

The Architect's Gesture*

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The earlier culture will become a heap of rubble and finally a heap of ashes, but spirits will hover over the ashes.
L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

The deceitful slogan

“*The terms: architect or architecture*, he detested them and never said: architect or architecture, and *every time* that I or someone else pronounced these words, he instantly replied he could not hear the words architect or architecture, that those two words were merely verbal deformations, nothing more, spawns no thinking being could allow himself to use and, incidentally, I never did so in his presence and, besides, even when I was elsewhere I could not use the words architect or architecture anymore; Höller has also grown accustomed to not using the words architect or architecture, we also limited ourselves to speaking of construction or the art of construction; and that the term construction was one of the most beautiful terms in existence we had known since Roithamer had spoken on the matter ...”¹.

It is not to Wittgenstein to whom Thomas Bernhard confers this rejection of the terms “architect or architecture”, but to Roithamer, the constructor of the Cone, a fictitious builder that is nonetheless a close relation to the philosopher whom he so closely resembles on more than one count. As for Wittgenstein, he figured for some time in the Vienna telephone guide as a professional architect. But this is not to say that he had any great sympathy for the trends displayed by the most representative examples of what the word meant at the time. A note written in 1930 reads:

* Text of the conference dictated by the author in the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú on April the 12th, 2007. The original text appears in French in *La Part de l’Oeil*, 8 (1992).

¹ Bernhard, Thomas, *Korrektur*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975, French translation by A. Kohn: *Corrections*, Paris: Gallimard, 1978, pp. 15-16. All translations are mine.

“Today, the difference between a good architect and a poor architect is that the latter succumbs to every temptation, while the true architect resists it”².

And how many did he deem capable of this? What we know about him and the feelings that his time –or rather, his epoch– inspired in him, could allow us to cut that number quite short. But if one wants to have a clearer idea of what these *temptations* may have involved, the house he built at the request of his sister Gretl (Margarete Stonborough) may certainly –and negatively– provide us with a fairly accurate image of them.

If the circumstances which led him to set out on such an enterprise are basically personal –and to a considerable extent, fortuitous– in nature, and if the meaning one may want to give to this decision, depending on what one thinks of him and his mindset (both morally and intellectually speaking) at the time are not any less hazardous, then the importance of architecture in the convulsions taking place in Vienna can be brought to mind³, recalling that what made it a “nation for geniuses”, was that which “equally implied its ruin”⁴. Among other, more significant and interesting, aspects on Wittgenstein, the fact that he did build a house, and that he did so in Vienna –even if this does not help us understand his work– is a matter of no small importance when it comes to making sense of what this may have meant to him in a world which he perceived to be profoundly alien.

To this avail, the attitude that Thomas Bernhard bestows on Roithamer, is remarkably kindred to that which also led Adolf Loos to oppose the architecture of the *Ringstrasse*, and eventually, that of the *Secession*⁵, as radically as was imaginable. Loos refused to assimilate architecture into art; to his eyes, the worst of confusions was entrenched in what he called “the deceitful slogan of ‘applied arts’ [*arts appliqués*]”. And to some extent, Wittgenstein’s case is not very different: so much so, that it is reasonable to suppose that he set out on the construction of his sister’s house

² Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Remarques-mêlées (Culture and value)*, French translation by Gérard Granel, Mauzevin: TER 1984.

³ See the analyses Carl Schorske makes on the matter in *Vienne fin de siècle, Politique et culture*, French translation by Y. Thoraval, Paris: Le Seuil, 1983.

⁴ Musil, Robert, *L’homme sans qualités*, chapter 8, French translation by Philippe Jaccottet, Paris: Le Seuil, 1957.

⁵ Loos’ (1870-1933) opposition to what was at first known as the *Ringstrassenstil* or *historicism*, and later as the ‘*Secession*’ –a movement to which he was furthermore, and at some point, related– is signaled by the publication of his famous article ‘The Potemkin City’, in *Ver Sacrum*, 1898; and the essay ‘Ornament and Crime’ in 1908 ; as well as by the construction of the Goldman & Salatsch Store in 1898 ; the Michaelerhaus in 1909-1911, and the refurbishing of the Cafe Museum in 1899 (which his adversaries were quick to nickname as ‘Cafe Nihilismus’).

in a similar spirit. The interest we deposit in the house itself, however, is often based on ill-conceived notions that correspond quite thinly to what this episode in his life indeed represents. And it is also true that this episode, together with others, is capable of enriching the singular and enigmatic image that we have of him, and the misrepresentations that invariably escort it; to which the odd –not to say unique— case of a philosopher-architect is added⁶.

The site of the house is very close to where, but some years before, and upon returning from the war, he had picked up the profession of a schoolteacher. In catering to his sister's wish to have an ample residence built to her taste⁷, Wittgenstein performed one of the three completed projects of his life –each a different time of his existence— together with the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* and the *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen* (Vocabulary for the use of public schools)⁸. But if biographies and published testimonies generally make little or no space for the construction of the house, this is not the case of studies more specifically committed to his work since his death in 1951⁹. But it is not so easy –and even more when nothing proves, *a priori*, that this may really be of interest¹⁰– to clarify what sort of a

⁶ The house on the Kundmannngasse did not always stir the interest that it does today. Margarethe Stonborough abandoned it to migrate and, after her death, its succession led to a project for its demolition in 1971. Because of the timely interventions and the passionate defense of some, it was finally declared to be of artistic interest and was saved from demolition.

⁷ As for the reasons that compelled Wittgenstein's sister to propose this to him, not much is known, but it is safe to surmise that the circumstances which led Wittgenstein to relinquish his career as a schoolteacher –and depression which appears to have ensued– incited Gretl to enthruse him with the invitation to partake in this initiative. On these several biographic matters, see Chauviré, C., *L. Wittgenstein, "The contemporaries"*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1989; and also Monk, R., *L. W.: The Duty of Genius* (the only complete biography to date), London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.

⁸ The *Wörterbuch* was written during the years in Tratenbach, Neukirchen, and, more specifically, Otterthal. It was published in 1926 by Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, in Vienna. See Cometti, J. P., presentation and translation of the *Prologue* in "L. Wittgenstein", *Sud* (1986), revisited in *Aspects of Wittgenstein, Sud* (1989).

⁹ 5868 assorted books and articles, according to a recent bibliography. Exceptions are the book by Bernhard Leitner, *The Architecture of L.W.*, Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1973; that by G. Gebauer et al., *Wien. Kundmannngasse 19*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1982; the study by J. Bouveresse which appears in the catalogue *Vienne 1880-1936: "W. et l'architecture"*, Paris: Centre G. Pompidou, 1986; as well as an unpublished thesis by E. Veit, also dedicated to the house.

¹⁰ Unless we were to imagine, as we shall soon see, that architecture can illustrate ideas or provide replicas for them; or if we think –and this is an idea that has been edging forward for some time— that Wittgenstein's work is closely bound to his life and to the ethical questions he never avoided. On this matter, see the biography by Ray Monk, *op.cit.* as well as that by Brian McGuinness, *L.W. Les années de jeunesse*, French translation by Y. Tenenbaum, Paris: Le Seuil, 1991.

relationship this particular aspect of his work and character may have had with his contribution to philosophy.

My house is the result of my good manners...

When Margarete Stonbourough offered Ludwig to be in charge of the construction of her future residence at the Kundmannngasse, he had just completed a six year stay as a schoolteacher in three townships of Lower Austria [*Basse-Autriche*]. From 1914 –that is to say, a full twelve years earlier, including those which spanned the war and his captivity— Wittgenstein had left Cambridge and distanced himself from philosophy for several years (after writing the *Tractatus* during the war and having it published in the *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* in 1921). The decision which led him to accept his sister’s proposal should be placed at a time in which, upon returning to Austria, he found himself being faced by very pressing matters. We are on the eve of the 1930s, and changes are taking place in his thought; the time is almost ripe for his meeting with Moritz Schlick and the Vienna Circle¹¹.

In fact, Gretl had at first entrusted the construction of her house to a Viennese architect, Paul Engelmann. Wittgenstein had already met Engelmann, a disciple of Adolfo Loos, in Olmütz in 1916, during the war¹².

At the time in which Wittgenstein accepted the commission and set out to work, Engelmann had already designed the plan for the house. We do know, however, that this plan was revised by Wittgenstein, that Engelmann and he discussed it and that they become partners with aims to collaborate on the project. It is difficult to ascertain what are the individual contributions of each, but it would seem that Wittgenstein really took charge of everything and that, to say it succinctly, his intervention was decisive, even if his competence in the matter – not to mention his tastes and talents— must have been quite limited at first. Be as it may, and judging by the testimony provided by Hermine Wittgenstein: “Ludwig made his debut; he began to interest himself in the plan and the scale model in his typically intense fashion, to the point that he took over them. Engelmann had to back off upon being faced by this personality, far stronger than his, and so it was this house was built under Ludwig’s control and according to his modified version of the plan, up to the smallest details”¹³.

¹¹ See *L. Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp; French translation by G. Granel, Mauvezin: TER, 1991. His earliest encounters with Schlick date from 1927.

¹² See Engelmann, Paul, *Letters from L.W. with a Memoir*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967; partial French translation by J. P. Cometti, *Aspects de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*

¹³ Wittgenstein, Hermine, “My brother Ludwig”, in: Rhees, R., *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

The construction itself lasted some two years. Shortly after, Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge, where he would become a Fellow of Trinity College after Russell and Moore accepted the *Tractatus* as a thesis. The house has suffered numerous modifications since, to the extent that the impression that a visitor may have of it today will barely correspond to that he might have had, if he has visited it upon completion. However, and in a general manner, “The house, covered in mortar, is a three-story tall construction having 27 rooms, which represent a habitable surface of 1116 square meters. The materials: reinforced concrete columns and beams, brick walls, a cover of reinforced concrete. Inner distribution: ground floor, with reception halls and the mistress’ room; first floor, with the master’s room and guest room; second floor, with children’s rooms, reception room and quarters for the staff¹⁴”.

Such are the broad features of the building; the most distinctive of which, however, involve the treatment of space, materials and, more specifically, of the intentions they reveal. The most immediately salient feature is doubtlessly that which links it to the lineaments and general impression conveyed by Loos’ architecture. A quick comparison with the *Haus Steiner* (1910), the *Haus Sheu* (1912-13), and even with the house that Loos built in Paris for Tristan Tzara (1926) leaves no room for dispute on this. At least two of the principles that Loos vehemently defended find a clear example in the Wittgenstein house, to knowledge, the radical suppression of any and all ornamental elements (with the ensuing importance that is granted to materials), and the subordination of the exterior to the *interior* disposition of the volume. Naturally, the fact that the old plan for the house had been drawn by Engelmann, himself Loos’ student, would seem to account for these analogies. But that which neared Loos to Wittgenstein –without prejudging their differences— also merits consideration. Wittgenstein unquestionably admired Loos and, in more than one sense, everything seems to imply that he also agreed with his ideas. Like Kraus, of whom he was an intimate, Loos was driven by a passion for purity and rigour which forbade him to surrender to the trends commonly shared by his Viennese contemporaries. His attitude is frequently related to an American way of life and to the inspiration for it that he drew in the United States. But further than what may result from this, Loos –and Kraus and Wittgenstein with him— had a contextual and typically Viennese aversion for the superfluous, or, in

¹⁴ Leitner, B., *op.cit.*; French translation, “La maison de Wittgenstein”, in: Clair, Jean, *Vienne 1880-1939. L’Apocalypse Joyeuse*, Paris: Edition du Centre Pompidou, 1986.

other words, was set instinctively against the trends inspired by the *Jugendstil*¹⁵. As was significantly claimed by Kraus: “What A. Loos, materially, and I, verbally, share, has always consisted in saying that there is a difference between an urn and a urinal. But today’s men can be split into those who use the urinal as an urn and those who use the urn as urinal”¹⁶.

It is needless to say that Wittgenstein thought no differently. Ample evidence can be called forth for this, beginning with the most prominent features of the *Tractatus*, which he was careful to emphasize contained no trace of wordiness whatsoever¹⁷. On this point in particular, then, the comparison is not all exaggerated, and can be doubtlessly connected to the particular relations the house establishes between its inside and its outside. As we shall see, one of the characteristics of the Wittgenstein house, among other original features, is in the separation that it marks, in several ways, between the *exterior* and the *interior*. In this regard, it might also be said that Wittgenstein draws close to Loos, for whom inner space should be sheltered –and thus, separated– from an external reality which, to his eyes, had become enmeshed in the mercantilism of modern civilization. While Wittgenstein never expressed himself in such terms, both he and his architecture manifest a kindred concern, a concern for the *center* as it opposes “civilization”, its centrifugal tendencies and the *progress* that, in his words, constitutes its very form¹⁸. This fairly typical conviction, the importance of which should not be underestimated, is most clearly expressed in the preface written for the *Philosophical Observations* of 1930: “This book has been written for those who sympathize with the spirit in which it was written. This is a spirit, I think, different to that of the mainstream of European and American civilization. The spirit of this civilization, the expressions of which

¹⁵ His sentiment and struggle might be considered as ‘Vienesse’ insofar as they emerged as a reaction to what Vienna had typically spawned in the realms of aesthetics, morality and politics. Loos is in the line of Mauthner, Kraus and Wittgenstein, albeit it would be absurd to confine his art to this tradition, as much as it would be equally absurd –and furthermore, arbitrary– to turn Wittgenstein into an author the singularity of which cannot be explained other than in the light of the moral and intellectual context of *fin de siècle* Vienna.

¹⁶ As quoted by Paul Engelmann, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁷ See the mid-October, 1919, letter to Ludwig von Ficker, French translation in *Sud* (1986).

¹⁸ This conviction is also Musil’s, whose work, in this regard, is very close in spirit to Wittgenstein, particularly as concerns the ambiguous relationships that bind the individual and history’s desire for interiority. In *The Man Without Qualities*, the notion of the ‘other state’ makes up its main thematic core. Wittgenstein’s beliefs regarding progress are brought forth in these lines: “Our civilization is distinguished by the word ‘progress’. The fact that it progresses isn’t just one of its characteristics: progress is its form’, *cf. Culture and Value*; French translation, *op.cit.* p. 16 (1930).

are the industry, architecture, music, fascism and socialism of our time, is alien and disagreeable to the author. This is not a value judgment. And while the author believes that what is understood to be architecture today is not architecture, or looks mistrustfully on so-called modern music (without understanding its language), the disappearance of the arts does not justify passing disfavoured judgment on a civilization. Because, in times such as these, the authentically strong personalities abandon the realm of the arts to pursue other things, and the worth of the individual finds some way be conveyed”¹⁹.

The affinities between Wittgenstein and Loos reach a limit that need not be examined further unto itself; however, if we were to consider the questions the house puts forth to the commentator, I am not far from believing that the light the lines quoted above shed on the house (but two years after its construction) serve as the most helpful commentary.

Do not play with another's depths

It was obvious that Wittgenstein's architecture would elicit attempts at philosophical commentary. That a philosopher like Wittgenstein should build a house that was not merely a *hütte* [choza]²⁰ would be unthinkable if not in the light of *philosophical* motifs, suggesting the search for relationships *substantially* linking philosophy to architecture. As Wittgenstein had published the *Tractatus* a few years prior to its construction, the temptation to read a prolongation of the 1921 published work into the house completed in 1928 was considerable²¹.

All the more so when the immediately outstanding features of the house seem admirably well suited to it. Or, as G.H. von Wright wrote in an oft-quoted remark: “The whole is divested of all ornament and is remarkable for the harmonious clarity of its proportions and lines; it's simple, firm beauty recalling the polished aesthetics of the *Tractatus*”²². Such reflections

¹⁹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Culture and Value*, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

²⁰ It could, in fact, be tangentially observed that that is what he built while staying in Norway.

²¹ With the exception of the remarks which Kunibert Bering dedicates to the house in his study: *Die Rolle der Kunst in der Philosophie Wittgensteins*, Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1986. The house, it seems to him, provides evidence of an evolution in Wittgenstein which allows us to date the premises of his second philosophy around those years. In doing so, Bering shares, with those who share the opposite thesis, the prejudice of seeking some sort of a valid “proof” of Wittgenstein's philosophy in his architecture. What is most typical of this procedure is that it generally settles for little. And necessity is stronger than art.

²² Von Wright, G.H., “Notice biographique”, in: Wittgenstein, L., *Le Cahier Blue et le Cahier Brun*, Paris: Gallimard, 1965.

could not be more justified; they impose themselves in a most evident manner onto any reader of the *Tractatus* who brings the house to mind. But the point is in knowing how far the comparison can be reasonably taken, and what conclusions may eventually be drawn from it. In fact, as we will shortly see, the best way to follow is probably not that which merely associates the philosophical work to the house, or seeks for it to serve as some sort of a prolongation to the former.

This double tendency is, in any case, what leads the investigations directed by G. Gebauer and several other authors in the frame of a seminar dedicated to Wittgenstein's architecture, held in 1973-74²³. At this point, I will dwell on two aspects, not as a matter of conviction, but more in order to suggest what misunderstandings the commentator can incur through this seemingly tailored comparison.

In a study entitled: *The Wittgenstein House, A Morphological Interpretation*, Lothar Rentschler sought to find the philosopher behind the architect, by showing that "the Wittgenstein palace is... a concrete replica of the semiotic system of the *Tractatus*"²⁴. With this objective in mind, Rentschler strives to establish a correspondence through highlighting some specific features of the building: the autonomy of its component parts, its static aspect—features far from strange to the *Tractatus*— the pursuit of precision and the concern for detail—points on which Wittgenstein's sister herself, among others, had insisted extremely— as well as the "recursiveness principle" which, it appeared to him, was at the "nucleus of the Wittgensteinian theory of language"²⁵. Such an analysis undoubtedly contributes to reveal the main architectural features that distinguish the building, but with that said, the intended "structural analogy"—unless it were a metaphor— proves unconvincing, and one cannot help but wonder at the intuitions serving as a basis for its beliefs and conclusions. According to L. Rentschler, Wittgenstein would have phrased "his ontological representation of the world into the language of architecture" so that the study that is made of it should be able to settle which of his two philosophies "best suits the house". It is easy to imagine what Wittgenstein himself would have thought of this, as the idea of building a house that served as the exact replica of a "philosophy" could not be anything but foreign to him. There are several reasons for this, none of which are irrelevant when it comes to understanding G. Gebauer's unfeasible attempt, in that same book. One thing

²³ See G. Gebauer *et al.*, *Wien. Kundmannngasse 19*, *op.cit.*

²⁴ Rentschler, Lothar, "Das Haus Wittgenstein: eine morphologische Interpretation", in: *Wien. Kundmannngasse 19*, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

is, however, is certain: the *Tractatus* is made up of “propositions” destined to eliminate themselves, much like a stair that is tossed after having been used to climb up, with one being left before the single and meaningful propositional language. No architecture can literally *correspond* to this, unless it was a *negative* architecture, hence, an uninhabitable one. And even as it is true in some respects that the house does appear to partake in such a form of architecture, at no point does it cease to be a house.

To some degree, it could be said that Rentschler's thoughts err on the side of excess. But this is not exactly G. Gebauer's case, insofar as, in that same work, he advances a far more philosophical –hence, risky– interpretation, under the title: *The syntax of silence*²⁶. Like L. Rentscher, Gebauer insists on certain features which are not devoid of meaning, for example, all that makes the house be on a setback from the rest of its environment: the super-elevation of the garden with regard to the street, the (inside's) concealment of the relationship with the exterior, the fact that no rooms face the garden. As he underscores: “the interior of the house does not communicate with its exterior”: “each and every room has a life of its own”²⁷. This is why Gebauer speaks of a “negative syntaxis”, tending to division. The staircase itself, as he notes, “does not so much contribute to communication as it isolates”. But together with these observations and the vantage they offer, Gebauer wants to see the “symbolic system” wherein Wittgenstein succeeded in “expressing silence” –the closing exhortation of the *Tractatus*– in the house. For Gebauer, Wittgenstein thus aimed to “show”, through the specific means afforded him by the “language of architecture”, that which language cannot “say”, as if the distinction drawn by the *Tractatus* between “saying” and “showing”, *apropos* of language, could also be applied to architecture, with the benefit of having it express that which language could not.

In developing this kind of conviction, Gebauer in fact surrenders to a form of confusion of which Wittgenstein himself was wary–and precisely in regard to architecture. His analysis does recur to notions which, like *saying* and *showing*, are undeniably relevant to Wittgenstein's thought and to what

²⁶ Gebauer, Gunter, “Die Syntax des Schweigens”, in: *Wien. Kundmanngasse 19, op.cit.*

²⁷ On all of these points, the analogies with Loos are compelling. However, it is uncertain if they can always be given the same meaning in both cases. Besides, Wittgenstein's construction exhibits features that are not shared by Loos' architecture, especially at the interior level, and precisely as regards the way in which constituent spaces communicate (or not). Wittgenstein, like Loos, breaks with constitution by floors, but in doing so, compromises the unity of the whole which, in the case of Loos, stood for a major principle.

might be recovered from it for the better understanding of the relationship between the sayable and the unsayable. But from a more immediate vantage, the use that Gebauer makes of them goes against an impossibility that is posed by the *Tractatus* itself. If proposition 7 effectively enunciates that “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”, and if it could be admitted, together with Wittgenstein, that what is not said can be found to be “inexpressibly contained in what is being expressed”²⁸, then it is an illusion to think that what language cannot say, architecture can show, or “express”, whilst evading the limits of language pointed out by Wittgenstein and conveying that which the *Tractatus* had already confined by drawing the boundaries of ethics and aesthetics from the inside. At the time when the *Tractatus* was written, there were no two means of expression, one of which said what the other could not. If we were to proceed in this fashion, we would be recurring to a distinction between saying and showing that annuls itself by unjustifiably adjudicating to the possibility of showing the capacities that are denied to saying. J. Bouveresse very clearly restricted the sort of misunderstanding from which Gebauer’s convictions are derived: “The evident difficulty (which is constantly being overlooked by commentators) is this: that language, in its ordinary use, shows something (the logical form) when it says something that is not that which it shows (by representing facts); if we agree to speak of an “architectural language” in a sense that’s sufficiently close to what the *Tractatus* understands for language generally, how are we to conceive, in this case, of the fundamental contrast between what is said and what is shown by the mere fact that something is said? The delicate point here is not just in knowing what a language of this sort can show, but knowing what kind of things it should “say” in order to do so. Can we ask ourselves if one of the most common and crude ways of violating the prohibition set forth by proposition 7 of the *Tractatus* does not impinge, precisely, on suggesting there is something like a language which allows us to express that which is beyond language (and indeed, beyond *all* language)?”²⁹.

As much as it may grieve some, the Wittgenstein house does not readily reward us with the possibility of supplementing language, just as art does not offer us the means to quickly and cleanly annul its alleged boundaries. If we were to subscribe to such notions, we would be fooling ourselves not only as to the nature of what Wittgenstein had in mind when

²⁸ L. Wittgenstein to Paul Engelmann, in a letter of April 9th, 1917; French translation in: *Sud* (1986), *op.cit.*, revisited in *Aspects de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*

²⁹ Bouveresse, J., “L’architecture de Wittgenstein”, in: *Vienne 1880-1939, op.cit.*

he built the house, but also as to all that refers to what an architectural work can *mean*. As Nelson Goodman suggests in a study dedicated to the matter: “what a work of architecture means cannot be generally likened to the thoughts it inspires, to the sentiments and circumstances that are at the origin of its existence or conception”³⁰. In architecture, what appears to resemble language—or *some* language— can certainly be taken in through other devices; something Wittgenstein himself was well aware of, insofar as it led him to find a *gesture* there, which in itself was likely to stir up other such gestures. In an observation the interest of which we should like to underscore for the purposes of this discussion, this gesture evokes the “phenomena which, in music or architecture, resemble those of language”³¹. Yet somewhere else, he writes: “Remember the impression caused on you by good architecture, namely, the impression of conveying a thought. We should also wish to follow it with a gesture”³².

To follow it, that is to say, to somehow communicate with it, but in the same way in which some—and not all— thoughts in us respond to what we *share* with others, on account of our belonging to a certain culture or participating in a common form of life which lies beyond what we are capable of *saying*. Architecture is thus not a language but a *gesture*: “Architecture is a gesture. Not every intentional movement of the body is a gesture. Nor is every building raised with a given intent architecture”³³.

This is the reason why architecture, together with music, may share a privileged bond to silence, and it is also why it should be seen, from a tracterian vantage, to just what an extent³⁴ “there where art is concerned, it is as difficult to say something good as ... to say nothing at all”.

Work in architecture is really more work on oneself

If we direct our attention towards Wittgenstein’s architecture, and render it a privileged object of investigation, presumably capable of opening

³⁰ Goodman, N., “How Buildings Mean”, in: *Reconceptions in Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 31 and following. Here, Goodman mainly lays hand to a notion of exemplification, in contrast to other manners of descriptive or representative symbolization. In Goodman’s perspective—which is not Wittgenstein’s— architecture *says* nothing, which by no means implies it does not mean anything. The error consists in relating it to language and to the functions that we ordinarily invest it with. Goodman’s study also examines how the criteria of correction or rightness can be applied to a construction; on this point, he also confirms some of the Wittgensteinian questions typical to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, for example.

³¹ See Wittgenstein, L., *Culture and value*, *op.cit.* p. 46 (1939-1940).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 33 (1932-1934).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the doors that had been closed on us by his philosophy, then we are in for a disappointment. At best, and to paraphrase Wittgenstein himself in judging Brahms' music as being very Kellerian, we could say his house is surely very Wittgensteinian³⁵. But let us not see a word, an evasion or a joke in this; rather, let us take it as a path by virtue of which we can yet hope to go a little further.

The error of the commentators who have taken a very precise interest in Wittgenstein's house was such that they may not have fixed their attention enough on his concern for *differences* and on the scope of his idea of "family resemblances". When confronted with a work of art, Wittgenstein often recommends an exercise in comparisons and descriptions, instead of an analysis that is aimed towards strict structural homologies, which is but another way of privileging the *same*. According to Moore's notes, "reasons, in aesthetics, are in the line of 'supplementary descriptions'; thus, you can show someone what Brahms had in mind by showing him several pieces by Brahms, or by comparing him to a current composer; the only thing aesthetics does is draw attention to one thing, to 'put things one beside the other' ... if, by giving 'reasons' of this kind, you get the other person to 'see what you see', then the discussion has ended"³⁶. This seemingly vague idea seems to have ranked Goethe and Spengler as two of its main influences; and it is closely linked to what Wittgenstein calls a *gesture*, that which to his mind, could combine things of the most disparate characters. The form

³⁵ Gottfried Keller was one of Wittgenstein's favourite writers. Regarding Keller's Brahms, see the "Lectures on Aesthetics" in: *Leçons et conversations*, French translation by J. Fauve, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, pp. 70-71, there where Rhees quotes Wittgenstein as saying: "Let us suppose that we perceive something specific in a poet's work. One may sometimes find a resemblance between

the style of a musician and that of his contemporary poet or painter. Take Brahms and Keller, for example. It often seemed to me that some themes of Brahms were extremely Kellerian". Also see, McGuinness, *op.cit.*, p. 57. In another text and apropos Brahms, too, R. Rhees recollects a discussion he had with Wittgenstein on Trafalgar Square concerning the distinction that the latter had established between *music* and *rhetoric*. According to Wittgenstein, Myra Hess, who had just given a recital, incurred the mistake of playing Brahms in a way that would have been fair – and that would, in fact, have been music— in Brahms' own time, but which in an ulterior context, turned into nonsense: sheer rhetoric. Rhees recalls that facing the Canada House, the construction of which had just been completed, Wittgenstein then added: "This architecture adhered to tradition while taking on some rhetorical forms of its own, but it expresses nothing through them. The possibilities allegedly channeled towards harmonizing with a great culture are ample. But there...we are before a case of *emphasis*; it's about Hitler and Mussolini". Cf. Rhees, R., *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.* p. 204.

³⁶ Moore, G.E., *Philosophical Papers*, "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33", London: Allen and Unwin, 1959, p. 278. As quoted by James C. Edwards, *Ethics without Philosophy*, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1982, pp. 128-129.

of comprehension that is best related to this is, significantly, the very one which he found Frazer's *Golden Bough* was lacking in. In any case, the concept seems to have resolved itself in Wittgenstein's elaborations in connection to *physiognomy*, *grammar* and *morphology*, in what has come to be known as his second philosophy. To delve into it would probably distract us from the more immediate thoughts suggested by the 1928 house, and the questions directly addressing the matter more directly. That said, there may be good reasons to believe that the spirit and presuppositions that were used on it, as regards the most significant strain of his thought, are not completely extraneous to what was essayed but a few years later, during the 1930s. But if we want to find a path here –if in a somewhat retrospective manner— then we must begin with a return to the *Tractatus*, and more precisely, to the status that it grants to ethics and aesthetics.

“Ethics and aesthetics are the same”³⁷; they are, furthermore, subtracted from the realm of language, or at least, withdrawn from that which language *says*. But this did not lead Wittgenstein to insist any less in the “ethical” and even “aesthetic” significance that he thought permeated his work³⁸. At a glance, this would seem difficult to understand; it is, however, a decisive fact, an essential component of which resides precisely in the opposition that Wittgenstein established between what language *shows* and what it *says*, as well as in the particular approach to the exile of the self that's posed in the *Tractatus*, well outside the limits of the world³⁹. On this matter, James C. Edwards is correct when he approximates the Wittgensteinian position to the Kantian paradigm for knowledge, bringing in Schopenhauer⁴⁰. If the self does not belong to the horizon of what can be said, the question is raised as to where it should be sought, and how it

³⁷ Cf. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 6.421; as well as *Diaries*, French translation, *op.cit.*, entry for 24. 7. 1916.

³⁸ Refer, for example, to the letters to Ludwig von Ficker, French translation in *Sud* (1986), *op.cit.*, or also his discussions with Russell, such as those that he himself recalls in his autobiography or in his correspondence with Lady Ottoline Morrell.

³⁹ Cf. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 5.632, *op.cit.*; as well as *Diaries*, French translation, *op.cit.*, entry for 2. 8. 1916.

⁴⁰ Edwards, James C., *Ethics Without Philosophy*, *op.cit.* Edwards demonstrates precisely –and, I think, convincingly—that the saying-showing distinction featured in the *Tractatus* is coherent with the paradigm of representation animating the Wittgensteinian view on language at the time. This distinction is destined to solve (or in any case, allows for the solution) of the problem of the self as a problem of “ethics”, and is furthered into a conception that conceives of it as will, and as an “ethical” possibility allowing for a *sub specie aeternitatis* vantage. All of this is closely related to the question of solipsism that is so prominent in the *Tractatus*. Among other indications, and where Schopenhauer is concerned, the entry for 2. 8. 1916 in the *Diaries* states: “It could be said (in the manner of Schopenhauer): it is not the world of representation that is good or bad, but the subject of the will”.

should be thought about. And if this problem is indeed such (the Self), it encompasses both ethics and aesthetics, hence, the problem of what language *shows*. Basically, the distinction here considered is applied on two levels by Wittgenstein: the logical one, and the ethical one. This last revelation entails a severance of thought and the will which seems to find a first solution in the Schopenhauerian notion of will, in which the self cannot, in some way, expect to be delivered from the world and from thought without being, so to speak, damned to not ever being saved. In other words, the solution of the problem of life, provided there is such a thing, cannot be merely in the self or, to put it more precisely, in its ability to rise to what might be termed as a “good perspective” over the world, as a problem that cannot be solved other than in terms of goodness and goodwill⁴¹. On this point, there is no doubt that Wittgenstein’s thought partakes in a philosophy of interiority the elements and the effects of which we already know. Simultaneously, the ethical and philosophical questions that meet at the crux of this tendency are closely bound to an experience the importance of should not be underestimated⁴². McGuinness tells of how, besides his love for Schubert’s music, Wittgenstein was also attracted him “for another reason, referring to the ethic and aesthetic life: the jarring contrast between the misery of his life and the total absence of its trace in his music, the absence of all bitterness”⁴³. As J. Bouveresse observes “it is clear that Wittgenstein himself aspired to produce a philosophical work displaying the same kind of contrast and performing the same kind of sublimation, a work the perfection of which would show a nearly untimely nature, and not disclose any of the personal struggles of its writer, his moral misery and the torments of his existence, his relation to the entire world, or his resentment towards his time”⁴⁴. The *Tractatus* and the house on the *Kundmannngasse* undoubtedly display the same characteristics on the matter, showing to what extent it was important for Wittgenstein to separate the outer man from the inner one.

His *Diaries* shed some valuable light on these issues. On October 7th, 1916, Wittgenstein wrote: “The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. Such is the connection between art and ethics. In the ordinary way of seeing, we

⁴¹ We shall mention in passing the importance that may be acquired by the scruples and feelings of guilt which, it seems, never ceased to torment him.

⁴² It really need not be said that this conforms the nexus that is usually established between his life and work.

⁴³ McGuinness, Brian, *op.cit.*, French translation, p. 157.

⁴⁴ Bouveresse, J., “Wittgenstein and the Modern World”, in: *Wittgenstein, Centenary Essays*, A. Phillips Griffiths, editor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

consider objects, so to speak, by putting ourselves in between them: when seeing them *sub specie aeternitatis*, we consider them from the outside”⁴⁵.

Here we encounter the idea of one *way of seeing* which, unless specified—as it will, eventually, be—does, however, signal that which separates the self from the world and its objects, withholding a possibility for the self, the key of which is will. This inextricably ethic and aesthetic possibility is that very vision *sub specie aeternitatis* in which the Wittgensteinian concern for a present that combines with a concern for the centre is conveyed. “The self, the self, therein is the great mystery”, he writes on August 5th, 1916, and yet more tellingly: “If good or bad will changes the world, it can only change the boundaries of the world, not the facts; not that which cannot be represented by language, but that which can be merely shown by it. In other words, the world must thus become entirely another. It needs, so to speak, to increase or decrease as a whole. Like the acquisition or loss of a sense. Like death, the world does not change, it simply ceases to exist”⁴⁶.

This helps us understand why architecture—like philosophy—represented a *work on oneself* for him⁴⁷; insofar as we can grasp how closely “the search in philosophy” at the time in which he wrote the *Diaries* was already related to what he would later call “the search within the realm of aesthetics”⁴⁸.

The perspective here revealed is furthermore not limited to what the *Diaries* and the *Tracatus* let through. Under a different focus, the same train of reasoning can be extended well into his second philosophy. But come this point, it might be helpful not to lose sight of some of the ideas which accompanied his work as architect, or what meaning he gave it—as he surely did—when it came to *working on oneself*.

Don't think, look!

As shown by the draft for the preface to the *Philosophical Observations* we have already quoted, Wittgenstein did not conceive that art, in modern societies, should be the essential scenario for the expression of those energies that were most meaningful. That is why the better part of his remarks on art, whether in his note or in his lectures, often seems to draw

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Diaries*, 1914-1916, French translation by G. G. Granger, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 154, entry for 7. 10. 1916.

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Diaries*, French translation, *op.cit.*, July 5th, 1916, p. 140.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Culture and Value*, *op.cit.*, French translation, p. 26 (1931).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: “Work on philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)”. Also, in *Culture and Value*: “The strange resemblance of a philosophical investigation ...to an aesthetic investigation...”, p. 36 (1936).

a line between the arts of the past and modern art, with its privilege of great art, in a sense akin to Goethe's⁴⁹. Insofar as architecture is a *gesture*, it partakes substantially in the network of forces and practices belonging to culture. For whoever performs it, this gesture may have an ethical meaning, but the sense it assumes in the world cannot be dissociated from its inherent complexity. In truth, there are –to some extent– two architectures for Wittgenstein, quite like there are two *temperaments*. “Architecture perpetuates and glorifies something. That is why there cannot be architecture where there is nothing to revere”⁵⁰. With regard to this, his own house leads him to write the following lines: “The house that I have made for Gretl is doubtlessly the result of my *good* manners, the expression of a great understanding (of a culture, etc.). But primordial life, the savage life that seeks to be released, that life is lacking. It could be said to lack health (Kierkegaard) (Hothouse bloom)”⁵¹.

We can locate this perspective within what Wittgenstein sometimes calls his “reproductive” spirit⁵². Whether or not he was right on this, the author of the *Tractatus* did not see the art of his time like most of his contemporaries did. His house is evidence of that. Even if we felt tempted to see an example of “modern” architecture in its stead, Wittgenstein shared Loos’ convictions on the matter. Loos, who rejected “modernity”, openly appealed for a tradition with its origin in Rome: “Our manner of thinking and feeling comes to us from the Romans”, he said. Among other such statements, this one in particular deserves a highlight: “New forms? What blindness! It is the new spirit that counts. Even if it were to spring from old forms, it shall yet be able to forge what we are yearning for, new men!”⁵³. Wittgenstein would probably have shown some reservations regarding these “new men”, but his architecture also makes show of the classical inclinations which, in any case, represented the only possible alternative to him: “The great architect in a bad time (Van der Nüll) has a completely different task than the great architect in a good time. One must not be once again deceived by the general concept. One must not accept the comparable, but the incomparable, as evidence”⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ See Schulte, J., *Chor und Gesetz*, *op.cit.*

⁵⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *Culture and value*, *op.cit.*, p. 83 (1947-1948).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50 (1940).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 11 (1929) and 29 (1931), i.e., there where Wittgenstein insists on what he terms “reproductiveness”, citing his influences and relating himself, in this aspect, to Freud and Bauer as examples of “Jewish reproductiveness”.

⁵³ As quoted by Engelmann in *L. W. A Memoir*, *op. cit*

⁵⁴ *Culture and Value*, p. 88 (1948).

And though he never compared himself to a great architect, his own work –it seemed to him- was truly dominated by a “classicism” which he phrased as follows: “An old style can somehow be reproduced into a newer language; it can, so to speak, be presented in a certain new way that is in *tempo* with the compass of our times. Then one is only, really, a reproducer. That is what I have done in building”⁵⁵.

And then again, it is possible that a few thoughts, sweepingly evoked, do not agree entirely with the idea that –except for the personal experience that accompanies the gesture and is performed as a work on oneself– architecture cannot be invested with a power of “expression” as justifiably as language. The ambiguities we have probably already noticed may even seem to become enhanced as we read: “Today’s men believe that erudites are there to teach them something; and poets, musicians etc., to entertain them. *That they may have something to teach them*, that has not occurred to them”⁵⁶.

If architecture does not, in effect, subtract from silence that which the *Tractatus* associates to it in yet a stricter fashion, these last thoughts that Wittgenstein released into his work do, however, capture how this does not translate into his architecture defying all “comprehension”. To this avail, I shall be satisfied to present a few, quick, observations on the later evolution of Wittgenstein’s thought and the status of the unsayable; noting that the possibility of an enlightenment quite different from that provided by the later thoughts of the author will be gleaned. On the other hand, the (ever popular) distinction between *saying* and *showing* is dispelled as such from the writings posterior to the *Tractatus*. In a way, this eclipse seems to spark the question of knowing in what measure the notion and the status of the unsayable are (or not) sustained, also entailing what binds them to the impossibilities affecting the ethics and aesthetics of the *Tractatus*. To phrase it more succinctly, have we found the bud of an explanation for the importance that Wittgenstein gave to art for the men of a culture, and for what it could teach them?

How strongly the idea of *physiognomy* and the notion of *seeing* took root in Wittgenstein’s thinking helps us shed some light on this matter. In view of the concepts inspired by the notion of form (*Gestalt*) and its characteristic features, the idea of what is shown seems to have, in fact, suffered a shift in lieu of what Wittgenstein formulates under the concept of *seeing*. The properties of *form*, which belong to the *morphology* of an expression, are inseparable from a certain way of seeing, from a “perspective”, so to speak.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 73 (1947).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48 (1939-40).

The unsayable partakes in language, in art and in our gestures, but with the *Investigations* the status of the expression changes, and with it, the possibility for another way of considering the practices belonging to the realm of language. There are two senses for the word “understand”. As Oswald Hanfling writes in his commentary of paragraphs 527 and following of the *Investigations*: “In the case of language, understanding is related to meaning. We understand a word or enunciation when we know what it means; and the meaning can be explained to us with other words, or ostensively. But these ideas make no sense when applied to music. The ‘understanding’ of a musical work cannot be understood in this sense ... we say that we have understood an enunciation in the sense that it can be replaced by another one that means the same; but also in the sense that it cannot be replaced, as in the case of a musical theme that cannot be substituted for another”⁵⁷. Not all our behaviours are *gestures* in Wittgenstein’s terms; architecture is a gesture. If something is *shown* in it, to return to the tractarian terminology, it cannot be but the sense that is a gesture, insofar as this measure appeals to our ability to ‘see’, in the sense of the second philosophy. But the “good perspective” continues to be that of the *Diaries*, with its privilege of the *sub specie aeternitatis* vantage. Stanley Cavell evokes this possibility as follows: “You are convinced, but not about a proposition: you have reached coherence, but not in terms of a theory. You are different, that which you acknowledge as a problem is different, your world is different (‘the happy man’s world’)”⁵⁸.

The myriad observations on architecture and art which form part of Wittgenstein’s eventually published works date mostly from the time of his “second” philosophy. The house, on the other hand, belongs to a time that Wittgenstein had left behind, heading towards a practice of “philosophy” which, to speak truthfully, was not altogether in line with what is usually implied by this word. His architecture is not the reflection of a philosophy, if one takes this to mean one of those buildings that make up their own history and delusions. It is clear, however, that this does not stop us from evoking Wittgenstein’s *architecture*, or his *philosophy*, albeit with the reservations that his case demands in the use of both words.

(Translated from Spanish by Victor J. Krebs)

⁵⁷ Oswald Hanfling, “I heard a plaintive melody”, in *Wittgenstein, Century Essays, op. cit.*, pp. 132-33.

⁵⁸ Stanley Cavell, “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy”, in *Must we mean what we say?* pp. 85-86.