

Hans Günter Golinski
First-hand Experience of Life
among Lothar Götz's Colour Spaces
in the BauHausFischer

Built in the middle of the woods on the southern slopes of Barmen, the family home designed by Hans Heinz Lüttgen in 1926 was a provocation: not only because it represented an avantgarde intervention in what was a natural panorama, but also because it demonstrated, through the innovative architectural idiom of the Bauhaus in a neighbourhood dominated by prestige villas in revivalist styles, the different – that is to say, democratic – outlook of the client. The architect, one of the Cologne Progressives, had composed, with his sculptural building between the trees, a tension-rich situation of Cubist forms, some of them his own, others organic and found on the spot. The house had been on the market for seven years when, twenty-five years ago, we made its acquaintance. It was in a sad state. On the outside, it had been painted white, and partly clad with fibre-cement slates. It had been given picture-windows, with metal or plastic frames. Inside, an attempt had been made to create a 'cosy' atmosphere with the use of wooden panels, round arches, brown wallpaper, fitted carpets and the like. Tiled rooms on the ground floor did justice to the building's use as a boarding establishment for pet animals. As we knew from the research which we had just started that Hans Heinz Lüttgen was also much in demand as an interior decorator, we began, as soon as we had got the keys to the place, to strip the wallpaper in what was described in the old plans as the 'Herrenzimmer' or 'study', in order to discover at least some piece of authenticity. Imagine our surprise when the first thing we found turned out to be the inscription (revealed after careful work with a razor blade) MENE MENE TEKEL U-PHARSIN, clumsily painted on the original apricot-coloured wall. Our enquiries and researches suggested that the Jewish client, a lawyer named Walter Fischer, had written this divine Old Testament judgement on the Temple defiler Belshazzar, the original 'writing on the wall', immediately before his flight to Palestine, in order to prophesy the downfall of Hitler, the 'mass murderer'. It is said that immediately before Hitler was invited to become Chancellor, Walter

Fischer won a case resulting from his client's having called Hitler a potential mass murderer. For the present occupants, the writing on the wall became a motto, a slogan directed against the baleful influence which, following the departure of the Fischers, prevailed in the house and the country, using in particular the means of art to warn against its return. Shortly after moving in to what we now called 'BauHausFischer', we began to invite artist friends, who, for a while, responded with their works and installations to the history and aesthetic of the private place.

Further findings from our archaeological hunt for clues proved that Hans Heinz Lüttgen, in his time a very progressive architect who knew about the Bauhaus theories, made a very pronounced use of colour. In the said study, we found the remains of a ceiling decoration consisting of green oxidized copper foil with geometric shapes painted on it in purple. The dining room evinced traces of an intense blue. In other rooms yellows and reds bore witness to the further deployment of colour, but we were unable to reconstruct any consistent design concept. In spite of these discoveries, we decided at first in favour of a cooler, more sober colour concept, such as we might pick up from the black-and-white architectural photography of the period. We chose a pale grey for the walls and a darker grey for the painted timber elements, such as doors, skirting boards and banisters. We made an exception of the ceiling in the 'Herrenzimmer', where we were concerned to preserve the former colour concept, or at least some inkling of it. Likewise the walls of the dining room were painted blue, those of the 'gentleman's bedroom' yellow, and those of the 'guest room' red. In addition, we created colour accents with the use of carpets and linoleum. As a few years later the exterior render was in need of renewal, and the windows of replacement, we decided to follow the description, which we had since found, by the art-historian Luise Strauss-Ernst, who emphasized and praised the red-blue-grey of the building in the green woods: red render, blue window frames, grey window sills.

Even before these renovation plans, we had become friends with Lothar Götz, and so it was natural enough to approach

him in the matter of a temporary colour design for the interior. The emphasis was on 'temporary', as, following the rebuilding and the exhibition, we intended to paint the walls a neutral colour once more, to provide a suitable background for pictures. Otherwise we made no stipulations: Lothar Götz was invited to move around the house and find himself one or more walls or a whole room. For some time he lived with us as a guest and experienced how we treated the house. With the intensity typical of him, he spent hours in individual rooms, measuring them out and internalizing their aesthetic proportions. He plunged into our by now extensive documentation, reflected on the BauHausFischer against the background of its age and the Bauhaus movement. From the plans and old photos he deduced the original purposes of the rooms and compared these with the uses we put them to. The partly functional arrangement of rooms creates an unusual feeling for space inside and an unpredictable façade outside. The body of the building, of which there are many views, evokes a ship, with port-hole, intermediate decks and bridge, a boat that certainly carries its inhabitants safely across the ocean of time. The permanent interaction of interior and exterior, a life with nature, and above all with the surrounding woods, is what characterizes the architecture, and it was this that Lothar Götz made his theme. There are very specific light conditions, geared to the path of the sun; although the living rooms face south, the trees dampen the light, casting a melancholy shade over the life of the house. After a considerable period of thought, Lothar Götz asked for three rooms. He showed us a first selection of colours, and it was not without some hesitation that we gave the go-ahead, for, in view of our art collection and the various other exhibition activities, we could not easily imagine living permanently among these pinks, reds and purples. But we had agreed on an ephemeral intervention. As other rooms besides those he had selected were due for redecoration, Lothar Götz gradually agreed to produce a colour concept for the whole house. In this way he 'conquered', over and above the three agreed rooms, further walls and a small vestibule.

Thus the colour dramaturgy looks as follows. One enters the red-rendered house through a relatively modest front door and

finds oneself in a small vestibule painted purple. A large painting by Kurt Weinhold (1896–1969) hung in the adjoining staircase immediately attracts one's attention. In 1930, in the Post-expressionist style, Weinhold created a nightmare allegory of his times. Composed like a medieval 'Deposition', a headless priest-figure, attractively depicted females and chimera-like beings symbolize the loss of spiritual values and the resulting existential *angst*: the intellectual climate in which Nazi ideology could flourish. Lothar Götz extracts the primary colours red, yellow and blue from the demonic picture and creates, with an additional, continually reappearing grey tone, an abstract, constructive composition, which unlike the oil painting, spreads a cheerful atmosphere. The mutual propinquity of the Bauhaus-inspired mural and the expressive painting can be read metaphorically as the head-on confrontation of progressive and reactionary trends in the years around 1930: Weinhold prophesies National Socialism, which will declare the architectural style chosen by Walter Fischer to be 'degenerate'. Götz's mural can, though, quite independently, be read as a welcoming homage to the Bauhaus idea.

From the vestibule, the first room one comes to is the already-mentioned 'Herrenzimmer', a room with an open fireplace, which the lawyer used as his semi-official chambers for talks and negotiations with colleagues and business partners. A large south-facing window made it the lightest room in the house, and the artist bathed it in a luminous lemon-yellow, thus achieving a radiance from inside to out and vice versa. The pale, historically based ceiling painting conveys, through a gentle 'interaction of colours' a dematerialized rounding-off of the room. The 'writing on the wall' has survived the painting, and provides a view into a different sphere. Above the fireplace, which dominates the room, Lothar Götz has placed, asymmetrically, a purple rectangle, which is charged with energy by dint of the surrounding yellow, so that it pushes into the room in a positively sculptural fashion, while suggesting depth at the same time, as though one were looking into an infinite cosmos of colour. Every association with a dark, wood-panelled 'study' with cigar-smoking gentlemen 'doing business' is

thus banished. Instead, this colour space inspires an easy exchange of ideas, opinions, and feelings, and thus enhances the idea of architecture, which among other things finds its expression in the human proportions of the room.

While not entirely escaping from traditional role distribution, the architect and his clients practised an emancipatory architecture: the couple each had equally large and equally attractive rooms both for meeting other people, and for withdrawing from their company. The 'lady's room' next door to the rooms assigned to the man of the house is today dominated by a grand piano. For one of the occupants, a professional musician, this is a personal place of refuge, albeit one also used for chamber-music concerts or experimental performances by friends for friends. Lothar Götz uses the recurrent grey to lend the room a general, calming basic timbre, which allows for all tones. Along the ceiling, and down over the wall until about 40 centimetres above the floor, he has drawn a broad red stripe which passes above the piano stool, and thus over the pianist, like a canopy. This stripe with its right angle echoes the architectural motif, found both inside and out in a number of places, of a framing, angled shadow-gap. A part of the ceiling along with the space above the window are opened up, atmospherically, by a diluted red, i.e. a pink. Thus through the red angle, the room achieves dynamism and stability at the same time, providing a firm foundation and opening up towards the outside by dint of the imagined transparency provided by the colour.

A small, purely functional porch formed by four doors (to the kitchen, the garden and woods, the cellar and the vestibule) is hauled out of its practical non-perception by the artist, who thereby puts the brakes on any busy person in a hurry by means of a playful chromatic timbre of yellow, blue and red. If one climbs the stairs to the first floor, one looks upon a continuation (or variation) of the colour wall of the vestibule below. The shared quotation of the colours on the lower and upper storeys here creates an interior cohesion of the individual designed rooms. On this storey, Lothar Götz has chosen the room described in the plan as 'breakfast room' for his chromatic intervention. This room, oriented towards the sunrise,

with large corner windows, served the couple and their two sons as a meeting-place in the early morning. It alternates between a little salon and a conservatory. Today's inhabitants use it to indulge their passion for things Japanese, withdrawing to the tatami mats laid out here. Sitting on the floor reinforces the impression of being out in the woods. It was only with reluctance that we opened up this very private place of meditation which was characterized, apart from a few Japanese woodblock prints, by calming colourlessness. Lothar Götz brought the early-springtime tender green of the surrounding trees into the interior all the year round. So every year there is a brief moment when interior and exterior match. The pale green wafts around a pale pink ceiling: in accordance with the 'interaction of colour' the room vibrates, yet without causing any restlessness. On the contrary, it urges those inside to breathe calmly, in and out. The anchoring silence emanates from the colour-mirroring and from a continuation of the windows in the form of two blue colour angles. Just like the purple in the 'Herrenzimmer', the blue blurs the boundaries between 'before' and 'behind'; colour enters the room and leads out of it at the same time. This paradox of colour deployment is for us a mystery; Lothar Götz's colours disseminate protective harmony and provocative vitality. Without going into a possible symbolism, the strength to spiritualize the place can be attributed to the colour compositions from the subjective experience of the inhabitants. The intention of the architect and the client to use the interplay of nature and architecture to create an aesthetic place to live had been almost destroyed. Thanks to the artistic interventions in the Bauhaus-Fischer not only by Lothar Götz but also by other artist friends, the history of art and architecture is being updated here, and Jewish life in Germany rehabilitated at the same time.

It goes without saying that the originally agreed ephemeral artwork has now become a permanent artistic installation, which conceivably will require the help of a restorer.