

# WITTGENSTEIN'S ARCHITECTURAL IDIOSYNCRASY

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Ludwig Wittgenstein was deeply embedded in Viennese architectural Modernism, culturally as well as personally. His assimilation in recent historiography to existing trends within the local architectural movement—namely Loos—are based on aesthetic and intellectual simplifications. The simplifications eclipse the distinctive contribution Wittgenstein's Palais Storborough makes to architecture, to Viennese Modernism, and perhaps to philosophy. The present paper seeks to rectify this constellation by re-situating Wittgenstein as an architect in his own right by re-sensitizing us to the idiosyncrasy of Wittgenstein's architecture [1].

The paper begins by looking at the wider biographical background setting the foundation Wittgenstein's involvement with architecture in Vienna. It scrutinizes his own as well as the family's wider personal connections to key figures in Viennese Modernism, with special focus on Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos. As will be shown, Wittgenstein's relation to these architects is, in Stanford Anderson's terms, one of critical conventionalism [2]. Wittgenstein builds on the conventions of pre-modern and Modern Viennese architecture, but re-interprets and re-appropriates each in a highly transformative and critical manner. The house's design draws from the local design tradition of Vienna and wider Austria, making it historical without being historicist. The historical qualities of his architectural engagement are highlighted throughout the paper, particularly in part two, where a critical discourse on the architectural and interior qualities embodied in the Wittgenstein

house is proffered. The significance of doing so is to demonstrate that Wittgenstein rejects not only ornament and opulence, as comes to define the Modern movement, but that he stands apart both aesthetically and intellectually from other Modernist architects practising in Vienna at the time. This paper will explore the lineage of aesthetic meaning as evidenced by architectural details in the house, with the assumption that these details reveal something of Wittgenstein's underlying rationale.

#### WITTGENSTEIN'S RELATION TO LOOS

On Monday, July 27th, 1914, one day prior to the outbreak of World War I, Wittgenstein and Adolf Loos met in the elegant and ornately designed Café Hotel Imperial [3]. Loos was already well-known in Vienna as an avant-garde architect, had gained prominence through his writings (such as the 1908 essay "Ornament and Crime"), and for his controversial work, such as the 1909-1911 House on the Michaelerplatz. The house implemented many of the ideas published in "Ornament and Crime," and serves as amongst the first haute buildings rejecting opulence. Initially the building was poorly received, and among the critics was Wittgenstein's sister and future client, Margaret Stonbrough. The house was described as having naked façades and as having material opulence, with marble, mirrors and wood paneling interiors. Importantly, it still lacked ornamentation, in the sense defined and decried by Loos. The lack of such ornamentation dissociated Loos and other Modernists from questions of use. Thus, Loos stood out in Vienna for his radical thinking and his work, leading him to recognition across Europe and the modernizing world.

Loos' difference from others in the Viennese context must have made an impression on Wittgenstein, who until this meeting with Loos had engaged only mechanical engineering and logic as fields of inquiry. The impact of meeting Loos' distinction is apparent as after meeting Loos, Wittgenstein returned home—a five-minute walk—to his parent's house. His family's city palace had interiors much like those of the Hotel Imperial—and like that hotel, would have likely been rejected by Loos' ideals of simplicity and austerity. The juxtaposition between the contemporary and opulence of empire and monarchy—even for the business elite—was stark and evidently present in Wittgenstein's everyday reality.

The next day, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Eleven days later Wittgenstein volunteered to serve. During the war, Wittgenstein met and befriended Paul Engelmann to whom he was introduced by Adolf Loos, and who he would later work with on the Wittgenstein House.

Also in the war period, Wittgenstein worked on his *Tractatus*, the only work published in his lifetime. He completed the text during the summer of 1918, between July and September during a break from the front. In November 1919, after the end of the war and his release from captivity in August, Wittgenstein returned to Vienna.

Within just two weeks, Wittgenstein left for a meeting with his friend Adolf Loos full of expectation, but he was appalled by Loos and his ideas about a *Kunstamt* (a state office or ministry for art). Wittgenstein writes:

*a few days ago I looked up Loos. I was horrified and nauseated. He has become infected with the most virulent bogus intellectualism! He gave me a pamphlet about a proposed 'fine arts office', in which he speaks about a sin against the Holy Ghost. That surely is the limit! I was already a bit depressed when I went to Loos but that was the last straw [...] [4].*

“ [WITTGENSTEIN] WAS APPALLED BY LOOS AND HIS IDEAS ABOUT A KUNSTAMT ”

The episode suggests the end of Wittgenstein's friendship with Loos as a person. True to his word, Wittgenstein would never meet Loos again.

His relationship to Loos' aesthetic and architectural ideas, however, is more complicated. While living in the remote reaches of Norway between 1912 and 1914, Wittgenstein went to great troubles to receive subscription copies of *Die Fackel*. The Viennese cultural newspaper edited by Karl Kraus regularly reported on Loos and other mainstays of Viennese intelligentsia. While rejecting the radical changes in Loos' thinking after World War I, Wittgenstein's attempts to develop a nuanced response to Loos' earlier work, both written and built, continued to interest him. The lingering interest in the development of Viennese architectural Modernism is manifest in the house as Wittgenstein's entrance hall in the Palais Stonborough resembles Loos' design decisions at the Michaelerplatz. The hall of the Wittgenstein

House has four prominently placed columns and overall meticulous regard for precise dimensions, which demonstrates both resemblance and departure from Loos' surface detailing in other regards.

Looking to Kraus' 1930 summary of Loos appearing in *Die Fackel*, parallels between Wittgenstein's later writing and the contemporary thought of Viennese designers are found:

*Adolf Loos and I [...] have done nothing more than to show that there is a difference between a urn and a chamberpot. It is in this difference that culture is given a space to play itself out. The others, those with positive knowledge, however, divide themselves between those who would use the urn as a chamberpot and those who would use the chamberpot as an urn [5].*

Similar remarks are found in Wittgenstein's student recorded lectures on aesthetics a year or two later in Cambridge. He observed a deterioration (a *Verfall* in Loos' terms) in the culture and craft of architecture [6]. In doing so, Wittgenstein targets the increasing failure of architects and patrons to differentiate a room and its furnishings, which he believed should be differentiated according to their proper use and place [7]. We now, he said, live in an age where dining-room chairs are put up in drawing-rooms and vice versa, with no understanding of what is inappropriate or incorrect about that practice—correctness being, for Wittgenstein, a central term of aesthetic commendation, rather than a descriptor of appearance such as beautiful [8]. Wittgenstein states:

*A picture of what happens in Architecture [...] when thousands of people are interested in the minutest details [as opposed to a] picture of what happens when a dining-room table is chosen more or less at random, when no one [any longer] knows where it came from. [...] A period in which everything is fixed and extraordinary care is lavished on certain details [...]. A great number of people are highly interested in a detail of a dining-room chair. And then there is a period when a dining-room chair is in the drawing-room and no one knows where this came from or that people had once given enormous thought in order to know how to design it.) [9].*

The parallels the above lines to Kraus' and Loos' reflections on urns and chamber pots are rather pronounced and the intellectual genealogy clear. Moreover, Wittgenstein's use of the term 'detail' may relate to its use in craftsmanship. In craftsmanship the term is used to denote precision and adequacy to resolve design problems, specifically of an architectural character.

In light of detail's meaning for Wittgenstein, the term certainly plays a role in Wittgenstein's own architecture. For at the built level, Wittgenstein's own architectural decisions at Palais Stonborough fully reflect the

distinctions of spatial use, dictated by a refined understanding and appreciation of propriety, both social and aesthetic, his later lectures on aesthetics reflect upon. The alleged austerity of Wittgenstein's interiors, for instance, is the result of historians' interpretations of photos of the house pre- or post-use as Wittgenstein's architecture in its intended state [10]. When refurbished by his sister Margaret, the house's furnished interior fully reflected the dictates of good taste and propriety Wittgenstein eminently desired and demanded for his architecture, as he expressly wrote to his sister later on:

*Only yesterday I had to think of the house in the Kundmannngasse—I don't know why—and of how pleasingly and pleasantly you have refurbished it. In these matters we're on the same wave length [11].*

In contrast to Loos, who regarded the wall and the finishes the prerogative of the architect, Wittgenstein left such matters at the discretion of the client. Margaret, the client in this case, furnishes the house in a manner that is both independent from Ludwig's design intentions and which is in contrast to the Loosian standard in Vienna at the time. She is particularly expressive with her furnishings on the upper floors where she has her private spaces, and which she adorns with tapestries and furniture that are textured and warm. Thus, the standard historical characterizations of the house's apparent austerity as an aesthetic preference—or preference for the naked wall—appears misconstrued.

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MARGARET BREAKS, LUDWIG FOLLOWS: FROM LOOS AND HOFFMANN TO WAGNER AND PERCO

Between 1914 and 1919, a great deal transpired in the Wittgenstein family. Shortly before the First World War, Ludwig's closest sister Margaret bought the Villa Toskana in Gmunden on Lake Traunsee in Austria's unofficial lake district, the Salzkammergut. Over nearly two decades, Margaret dedicated her

energies to the renovation and modernization of the historic building. The process concludes in 1925 and is immediately followed by her next architectural project: the Palais Stonbrough (1926-1928) [12]. With the exception of his time during the war, Ludwig would spend every summer in the increasingly modernized Villa Toscana, and would follow the building's transformation closely down to the minutest of details. To get the renovation under way, Margaret contracted a relatively little known young architect, Rudolf Perco—and not, as is often suspected, Hoffmann [13]. Margaret's choice of Perco over the family architect Hoffmann (see below) indicates an emancipatory act on her part, and certainly foreshadows her analogous decision to contract Paul Engelmann over the established radicals like Loos. Perco's significance as an architect resides in part in his discipleship with Otto Wagner, and Wagner's ground-breaking efforts in modernizing Viennese architecture. As head of the architecture school at the Vienna Fine Arts Academy, Wagner in fact founded a school. Perco became a star pupil, and Perco's own architectural output at Gmunden and beyond demonstrates his Wagnerian tutelage [14]. In its orientation, Wagner's program pursued a new orientation in the training and practice of architectural design, one we could dub constructive Jugendstil. That is, while Wagner's aesthetics was partly informed by Art Nouveau sensitivities, he sought to anchor his visual design choices in the rationale of construction and function. In his famous Postal Savings Bank (1905), for instance, Wagner aesthetically elevates the duct work responsible for the building's ventilation and heating to aesthetic details. The duct work is designed to look like stelaes, stylized columns and do not recall their function directly, as standard artifacts like radiators do (see Figures 1 & 2). Here, the building systems hold aesthetic significance and meaning. Whereas in Hoffmann's work, it is carefully hidden away under, or under what may be interpreted as surface ornamentation. Perco followed Wagner's example in the Villa Toscana and turned the radiators into aesthetic elements of the architectural interior. As would, in turn, Wittgenstein in the Palais Stonborough's use of radiators (see Figures 1 and 2). So there is a clear lineage, not simply of an aesthetic decision or a built detail as such but also its underlying rationalization.

If Ludwig's future engagement with architecture is prefigured by the Villa Toscana, so is Margaret's. In contrasting Perco, Margaret acted in favor of a decidedly Modernist architect. She takes a difficult step forward in that she contracts out the work to a relatively untried-and-tested architect. She invests her money, free time, and potentially her own reputation on their promises. Margaret sets the building agenda as the primary client

“ WHERE THERE IS A  
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FACTS THERE IS A  
BASIS FOR CLARITY ”



FIGURES 1 & 2: (TOP TO BOTTOM).

which determines the (re)programming and aesthetics of the informal spaces in both building projects. Just as importantly, she departs from Hoffmann's influence. The departure is significant as Hoffman was the architect of her fully furnished Berlin flat, a wedding gift from her father. Hoffmann never worked with, but only for, Margaret. Margaret in turn would later emancipate herself aesthetically after her father's death, by nearly entirely leaving behind the wedding gift of a house. Except for two pieces of furniture, one of them designed by Hoffmann, Margaret left everything behind in Berlin when re-locating to Vienna to the Palais Schönborn [15, 16].

The Viennese architects Hoffman and Wagner are as important to our understanding of Margaret's future choices (as a patron) as they are to our understanding of Wittgenstein's architectonic idiosyncrasy. Let us first discuss Wittgenstein's relation to Josef Hoffmann's work. Returning to the biographical narrative at Wittgenstein's 1914 horrific and nauseating break from Loos, Wittgenstein spends ten days at his parents' lavish country home. The building was partially remodeled by Hoffmann, founding member of the Wiener Werkstätte and member of the Secession. Hoffmann presented, in many senses, an antithesis to Loos both artistically and intellectually. Hoffmann realized numerous architectural projects for the Wittgenstein family in close cooperation with Ludwig's father and was responsible for his sister Margaret's first apartment in Berlin in 1905.

Hoffman was a major proponent of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) where the artist delivers the complete package deal for the client. A building, interior furnishes, cutlery, crockery, and even jewelry are tailor-made to perfectly cohere in the total ensemble. The pieces are assembled by the architect, having solicited nothing from the client's own aesthetic inclinations. The client willingly signed up for the total treatment, wherein the architect designs their entire domestic realm.

Wittgenstein would later reject the *Gesamtkunstwerk* position—leaving all furnishing and other household objects to the discretion of the house's patron and tenant. He was morally open to a collaged or unplanned mingling of objects in his house, provided they bespoke a certain quality and contextual propriety. In this rejection of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he is in keeping with Loos' idea and remaining critical of Hoffman that architecture would be confined to what was necessary from a use perspective. The confinement of aesthetics and design to use was not just critical of Hoffman, but restricted aesthetic universalism and excess. So much so that aesthetic universalism and excess is banished from the architect's scope of work.



Wittgenstein viewed Loos' aesthetic confinement not simply as the boundaries of architectural aesthetics, but further as the limits of an architect's role in building. The limits of the architect's role is the design of the house, leaving the inhabitants to develop its interior aesthetic as they choose. The demarcating the architect's scope of work runs parallel to Wittgenstein's position in his earlier writings in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein views the factual or what is the case, that which one can speak about clearly. His valuing of the factual translates directly into the way he approaches building and the design questions associated with it, such that one might argue that the Wittgenstein House has a certain clarity of expression itself.

For him, where there is a set of knowns or facts there is the basis for clarity. Transitioning beyond the knowns, or the basis for clarity, is otherwise a transition into the mystical. Wittgenstein famously critiques attempts to express the mystical, arguing that one must remain silent, at least if one is to speak philosophically.

For Wagner, some facts manifest from a design brief that the architect cannot merely design around but rather has to expressively accommodate —he called this *Sachzwang*. Though Wagner had introduced the notion of *Sachzwang* to Viennese architecture at the close of the century, Wittgenstein's practice in architecture is complimentary to Wagner's position to a certain extent [17]. Indeed, there are architectural echoes to Wagner in Wittgenstein's house. Looking to Wagner's 1912-1913 Lupus Sanatorium, there is a precision in the placement of the main columns and cross-beams hitherto absent in Viennese architecture, and taken up only again later in Wittgenstein's.

Regarding both Wagner and Hoffmann, there is a nuanced taking over of pre-existing Viennese ideas that Wittgenstein adapted to meet his own situation and goals. At the same time and in contrast

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to Loos, Wittgenstein had no personal or biographical confrontation with Hoffmann or Wagner. While Wagner's early death in 1918 may explain this, regarding Hoffmann this is all the more extraordinary since Wittgenstein would spend many a summer in the visually opulent interior of a Hoffmann design during his summers, at the family's hunting lodge. Nor do we have records of written commentary on Hoffmann's design stance. Arguably, Wittgenstein was not compelled to articulate his reaction to Hoffman's work in that it did not provoke as Loos' later musings would [18].

At the built level, however, traces of commentary and reaction to both architects exist. Without sharing Hoffmann's predilection for Jugendstil ornamentation, Wittgenstein carefully observed and copied architectural details of interest to him. Traveling to another family-owned building, the Villa Toscana in Gmunden Rudolf Perco had renovated, Wittgenstein recorded a couple of technical details. The details would then re-appear in his own house, especially regarding heating elements, including the famous radiators and window mechanisms. Perco's pioneering contribution was to introduce the so-called French or Parisian windows into Austria. Parisian windows are more generously dimensioned than typical parapet Viennese windows, in that they extend from the floor level upwards. Vienna's harsh winter climate and lack of proper interior heating technology had previously disinclined Vienna's architects to use Parisian windows. Wittgenstein, observing Perco's introduction of Parisian windows at Villa Toscana, would now bring them to his Vienna project, and employ Parisian windows on all levels (which not even Loos had done). Finally, Perco had deliberately used a fitting that connected each window's two metal panes, which was an odd choice of materials at the time (see Figures 3 and 4). Wittgenstein took over Perco's distinctive fitting design and his choice of materials, deviating from Loos' approach which included wooden window fixture. At the same time, Wittgenstein apparently saw no reason to copy any other of the renovated villa's detailing—confirming once more his eclecticism towards the reservoir of Viennese Modernism and traditionalism.

Or again, in the Palais Schönborn-Batthyány Wittgenstein's sister previously lived in, Wittgenstein observed a built detail then common in Viennese architecture of the period—that the first interior door would rest, not on the floor, but on the first step of the short set of stairs leading up to the second interior hall (see Figure 5 and 6). (The same was true of the family's Vienna palais at Alleegasse 16, now known as Palais Wittgenstein.) Again, this was not purely an aesthetic choice but served utilitarian



FIGURE 3: INTERIOR VIEW OF PERCO'S WINDOWS FROM A DISTANCE.



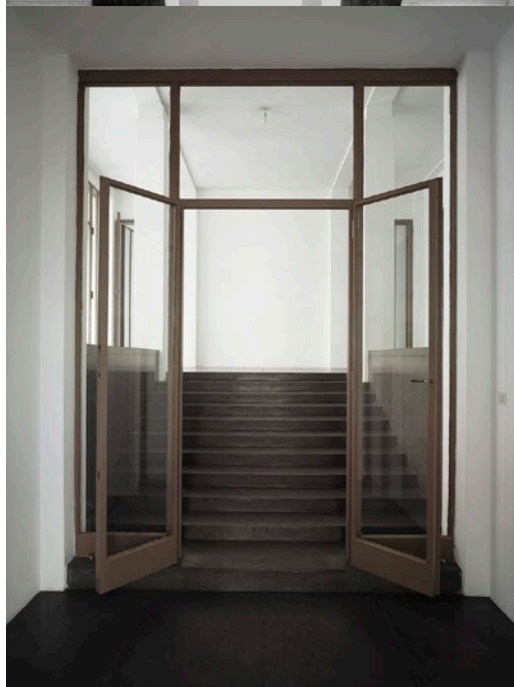
FIGURE 4: VIEW OF PERCO'S WINDOW STOP FITTING.

ends—here, to ensure that any residual muck or moisture accrued from rain or storm water would not tarnish the door or seep into the interior. Wittgenstein takes over that detail, stripped of all period ornamentation of the pre- or Jugendstil era, in his own house—in a manner, and like so much else of the house, an historical ostension without being historicist. For, as he says in his 1938 lectures on aesthetics, deterioration in architecture occurs “when you get imitations,” that is, wholesale copying of details with no understanding of “where this came from” i.e. what original use or purpose was behind the design detail [19, 20]. In this sense, and with regard to other built details already discussed (and to be discussed below), Wittgenstein builds levels of meaning into his architecture, and operates on indirect ostension rather than explicit copying, in line with his later discussions of ostensive explanation in the *Philosophical Investigations* [21]. These ‘levels of meaning’ operate on, and their discernment accordingly relies on, an understated familiarity with local Viennese architecture, elements of which Wittgenstein used with great ease as they were part of the everyday life he was immersed in. To later art-historical interpreters, especially those visiting the house (and indeed town) for a brief period only, Wittgenstein’s points of reference will seem elusive, as they must, for anybody not sharing his form of life and cultural frame of reference [22]. Finally, points of contact to his (later) philosophical reflections, such as ostensive explanation, need not indicate causal relations of influence—where an idea in architecture ‘leads Wittgenstein to’ having an idea in philosophy [23]. Rather, Wittgenstein exercised a similar stance or orientation in both domains, leading to similar though not necessarily overlapping (let alone, identical) outputs in architecture and philosophy. Before investigating the results of Wittgenstein’s engagement with architecture, his path toward that engagement will be briefly examined.

#### WITTGENSTEIN'S PATH TO ARCHITECTURE

With the Villa Toscana completed in 1925, Margaret decided to build a city mansion in a Viennese suburb. She approached Paul Engelmann, a project architect who had frequently worked with Loos, but he had a limited oeuvre on his own. Around the same time, Wittgenstein returns to Vienna after an unsuccessful and badly concluded attempt at becoming an elementary school teacher [24]. He writes to a trusted friend and future colleague at Cambridge University—none other than John Maynard Keynes—in late 1925:

*I have decided to remain [a] teacher, as long as I feel that the troubles into which I get*



FIGURES 5 & 6: VIEW OF THE PALAIS WITTGENSTEIN (ABOVE) IN CONTRAST TO THE WITTGENSTEIN HOUSE (BELOW).

*that way, may do me any good. [...] If I leave teaching off I will probably come to England and look for a job there, because I am convinced that I cannot find anything at all possible in this country. In this case I will want your help [sc. to secure a job in teaching] [25].*

Seven months later, a major incident with a student forces Wittgenstein to resign as a teacher and exposes him to federal court hearings, which solidifies his grim prediction as to his future employability in Austria—certainly where the public sector educational institutions were concerned.

In these circumstances, his sister's offer that same year to act, not just as architectural patron but, as *de facto* employer for her compromised brother must have appeared as the only reprieve short of exile. Margaret's offer of employment further coincided with the family's alleged attempts at the time to hush up Wittgenstein's humiliating court case [26]. These are the circumstances in which Wittgenstein finds himself architect of a house.

Wittgenstein's foray into architecture, in that light, cannot simply be attributed to a purely vocational decision on Wittgenstein's part, but was forced on him by external circumstances. The circumstances shed new light on Wittgenstein's remark that he regarded work on architecture as work on oneself [27]. He may have argued that working on architecture is working oneself, because in his own case, he worked on himself through his engagement with architecture [28].

In 1926 Ludwig becomes involved in Margaret's project to build a city mansion at the express invitation of both his sister and Engelmann. From this point on, Wittgenstein described himself as an architect, and no longer as a teacher, as documented by his paperwork re-establishing his residency in Vienna. Rather than merely supporting the project at a distance, Ludwig gradually takes over the entire design process his friend Paul Engelmann had already begun. By May 1926, Wittgenstein was living in Vienna again and had started his new two-year long stint as an architect.

Wittgenstein's involvement in the design process at this relatively late stage can be seen as a reaction of sorts to the project's earlier stages. The sister, having rejected Loos and Hoffmann alike (the first two ways to approach the project), and then having contracted Perco (the third way), now finds a fourth way to approach the building project. Ludwig helps to furnish an architectural mantle on which to pin her own ideas. Margaret Wittgenstein, well embedded in the highly cultured Viennese upper class, knew what she would have received from Loos and Hoffmann. It was chic at the time to contract one of the two architects. Collectors of Klimt paintings leaned toward Hoffmann, who frequently worked with Klimt, and

collectors of Schiele leaned toward Loos. Though well-versed in the aesthetic trends championed by the liberal Viennese upper class, Margaret Wittgenstein deliberately side-stepped them as a patron—and made her brother to understand that she expected likewise of him as her architect. That is, Margaret was not just Wittgenstein’s immediate reason for engaging architectural design, but served as an ally in a departure from the established norms of Viennese Modernism. The finished house was to overcome both the architectural and cultural conventions of its time while additionally reflecting the growing emancipation of its owner. The remaining paper inquires as to whether and how the building itself achieves the siblings’ rogue ambitions.

#### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS, 1: FLOOR PLAN

The building’s floor plan, particularly the ground floor, is complex and dense. Wittgenstein faced the problem of creating a flexible world to accommodate the public and private lives of his sister. It was necessary the plan allowed for ready re-interpretation and re-appropriation while also allowing for the following of strict social and cultural expectations. Above all, the spatial program reflects Margaret’s family and social life. There is social gathering space for her absentee husband, two sons, two foster sons, as well as domestic staff. The plan’s resulting modernity and unconventionality, particularly in the Viennese context, emerges as follows.

The main floor combines public and private areas. One of the doors in the large semi-public hall opens directly into Margaret’s living and sleeping area labeled living room on Wittgenstein’s floor plan. An alcove opposite the window contains a niche for her bed, which also served as a couch during the day. The adjacent dressing area, misleadingly

“ [LUDWIG] SERVED AS AN ALLY IN A DEPARTURE FROM THE ESTABLISHED NORM OF VIENNESE MODERNISM. ”

labeled bedroom on Wittgenstein's plan, is hidden behind a screen.

The main floor served as a stage on which Margaret lived her life. It was the focal point of her activities, private and public, within the house. The other floors were reserved for her husband, children, and domestic staff.

The building is viewed as consisting of two houses: a spatially organized object and a use-object. Wittgenstein himself insisted that, for all the plan's strictness, the house would allow for multiple uses and furnishings, as long as overall strictures on quality and correctness were observed [29]. In terms of spatial organization, the building is understood as an elementary and structural envelope, as a sequence of spaces—of autonomous spaces with defined proportions. The use of concrete furnishes a strikingly abstract background, a basic spatial envelope which draws its characteristics from the precise use of proportion, light, rhythm and tactility. (The characteristics of material use receives special focus in details with an overt relation to mechanical engineering, Wittgenstein's original subject at university: metal doors, metal windows, radiators, sliding elements and elevators.) The distinguishing features between Wittgenstein and Loos' approach to building design is perhaps most apparent in the spatial sequence. There is neither a spatial plan nor a central living hall as favored by Loos, nor an open plan with free spatial transitions. Rather, there is a ceremonial progression of sorts created by a variety of doors and thresholds. Wittgenstein designed, with great precision, a sequence of door types that vary subtly at the level of transparency and opacity. There are doors with clear glass, opaque glass, and without glass altogether (see Figures 7-9).

Further, the ground floor living room of Wittgenstein's plan is visually separated from the staircase and thus differs markedly from the type of grand living hall that Loos placed prominently in his domestic architecture for Vienna's upper class. Finally, Wittgenstein's internal spaces are completely devoid of material padding where Loos' celebrated the sensual and haptic use of materials such as natural stone, colored marble and granite, timber-paneling, leather and other wall coverings (cut and faceted glass and, later, color as a consciously-used spatial finish).

## ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS, 2: BUILDING VOLUME AND FAÇADE

Looking at the house, one is primarily struck by the strong plastic appearance of the building, which has a cubist-like form unusual for Vienna in 1928. The sculptural effect of the house is comparable only to the contemporary building by Adolf Loos, the Moller House, but which



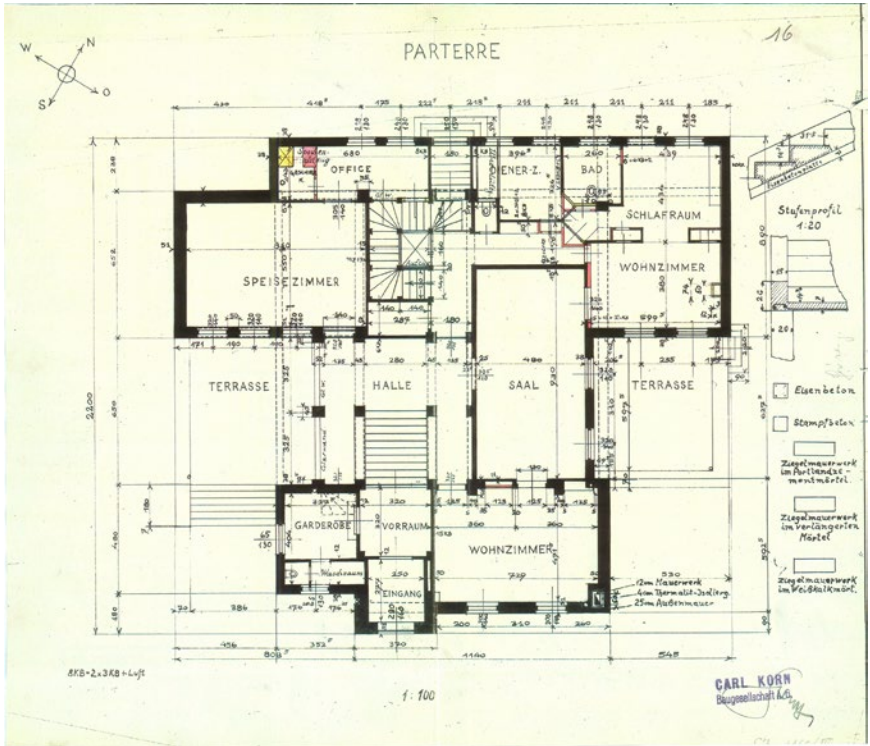


FIGURE 7: GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF THE WITTGENSTEIN HOUSE.

is markedly more reserved. Viewed in perspective, the projections and recesses of the building volume result in an apparently random window arrangement. The orthogonal drawings of the façades, on the other hand, reveal axially arranged windows, which enjoy a particularly complex relationship with the interior spaces. The fenestration as a result offers no clues about the sort of room located behind each window. Unlike in the work of Adolf Loos, bathrooms and small ancillary spaces are not represented on the façade by small windows. Wittgenstein's façade is not a functional illustration of the various spaces but rather a composed whole which works with axes and rhythms.

On the main floor, there is an unwavering use of virtually identical glazed metal doors on the façade and throughout the internal spaces. The door's use clearly demonstrates a design decision that cannot be reduced to functionalism and that does not feature in the architecture of Adolf Loos. The metal and glass double doors are arranged like Viennese casement windows. In one instance, the fenestrations are arranged in the form of French doors to the terrace and another as French doors to the hall. The hall is transformed into the external element of the internal space, a sensitively interpretation of the spatial hierarchy and the public and private characters of the rooms. Internally, the large living room or library and Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein's living room are the only two spaces whose internal double doors have no glass and consist entirely of metal. By controlling the amount of light passing through the glass doors, Wittgenstein directs movement through the house. Upon entering the house, the visitor's attention is drawn to the light to the left of the entry (the glass wall to the terrace) and eventually toward the dining room and the small breakfast room. To the right, the large living room or library can also be entered via glass doors. The programmatic sequencing of the entrance doors and terrace doors continues in the same manner throughout the house. It generates highly deliberate diagonal lines of sight that would have, for instance, allowed Margaret to discretely view visitors in the hall from her sleeping area in the curious alcove. The particular line of sight is permitted only when the doors were left open, providing a vantage point from which Margaret could oversee the central activities of the house.

The sequence of spaces creates an almost cinematic spatial and temporal chronology of uses which is expressed in the diagonal nature of the visual axes: the glass doors establish visual axes from the dining-room, through the hall and into the large living room (library) and from the small living room (Margaret Stonborough's salon), through the music room and into

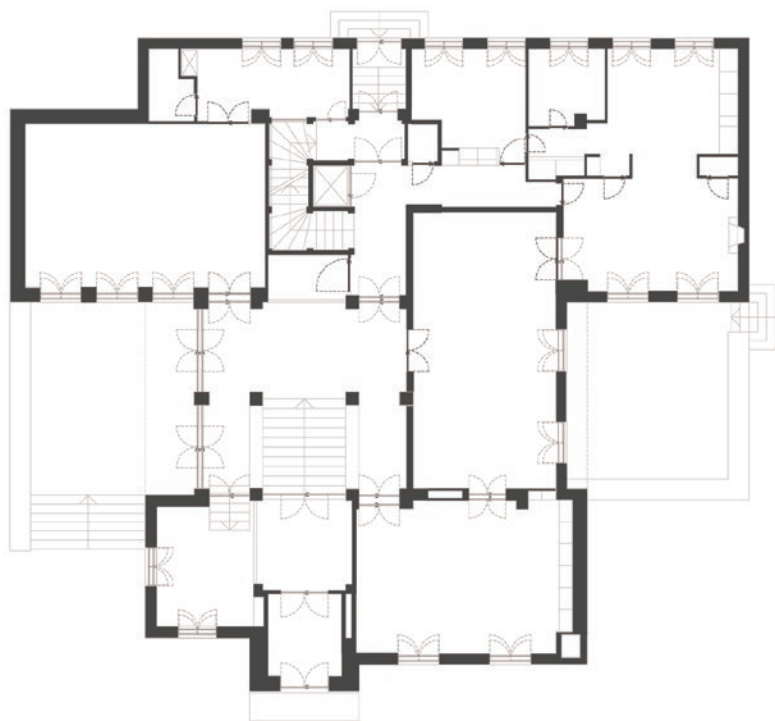


FIGURE 8: GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF THE WITTGENSTEIN HOUSE, DRAWN BY EMILA BRUCK AND DORIS SCHEICHER.

the hall. As a result we have many intersecting and parallel visual axes, axes that are both linear and diagonal, axes that are both real and (in a sense) virtual. When the doors are open in certain arrangements, the building prevents its viewers to take in the unfolding scene all in a single glance. Instead, one has to take in the happenings in discrete visual moments and perspectives, and arrange one's experience of the house sequentially—as one would, for instance, view a film, one scene at a time, without being able to take in everything at once.

### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS, 3: INTERIORS

The interpretation of Wittgenstein's interior design is separate from the building's volume and envelope. The interiors have a fundamental and elementary quality virtually untouched by the furniture. The simplicity of the interiors embodies the greatest difference between Wittgenstein and his architectural contemporaries who opposed the separation of architecture and internal finishes. Each of their positions were represented on the Vienna architecture scene.

For Josef Hoffmann, architecture—the dwelling in particular—should be determined by the artistic predilection of the architect. The predilection could go as far as determining everyday objects such as kitchen utensils, appliances, and textiles. In contrast, Loos argued that the walls belonged to the architect, but not such moveable elements as chairs, dining chairs and armchairs. His approach yielded the design of in-built furniture, wall cladding and chimney-nooks. By consciously choosing such objects, Loos developed his own closed aesthetic. He had no difficulty incorporating inherited items of furniture or oriental carpets into a new architectural design. His interiors were sometimes characterized by the use of ornamental oriental carpets because the objects were effective status symbols of the bourgeois.

Wittgenstein gave instructions and guidelines to his sister Margaret regarding the furnishing of her own house. The guidelines and restrictions were severe. She was to use neither carpets, curtains, nor chandeliers. His position stands in distinct contrast to Loos' pupil Paul Engelmann, who would have wanted a Loosian interior for Margaret but was complicit with Ludwig who preferred an autonomous one. Wittgenstein's absolute position regarding carpets and curtains is, however, easy to explain. His architecture had already addressed the functional issue of the curtain—the ground floor windows incorporated vertical black-out elements that were parked at basement level during the day. The anthracite-black artificial

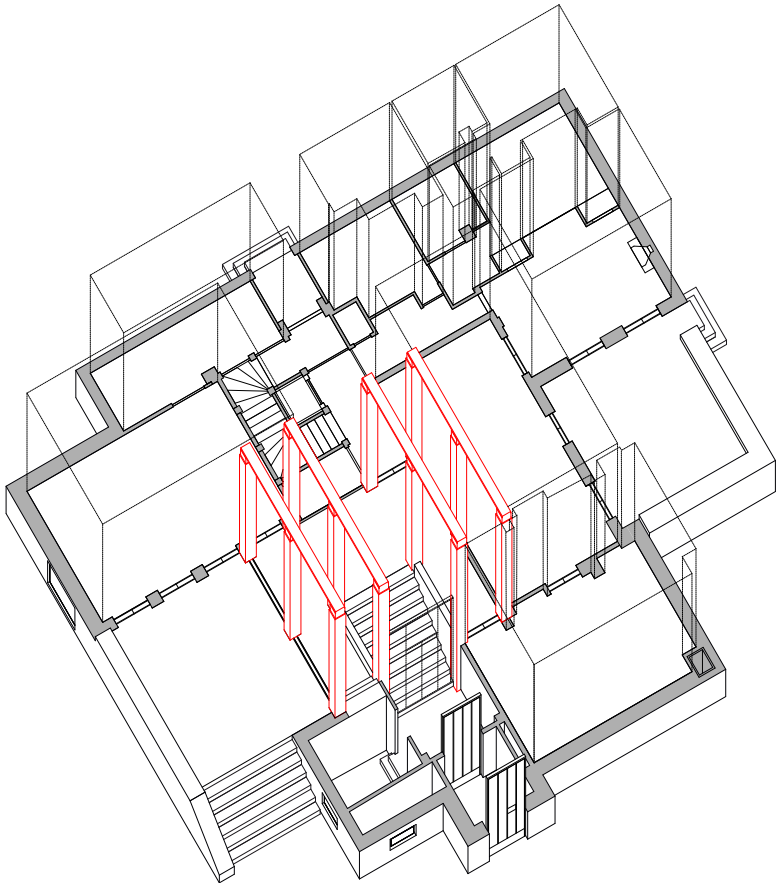


FIGURE 9: AXOMETRIC OF THE GROUND FLOOR OF THE WITTGENSTEIN HOUSE. DRAWING HIGHLIGHTS THE COLUMN PLACEMENT IN THE MAIN HALLWAY.

stone floor with the detailed joint pattern was part of the design in which the reflection of the black stone de-emphasizes the material qualities of the perfectly polished floor, in turn creating the sensation that the floor itself dematerializes. Laying a carpet on the floor would have interfered with the dematerialization effect. The laying of carpets on the floor in this example would have been inconsistent with the floor's design, which does something to explain why Wittgenstein was strict in his instructions and guidelines for the house.

Wittgenstein's approach to the issue of artificial light was similar. The qualities and characteristics of a space are heavily determined by how much and by which route light comes into a room. A room appears differently with light from just one window on one wall, and differently with a floor to ceiling window wall. Wittgenstein's austere decision to have a single unadorned 200 watt bulb at ceiling level allowed for an evenly distributed light in all directions at even intensity; unlike the uneven distribution of shaded lamp shades. Wittgenstein's lighting design, one could argue, is objective, given its neutrality and impartiality to an observer's relative position in the house. In contrast, all further lighting sources would be induced by candles or standing lamps, were thus highly situational and subjective, and could be adjusted by the owner and guests to suit specific occasions.

#### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS, 4: LEVEL OF USE

Furniture itself was not a matter for Wittgenstein the architect. Here, he allowed his sister—the user of the house—complete freedom. Wittgenstein was familiar with his sister's furniture and art collection because he had often been her guest in her *belétage* in the Palais Schönborn-Batthyany. He knew how his sister's house operated at the social level. One cannot escape the feeling and suspicion that Wittgenstein saw furniture, users and visitors as merely temporary, and in relative terms, less significant events in an absolute space, which served as a stage. His sister and the furniture changed continuously and yet this elementary space remained unchanged. During a social event the house functioned differently from times when only the family was present. His architecture was to be equally appropriate for both situations: hence the dark, almost black floor, which levels out the objects placed upon it—enveloping them in a world of continuity.

Margaret Stonborough's visitors, furniture and works of art inhabit the Wittgensteinian space almost as if they are egalitarian guests of the building. The approach reveals the radicalism of a modernism,

which simultaneously takes up elementary and autonomous qualities of the building itself. Here, Wittgenstein's artistic intention reveals itself as an abstract creative will triggered by the architectural debate about the Viennese *modus vivendi*.

## CONCLUSION

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Wittgenstein's late philosophy urged against understanding our interpersonal communication in language in too fragmented a manner. Only by contextualizing our verbal exchanges against a shared and highly specific forms of life can their full meaning or significance be brought to the fore. Urging a contextualist position of sorts may hold validity in our engagement with and communication across material culture as well as architecture. This contextualism can fruitfully inform our reception of Wittgenstein's own architecture. Informed by a deep affinity to the material culture surrounding him since his earliest childhood, as Wittgenstein's own engagement with architecture undoubtedly was, engaging Wittgenstein the architect is not primarily a lesson for us so much as a challenge—a challenge to contemporary historiography [30]. Our own understanding of the full genesis and denouement of Viennese modernism is still too fragmented for us to understand Wittgenstein's own place in it, and frequently deters us to allocate him such a place at all. Wittgenstein's being at home and ease with a specific culture and its manifold reference points concomitantly accounts for the work's inaccessibility to those not sharing in the form of life that informed the house's gestation. In a sense, Wittgenstein's own house may explain why the canonization of buildings in disregard to their highly specific forms of life frequently make for awkward histories and reluctant exclusions. The resilience toward canonizing the house may be rooted in the house's stubborn refusal to explain itself or render itself into a code easily deciphered

“ WITTGENSTEIN'S OWN HOUSE MAY EXPLAIN WHY THE CANONIZATION OF ARCHITECTURAL WORKS [...] FREQUENTLY MAKES FOR AWKWARD HISTORIES AND RELUCTANT EXCLUSIONS. ”

by those outside its immediate context. This refusal may account for the continued relevance of not only Wittgenstein's own architecture but of our ongoing attempts to come to terms with it as a site of cultural transfer and transformation.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I thank Carolyn Fahey for probing questions and edits that greatly improved this paper and led me to expand my existing research in new directions, and Stefan Koller for help with the philosophical content.

#### ENDNOTES

[1] The present work builds on my earlier publications: August Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins: Rekonstruktion einer gebauten Idee* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2011); August Sarnitz, "Reconstructing Wittgenstein as an Architect: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein—Defining and Designing a New Interior," in *Private Utopias*, ed. August Sarnitz (Berline and Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 106-123.

[2] Stanford Anderson, "Architecture in a Cultural Field," *Princeton University*, 5 March 1988), Stanford Anderson archives, disk Princeton/Zürich, rev. 20 April 1988. The intended meaning of critical conventionalism is well conveyed by a quote from Loos provided by Anderson: "Tradition is no more the enemy of development than the mother is an enemy of the child. Tradition is a reservoir of strength from countless generations, and the firm foundation for a healthy future" (22 n. 15). A comparable dialectic between tradition and transformation in Wittgenstein's philosophical work is discussed by Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27 ff.

[3] The encounter is referenced in a letter of Wittgenstein's to Ludwig von Ficker, as discussed by Burkhardt Rukschcio and Roland Schachel, *Adolf Loos: Leben und Werk* (Wien: Residenz Verlag, 1982), 195. See further Brian McGuiness, *Young Ludwig: Wittgenstein's Life, 1889-1921* (London: Penguin, 1988), 209; and Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*, 145-146.

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein to Paul Engelmann, 2 September 1919. (Cf. Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*, p. 148). The English translation provided here is owed to Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic*



*Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 224.

[5] Karl Kraus, “Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag,” for Adolf Loos (Vienna: Loecker Verlag, 1930), 27.

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 9-10. The lectures on aesthetics date to 1938. The similarities between Wittgenstein’s writings and (some of) Loos’s are well documented in John Hyman, “The Urn and the Chamber Pot,” in *Wittgenstein, Theory, and the Arts*, eds. Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey (London: Routledge, 2011), 137-153. Hyman’s architectural assessment seems overstated, however: “the design of the house in the Kundmannngasse would have been inconceivable without the example of Loos’s work, and the influence of his ideas” (137).

[7] *Ibid.*, 7, n. 2.

[8] *Ibid.*, 8. Cf. Hyman, “The Urn and the Chamber Pot,” 137. Hyman states: “the emphasis Wittgenstein places on technical correctness in design and his readiness to talk about clothing, hairdressing and architecture in the same breath are surely due, at least in part, to Loos’ influence.” On Loos’ own ideas on daily (fashion) objects of use, see in particular the essay collection on Loos, Adolf Loos, *Spoken Into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897-1900*, trans. J. O. Newman and J. H. Smith (Boston: MIT Press, 1987), with an introduction by Aldo Rossi.

[9] *Ibid.*, 7, n. 2.

[10] Thus Hyman writes: “if we compare the Stonborough house with Loos’ domestic architecture, its austerity and refinement appear a little overwrought.” From Hyman, “The Urn and the Chamber Pot,” 146. Similarly, David Macarthur, “Working on Oneself in Philosophy and Architecture: A Perfectionist Reading of the Wittgenstein House,” *Architecture Theory Review* 19, no. 2 (2015): “With regard to the matter of ornament, Wittgenstein applies Loos’ ideas more systematically and scrupulously than Loos himself. Wittgenstein’s interiors are, in sharp contrast to those of Loos, characterised by an overwhelming impression of austerity, simplicity, and stillness.”

[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein to Margaret Stonborough, letter dated to circa September 1949, in *Wittgenstein. Familienbriefe*, eds. Brian McGuinness, M. C. Ascher, and O. Pfersmann (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1996), 200. Cf. Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*, 82.

[12] For details and documentation (including floor plans and building permits) of the Villa Toscana, see Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*,

43-44; for a photo of Wittgenstein in the building, see Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*, 71.

[13] E. Prokopp, Magarethe Stonborough-Wittgenstein, Böhlau, Wien, Chapter on the villa Toscana: the drawings of Rudolf Perco are very similar to those of Josef Hoffmann of the same period. The author holds the same opinion. Perco's drawings look "Hoffmanesque."

[14] Perco's architectonic contributions were (and, to this day, remain largely) overlooked by architecture historians. Within Austria, Perco regained recognition with the publication of Otto Antonia Graf, *Die Vergessene Wagnerschule* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1969). See also Ursula Prokop, *Rudolf Perco 1884–1942. Von der Architektur des Roten Wien zur NS-Megalomanie* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001).

[15] The two items of furniture include a post-Art Deco table by Dagobert Peche. Peche, at the time relatively little known, later became a highly sought-after designer: testimony to Margaret's own impeccable taste Wittgenstein would later speak so highly of (see letter, quoted above). For photos of the furniture, and traces thereof in Margaret's own drawings, see Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins* 62, 130.

[16] For photos of Palais Schönborn, see Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*. To confuse the building with Palace Schönbrunn, as Monk does, is tantamount to confusing Windsor with Buckingham Palace; had Margaret already lived in anything like the latter, transitioning into the later Palais Stonborough would have conveyed an immense loss in socio-economic status.

[17] See Stanford Anderson, "Sachlichkeit and Modernity, or Realist Architecture," in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles: The Getty Center, 1993), 323-361 as well as August Sarnitz, "Realism versus Verniedlichung: The Design of the Great City," in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles: The Getty Center, 1993), 85-113. On a related note, Loos critiqued imagination as a source of architectural ideas, since imagination (for Loos) is dissociated from cognition of the realities of fact and use. See Adolf Loos, "Der Sattlermeister," *Der Sturm* 1, no. 3 (1910).

[18] As an author, Wittgenstein was keen to record disagreements, especially when they were egregious (such as on the subject of Weininger's misogyny), and less keen to record agreements or mild disagreements. Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, preface to *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), 23. Wittgenstein states: "what I have here written makes no claim to novelty in points of detail; and

therefore I give no sources, because it is indifferent to me whether what I have thought has already been thought before me by another.”

[19] Wittgenstein, *Lectures*, 7.

[20] *Ibid.*, 7. n. 2.

[21] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), §7.

[22] What complicates the issue is that the historiography of Austrian modern architecture has been shaped by the necessarily selective nature of synoptic studies, frequently composed from an outsider’s perspective, such as Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1981); or Allan Janik and Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (Chicago : Ivan R. Dee, 1973). These works arguably create too limited a frame of reference for us to understand the diversity and nuance in architectural modernism that Wittgenstein and others before him (cf. Otto Antonia Graf, *Die Vergessene Wagnerschule*) responded to. See further the conclusion below.

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[23] The causal reading is critiqued by Christopher Long, “[Review of] Nana Last. *Wittgenstein’s House*,” review of *Wittgenstein’s House: Language, Space, and Architecture*, by Nana Last in *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* XLVI, II (2009): 230-233.

[24] Cf. Alexander Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein: A Family at War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2010), 148-149.

[25] Ludwig Wittgenstein to J. M. Keynes, 18 October 1925, in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911 – 1951*, ed. Brian McGuiness (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 157. Italics added.

[26] Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, 162.

[27] Ludwig Wittgenstein, MS 112, dated to 14 October 1931, posthumously published in *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, eds. Georg Henrik van Wright, Heiki Nyman, and Alois Pichler (Stuttgart: Suhrkamp, 1994), 52.

[28] While many details surrounding Wittgenstein’s transition into architecture are beyond historical verification, Wittgenstein’s oldest sister, Hermine, later confirmed that, in her own assessment, Margaret seemed ‘psychologically compelled’ to help out her younger brother with the architecture commission, which seems to corroborate the impressions from Wittgenstein’s own correspondence. These unpublished family memoirs are preserved in the Brenner archives in Innsbruck, Austria (cf. Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*, 230). Hermine Wittgenstein’s relation to the house is of further importance: we owe to her surviving pastel

drawings the only documentation of Margaret's original refurbishing of the house in the 1920s and 1930s (Sarnitz, *Die Architektur Wittgensteins*, 129). During World War II, the house had been used as a military hospital and it would never be re-instated to its pre-war interior state.

[29] See the earlier discussion on the place of 'quality' and 'correctness' in Wittgenstein's aesthetics.

[30] See accounts on Wittgenstein's place in Viennese Modernism and the *fin de siècle* Vienna, such as that of Allan Janik, Roger Paden, and Paul Engelmann.