RICE UNIVERSITY

DIRTY BLUE ON NOT-SO-WHITE WHITE WALLS FOR THE WITTGENSTEIN HOUSE

by

David Parke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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April, 1997
Dirty Blue on not-so-white White Walls for the Wittgenstein House

1925 Le Corbusier writes *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* and argues that architecture ought to be *white* for it to be modern.

1926 Ludwig Wittgenstein begins the project of building a house for his sister, Margaret Stonbourough-Wittgenstein. This house, known as the Kundmanngasse, is all *white* and very modern.

1927 Wiesenhof seidlung receives half a million visitors. Architectural contributions of sixteen architects had to have flat roofs and be *white*.

1946 Yves Klein paints his first *monochromes*.

1951 Wittgenstein writes his *Remarks on Colour* and dies.

1957 Klein shows his blue *monochromes* in the exhibition *Epoca blu* (Milano) and patents his own color, IKB (International Klein Blue).

From Le Corbusier to Klein, this brief chronology traces a recent history of the idea of monochromy, be it in architecture or painting, be it white or blue. The origins of such an idea can perhaps be found in a Mediterranean village for architecture and seventeenth century Holland for painting; and it might also need to include Malevich's *White Square on White Background* (1919), Rodchenko's *Pure Color red, Pure Color and Pure Color Yellow*, Miró's Catalan blue monochromes (1925), Ad Reinhardt's black on black canvases (1953), not to mention Rothko's chapel here in Houston.

In 1951, however, Wittgenstein wrote his *Remarks on Colour* in which one can discern a critique of such things as monochromatic essence in painting. For Wittgenstein, the internal properties of colors (i.e., lighter, darker, cooler, etc.) belong to a language-game rather than a tangible reality. In other words, the language of colors is always that of a community. It would therefore be impossible to think of a private (non-communicable) color language (i.e., the way we compare and distinguish colors belongs to a set of collective actions from which color language is inextricable). Also impossible is any conception seeking to make the name of a color correspond to a physically determined one. Color identity does not exist in a tangible world, one that is individually perceived, it exists in the relations among men and women through the agency of language, for example: implicit in saying that something is blue, is that it is not green, yellow, orange, etc., and Klein's monochromatic obsession might have seemed vain for Wittgenstein since there is really no need neither to doubt nor look for certainties in the ever-changing language-games of color.

To consider colors as a language-game is to implicitly critique the possibility of color related norms such as pure white, or pure blue. Yet Wittgenstein's house is all white when by his own definition there is no such thing as absolute color and neither white nor blue can be pure. A question thus arises as to why the Kundmanngasse, which he designed, is so normatively painted white? This question, more so than its answer, is the basis for this thesis project which seeks to relativize the whiteness of the Kundmanngasse through the introduction of a color-object: six painted panels mounted together as one large movable screen that is meant to inhabit the white rooms/walls of Wittgenstein's questionably normative white house.
Pre-Thesis Statement

I have written down all these thoughts as remarks, short paragraphs, of which there is sometimes a fairly long chain about the same subject, while I sometimes make a sudden change jumping from one topic to another. It was my intention at first to bring this all together in a book whose form I pictured differently at different times. But the essential thing was that the thoughts should proceed from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks. [excerpt from preface, Philosophical Investigations --Ludwig Wittgenstein]

Previously I had used the words Wittgenstein, Vienna, Tokyo, and fosuma in describing the scope of my thesis to this I add the following words expanding/explaining the proposal of my investigation:

I want to dismantle/interpret/analyze the house that Ludwig Wittgenstein designed for his sister Margaret Stonbourough- Wittgenstein. The building, known as the Kundmangasse, is located in Vienna and was built during 1926-28. Although Wittgenstein is best known for his philosophical pursuits he also had received degrees in mechanical engineering and mathematics. A family fortune allowed for a privileged education where Wittgenstein gained exposure and knowledge to those who were experts in their field. Brahams, Mahler, Loos, B. Russell, Kokoschka, and Klimt, among others, knew Wittgenstein at some point in his life.

The Kundmangasse incorporates/suggests the concepts of rigorous classical ideals while being clothed/veiled in a modernist language. The interior vs. the exterior. Could it be that what is being represented on the exterior of the house is not what is being signified in its interior? If so, how would it relate to Wittgenstein's ideas about 'language games' as represented by his philosophical discourse.

It is my hope that through my dismantling I will discover the specific concepts and ideas that allow for a harmonious juxtaposition in one building/architecture/design.

I will transfer the results of this investigation into a series of paintings.

The paintings will also consider Wittgenstein's ideas about color, [as an expansion to Goethe's Theory of Colours] and his philosophy as presented in the Tractatus: to demonstrate that spiritual values could not be legislated in discourse, but could only be conveyed in language that did not
Pre-Thesis Statement

commence them, or expressed through an individual's actions--thus the exclusion of metaphysical speculation from philosophy. (see G. Indiana p 118)

Wittgenstein was a skilled machinist. The design of the hardware throughout the Kundmangasse is precisely crafted and designed with extreme specificity. I will attempt to adopt this sensibility into the construction of the armature/structure in which my paintings will be stretched and hung.

I am researching Japanese fosuma and byoba as historic precedents in how painting can transform and frame space. The fosuma is a painted paper faced partition that slide in tracks, used to divide interior spaces in shion-style buildings. The byoba is a portable accordion folded fixture used for the dividing of space in traditional Japanese architecture.

John Whiteman's project Divisible by 2 and the paintings of Gunter Förg are also being considered as precedents to my project.
I have written down all these thoughts as remarks, short paragraphs, of which there is sometimes a fairly long chain about the same subject, while I sometimes make a sudden change jumping from one topic to another.-- It was my intention at first to bring this all together in a book whose form I pictured differently at different times. But the essential thing was that the thoughts should proceed from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks. [excerpt from preface, Philosophical Investigations Ludwig Wittgenstein]

Previously I had used the words Wittgenstein, Vienna, Tokyo, and tosuma in describing the scope of my thesis to this I add the following words expanding/explaining the proposal of my investigation.

I want to dismantle/interpret/analyze the house that Wittgenstein designed for his sister.
{brief history ,dates, description of house, Wittgenstein bio}

Why? Because the house incorporates/suggests the concepts of rigorous classical ideals while being clothed/veiled in a modernist language. The interior vs. the exterior. Could it be that what is being represented on the exterior of the house is not what is being signified in its interior. If so how would it relate to Wittgenstein's ideas about language games as represented by his philosophical discourse. It is my hope that through my dismantling I will discover the specific concepts and ideas that allow for a harmonious juxtaposition in one building/architecture/design.

I would like to transfer the results of this investigation into a series of paintings.

The paintings will also consider Wittgenstein's ideas about color, [as an expansion to Goethe's Theory of Colours] and his philosophy as presented in the Tractatus: to demonstrate that spiritual values could not be legislated in discourse, but could only be conveyed in language that did not concern them, or expressed through an individual's actions-- thus the exclusion of metaphysical speculation from philosophy.(see G. Indiana p 118)
To
David Parke
Oenil Ford Fellow
Rice University
School of Architecture
fax 713 522 8174

Vienna, 17.07.96

Re: Your fax from 16. July 96

Visiting the House Wittgenstein, Cultural Departement of the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna

Dear Mr. Parke,

The House Wittgenstein can be visited every day from Monday to Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The entry of the House Wittgenstein is now at the Parkgasse 18.

With best regards

Alexandrina Stojanova
April 1, 1996

Mr. David Parke  
School of Architecture  
Rice University  
6100 S. Main  
Houston, Tex 77005

Dear Mr. Parke:

On behalf of the Trustees of the Texas Architectural Foundation, I want to congratulate you on your selection as the 1996-97 recipient of the O'Neil Ford Traveling Fellowship. This scholarship, in the amount of $2,000, is to be disbursed in one payment administered by the Texas Architectural Foundation. As you know, one of the Foundation's primary goals is to further architectural education in Texas.

I suggest that you acknowledge your award by expressing appreciation to the donor:

Mr. Boone Powell, FAIA  
Ford, Powell and Carson  
1138 East Commerce Street  
San Antonio, Texas 78205

I would appreciate receiving a copy of the acknowledgment letter.

Thanks to the generosity of donors such as Ford, Powell and Carson, the Foundation continues to grow and assist students like you.

Please accept our best wishes as you continue to pursue a successful career in architecture.

Sincerely,

David Lancaster  
TSA Executive Vice President

c: Mr. Boone Powell, FAIA  
Dean Lars Lerup
Bibliography


Bibliography


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Bibliography


HAUS WITTGENSTEIN

DIESES HAUS WURDE VON
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN (1889-1951)
GEMEINSAM MIT PAUL ENGELMANN (1891-1965)
ENTWORFEN UND 1929 FERTIGGESTELT
1971 UNTER DENKMALSCHUTZ GESETZT

1976 VON DER BOTSCHAFT DER VOLKSPROBLIK
BULGARIEN ERWORBEN UND IN STANDGESETZT

GESTIFTET VON DER INGENIEURKAMMER FÜR WIEN, NO UND BGLD
The first floor, definitive version. Bad = bathroom; Schlafzimmer = sleeping room;
2. Used bed equipment
   Custard
Canvas -

95" x 47 1/8"
false air
pump blow suck

sodium light illuminates a translucent pale mesh
thicken steam lurks
contained

condensation

dampness cracks
fur spins to pull water from its flesh
moisture emits a destructive solvent

Bitter mist