what if a site is not only a black spot on Google Earth, but also a dark hole in people's minds? The house I'm speaking of is there for real, with a sidewalk along its property wall, and a garden with trees and brick walls covered with ivy. Nonetheless, it is not there—no one registers its presence.

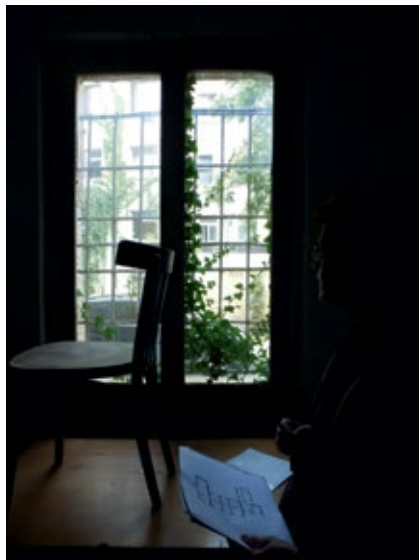
For years, people passed it every day without knowing much about it, ignoring the reasons for its being there. Instinctively they moved to the other side of the street and automatically stopped talking or pretended not to notice.

Since the 1950s until recently, this unobtrusive house in the middle of Tirana, Albania was the headquarters of the Sigurimi, the secret service agency that operated under the long dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. Its location was crucial in the geopolitics of the city, for it had the "normal" aspect of a private villa as they were built during Fascist times: typically reserved, set back from the street, and almost invisible to the public. The perfect match of anonymity and banality would cloak a post of surveillance. From here, hotels, embassies, and public places were placed under continuous observation by means of a complex network of cables buried below the city grid, cameras posted in inconspicuous locations, and a legion of informers on daily duty.

Even after the house was finally abandoned and allowed to deteriorate, it still held all the equipment for spying, classifying, and filtering information. But it was slowly covered in dust, splattered with leaks, and overgrown with vines. The house "disappeared" once more, this time into history.

It is a vexing thought that such a center of information and scrutiny can retain most of its sophisticated equipment and technical devices while slowly disappearing.





It had taken a concerted effort to acquire listening devices, recorders, cameras, bugs, and decoding equipment from numerous sources around the world, most of them considered by the regime to be enemies. In light of the climate of distrust in which Albania was plunged by its paranoid dictator, it is ironic to note what each country supplied: old-fashioned typewriters from the former East Germany, portable sensitive tape recorders from West Germany, cameras with remote sensors from China and Japan. For nearly two decades, water has penetrated the crumbling walls, buckling the floors. Dirt and dust encrust every surface, and vines drape layers of veils over walls and windows. The only thing that does not register time is the light filtering in and the wind blowing through the trees.

Having long lost its place in people's memory to the point of leaving not only a blackened square in the city's geography, but also a blank in the minds of its citizens, the House of Leaves—as it used to be euphemistically called—will now return to attention. One among a number of historic locations that the government wishes to bring back into consciousness, the House of Leaves will become an odd creature formed by a half-forgotten past and a wide-open future.

Today, a new generation is able to recognize the struggle and persecution their mothers and fathers suffered while living under a regime of systematic paranoia which gripped even its innermost circles. While everything in the house is now “rubbish,” once it is opened as a site of memory, the dust will cast merely a thin layer upon a past everyone wants to forget. In this sense, the House itself is a kind of filter, almost like a lobster-trap no longer attended by lobstermen, and its carelessly stacked piles of once-expensive listening equipment are now deaf to all voices.

The transformation of this “sleeping beast” rather than slumbering beauty into a site of memory imposes sharp limits—any intervention must avoid the improvement of the condition of the building in order to bring it up to current standards. Instead, the decay and derelict condition of the house assumes the character of an historic tattoo, a deeply etched condition no one can quite imagine today. Most importantly, the natural, almost idyllic state of a house shrouded in vegetation in the midst of urban tumult needs to be safeguarded, for it makes comprehensible the un-natural purpose for which a private medical clinic from the early 1930s passed into the hands



of occupying German forces during the War, and finally came under the control of the secret state police in the Hoxha decades, only to slip into seeming oblivion after the country shed the yoke of its regime. The most telling aspect of the House, from the current point-of-view, is its multi-layered condition. Whether from the sidewalk or from its interior, the building reveals barriers and divisions, demarcations and thresholds of different vintage and purpose, all of which transform it into a strangely hollow and subtly shrouded object. Simply by the act of opening the site and its premises to the public, the half-forgotten, half-feared conditions of the past are peeled away, leaving one to reckon with a disconcerting present. Public statues of the dictator have been removed from their pedestals and now stand crudely shrouded in the backyard of the National Museum, but the House of Leaves has a more insidious story and many more facets to its nature. No simple act of unveiling or shrouding could do it justice. One needs to venture into the labyrinth of the past in order to discover the beast in its lair, even if it may be dessicated and shrunken.

The project of transforming the House of Leaves into a public Museum of Secret Surveillance was initiated by the Albanian Ministry of Culture in 2014. The writer Bashkim Shehu has composed the narrative and its realization is supported by a team of historians from different European countries. The project is by Elisabetta Terragni and the graphic designer Daniele Ledda of Milan. The pictures have been taken at various times during the past two years.

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PLOT
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FRONT COVER

Patricia Johanson, "Living Apartment Houses," 1969. Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 8.5" x 11." One of a series of proposals commissioned in 1969 by *House & Garden* magazine, this project envisions the entire metropolis as a park.

BACK COVER

Patricia Johanson, "Morning Glory Pools," for Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility, Petaluma, California, 2004. Acrylic, ink, pastel, and colored pencil, 17.5" x 15."

TITLE PAGE

Xinran Yuan, "41 Hours of Day and 59 Hours of Night," detail, 2015. Liquid chlorophyll on cotton paper, 38" x 50."

COLOPHON

Xinran Yuan, "19 Hours of Day and 29 Hours of Night," detail, 2015. Liquid chlorophyll on cotton paper, 38" x 50."

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